Rebel in a Black Dress

The Life and Writings of Séverine

Séverine, Caroline Rémy de Guebhard, Michael Shreve

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Séverine was a rebel, but always a woman guided by honesty and conscience. As one of the most famous and most formidable figures of her day the injustices she fought still resound today: oppression, poverty, unemployment, homelessness, discrimination, human rights, women's rights, animal rights, police brutality, censorship, graft, hypocrisy and warmongering.

As her last words testify to her life: "You must always tell the truth."

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By Way of Introduction

The First Republic was ushered in by the French Revolution in 1789 and officially proclaimed in September 1792 when the monarchy was abolished. Louis XVI was beheaded four months later, followed by internal rebellions, war abroad, an economic crisis and, of course, the ruthless suppression of all counter-revolutionary forces during the bloody Reign of Terror that made the guillotine perhaps the only thing in France not starving. The army gained more and more control, thus preparing its most successful general, Napoleon Bonaparte, to stage a coup and eventually declare himself Emperor in 1804.

During the First Empire the royal dogs were kept at bay and the Napoleonic Wars insured that foreign countries would not meddle in domestic affairs, but while preserving some social gains and instituting civil reforms, Napoleon was not a republican nor a democrat and became increasingly autocratic until the European nations finally allied against him. After his disastrous campaign in Russia he was forced to abdicate on April 11 1814. A yearlong exile on the island of Elba, then he returned to revive the Empire for the famous Hundred Days before his final defeat at the Battle of Waterloo on June 18 1815. While he wallowed in exile—on Saint Helena this time, ultimately dying there in 1821—the monarchy was restored in France under Louis XVIII, the brother of Louis XVI.

Unlike the previous "absolute" monarchy, the Bourbon Restoration under Louis XVIII was a "constitutional" monarchy following the Charter of 1814, the constitution he had allowed before Napoleon rushed back on stage, but it, too, was far from democratic. He died on the throne in 1824 and was succeeded by another younger brother, Charles X, who ended up becoming more and more authoritarian, suspended the constitution and finally dismissed the government, which led to the July Revolution of 1830 and brought to power Louis Philippe, Duke of Orléans, the "bourgeois monarch". As might be expected, this government, as well, declined into oppression and exploitation that enriched the wealthy until the economic crisis of 1847 exploded in the 1848 Revolution, which sent this last French king into exile in England.

After sixty years of various changes under different forms of government, the condition of the people had not changed. To solve the problem in this Second Republic, rival schools of thought inevitably came into conflict. Between capitalism and socialism, between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, between the rich and the poor were irreconcilable differences out of which imperialist sympathies resurfaced. The conservatives came out on top but on December 10 1848 it was Louis Napoleon Bonaparte, nephew and heir of Napoleon I, who won the presidential election. Over the next three years he consolidated his power and influence by suppressing the opposition, playing the monarchists against the republicans, all the while fostering his own personal ambitions that culminated in a coup d'état, an illegal maneuver that dissolved the National Assembly in December 1851 and paved the way, a year later, for the Second French Empire, which lasted eighteen years.

Napoleon III, Emperor of the French, ruled until 1870, developing from an "authoritarian" empire into a "parliamentary" empire during those volatile times on the international scene: wars in

Europe along with an economic crisis brought on by the American Civil War that resulted in free trade agreements with Britain, for example. As he continued to estrange his former supporters and fuel his enemies what other result was to be expected but his downfall? And Prussia was the instrument. France declared war on Prussia in 1870, but after a series of defeats culminating in the disastrous Battle of Sedan on September 1, Napoleon III surrendered. It was the loss of more than just his war. On September 4 the National Assembly was mobbed, a new government formed and the Third Republic officially declared, dominated by the "three Jules", Jules Ferry, Jules Simon and Jules Favre.

The Third Republic ended in 1940 when the Nazis defeated France and the Vichy government was installed. As it ended in war, so it had begun. After Sedan the Prussians continued their march and laid siege to Paris for more than five months. Bombarded, starved, and finally vanquished and sold, the French surrendered to the Prussians in 1871 and set up a provisional, conservative government in Versailles with Adolphe Thiers at its head. The resulting treaty and financial laws, especially for those eternal reparations, were so untenable that the workers, socialists of all stripes and the National Guard rebelled and established the Paris Commune of 1871. This radical left-wing government lasted over two months before it was repressed during the "Semaine Sanglante", the Bloody Week, between May 21 and 28 1871.

The times were uncertain. Still feeling the wounds from the defeat of Sedan and traumatized by the Commune, France hesitated between a conservative monarchy and a moderate republic. After almost a century of passion and fury, from revolution to restoration, from fleeting republics to authoritarian empires, from coup d'états to unstable monarchies, the country was hoping for a rest, but it did not know which way to turn. Nevertheless, after a failed attempt to reestablish the monarchy, the republicans took control of France, wrote its new constitution in 1875 (voted through with only one vote of majority) and ruled for the next sixty years.

During the 1850s and 1860s the French had lived under an authoritarian government, but they were relatively prosperous times. Unfortunately, the failed war of 1870 plunged it into an economic depression that it would not really crawl out of until World War I. In many people's eyes those responsible for this deplorable situation were the members of parliament whose self-interest took precedence over any concern for their electors. The growing poverty through this era was phenomenal and the struggle against it monumental. At the start it fell to the Paris Commune of 1871. Even if it is hard to imagine today, it was a time when people of different political ideologies fought together—socialists, communists and anarchists alike—to establish a revolutionary government, flying the socialist red flag instead of the republican tricolor (blue, white and red), and eventually become a model for future generations throughout the world. The Communards, however, paid dearly for their experiment. During the Bloody Week in May 1871 the number of casualties (more Parisians than Communards, of course) in the slaughter was anywhere from 17,000 to 40,000. Officially there were 43,522 arrests that took six years to try in court and resulted in a couple of dozen executions and thousands sent to the penal colony in New Caledonia. Many Communards managed to flee to Belgium or Britain or elsewhere; many others escaped from the colonies to live in exile. When the general amnesty was declared in 1880, they returned to face the Third Republic. By then, Séverine had a role to play.

[1] Notes d'une frondeuse, 1894.

Liberty – Equality – Fraternity

July 14 [Bastille Day/Independence Day][1]

Liberty?

Last night on the asphalt beach that my window overlooks, some human wreckage, a father, mother and two children washed up on a bench. From this height, where I hover in spite of myself, I could see nothing but a pile of gray flesh and muddy rags with an arm or a leg sticking out here and there, and then a slow and painful movement like the leg of a squashed crab. They were sleeping, huddled together, curled up into a single heap—a habit of theirs to keep from dying of cold, even on this warm summer night.

Some policemen came, circled them, sniffed them out with their eyes, with that hostile curiosity of guard dogs and cops toward the poorly dressed—and yet not too mean. They tapped the man on the shoulder and he jumped, rubbed his eyes and struggled to his feet, breaking up the group where the kids suddenly woke up and started crying.

I knew that he was telling them his story from his gestures and even more from the woman's silent tears as she dried them with the edge of her apron while the man, by retelling, revived her suffering. Neither tramps nor bohemians—but workers! Workers in the most dire straits, after pawning everything, selling everything, losing everything.

There could be only one consolation for this hapless man: that he had lived as a free man in a free century; and the flags flying at the inn Under The Stars (their last home!) eloquently reminded him how fortunate it was for him and his family to have been "freed" a century before. Miserable, yes, but a voter and a citizen! It is so very fruitful that they freed the serfs and turfs.

When he had finished, the guardians of the peace discussed the matter privately, spreading out their arms as if to say, "What can we do?" Nothing, of course, but obey orders, carry out the law… the fair and equal law that replaced the dreadful reign of royal decrees.

In the name of liberty they took the free man and his brood to the station. Back bent, he did not complain. The mother and children, creatures unaware of the benefits of independence, were almost happy with the idea that their captivity would provide them with a bed and food…

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Equality?

Yesterday, also, under my window, around two o'clock, all of a sudden, I heard horses galloping, wheels speeding over the pavement and shouts! It was the President passing by in his carriage…

They people were not overly enthusiastic, but they still took off their hats, yelled and ran behind it with a great display of servility. How wonderful it is, however, when you think about it, that a hundred years ago they cut off the head of a king and twenty years ago they overthrew an emperor! No more scepters, no more thrones, nor more crowns!

Nothing but the currency of the monarchy: little kings at the Hôtel de Ville, little kings at the Palais Bourbon, little kings at Luxembourg[2] and the ghost of a sovereign costing dearly, but no longer ruling. Ah, the nation has really benefited from the change!

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Fraternity?

On the pavement, again, horses are clopping, artillery is rolling, the racket of a horde marching by to the rattle of steel. Some regiments are off to a parade. But the hurrahs and bravos are directed

[2] City Hall, the National Assembly and the Senate, respectively.

less at these brave little soldiers with ruddy faces, all sweaty and panting under the hard eye of the officers, than at the marvelous tools of butchery that they drag along.

Ah, the fine rifles that are carried so straight and are so well cared for. Ah, the pretty cannons so finely wrought like clockwork with their sleek and slender necks, their hollowed flanks, their long muzzles that kill from so far away!

How all this will make blood run! How it all will hack into tiny, tiny, tiny pieces the human flesh, like mincemeat.

And with their eyes and voices the crowd cheers on these beasts of slaughter that at the first sign—you know this, o proletariats!—will sink their fangs into French as easily as German flesh.

Alas!

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And while the roar of the passers-by rises into my melancholy room, I think of that ancient cleverness that gave up Rome for a day to those whom they oppressed the rest of the year[3]. Twenty-four hours with more than just liberty—license. They let them treat the highest ranking members of the Republic as equals, fraternize with them in the celebration—and then they took advantage of their drunken stupor the next day to make their chains heavier, their work harder and deny them all justice and rights!

Dance and laugh, good people of France, if that is what you want, but open your eyes at the same time. The anniversary you commemorate is not yours. The victory you celebrate is not yours. And for you, fools, just like the Golden Calf, the Bastille is still standing!

When will you take it?

[3] The Saturnalia.

1 Childhood

Traditional Drama
Curtains Open
Lights Up

Séverine was born Caroline Rémy on April 27 1855 into a typically middle-class, bourgeois family in Paris. Her father, Onésime Rémy, had worked his way up through the ranks of bureaucracy to become the head of the Wet Nurse Department within the Prefecture of Police. From eight in the morning until six at night he trudged through the muddy suburbs of Paris to check on the women breastfeeding the children of the petite bourgeoisie and of mothers who had to work. Babies often died in unhealthy conditions and it was his job to prevent such tragedies. He was an honest, hard-working man, but at home he was strict and demanding on Line, as she was called.

It was a sad and solitary childhood. Being an only child and educated at home, Line had few friends and had to learn how to get by on her own in the world of adults and at the same time at an early age discovering her precociousness and rebellion. She taught herself to read using her father's newspaper, *Le Siècle*, and her favorite books of Comtesse de Ségur. When she asked to have a pet—a dog, a cat, even a bird—to share her solitude in the second-floor apartment, her father came home with a goldfish. "Are you happy? You'll have fun with it?" Staring at the bowl to hide her disappointment she answered, "Of course. And we won't make any noise when we argue."

In her simple but severe upbringing, she had to steer prudently between her father's thunderous wrath and her mother's rigorous austerity. She was dressed in dark clothes so as not to show the dirt and her golden red locks were cut short like a boy (or a prisoner) for tidiness.

One glimmer of light in the middle class gloom was Clementine, the maid. Line admired her pretty brown hair, bright clothes and even brighter laugh. A kind of complicity developed between the two of them. When she ended up leaving to get married it was a bitter tragedy for Line. But she still had her grandmother, cheerful and intelligent, who, being a widow, had come to live with them. She seemed to see more shrewdly than others. "My poor child," she said, "if you don't learn how to snuff out your passion, you will be ever so unhappy!" (because Line had slapped a boy who was torturing a bird), which was nicer than what others told her: "You'll end up on the gallows!"

Yes, she was different. This "wild seed in the family garden" hated her bourgeois upbringing, the hypocrisy and conformity that was meant only to break a child's will and remold the nascent personality.

Nevertheless, her parents loved her in their way, saving every penny for her dowry and tutoring her in Greek, Latin, music scales and how to act like a lady. Her father took her to the Louvre where he liked to visit the antiquities, the classics—Line preferred Rembrandt. But her mother brought her to the theater, which became a lifelong passion. She dreamed of becoming an actress, one of those grand women in revolt on stage. Her father would have none of that nonsense. He

had destined her for teaching. Or a wealthy marriage. As she grew older, marriage looked more and more like her way out. Anything to get away from home.

At fifteen years old in 1870 Line was imprisoned… in a house left emptier by the death of her grandmother and bleaker by the siege of Paris (remember the Prussians). Line went out to help the wounded and dying. She came home with brains and blood on her schoolbooks. War, like the police, she hated from childhood. In the spring the Paris Commune bloomed. Still wearing skirts, she lived through it in a fog. Her parents feared the rebels more than the Prussians; they preferred military discipline to the insecurity of the Communards—those men and women drunk on blood and wine—so they moved out of Paris. Not for long, however, because everyone knew, soon enough, that the end was near. Line heard all kinds of horror stories about the atrocities committed inside the city walls, but she was no longer a little girl; she was already a dazzling beauty and she knew fully well that adults did not always speak the truth.

They spent two months outside Paris, safe from the "Communard Rabble" (as her parents called them) until the end finally came. That last week of May 1871 is graphically and accurately called The Bloody Week. The barricades of the Commune were broken. The rebels were summarily executed or put to flight. The dead and wounded were piled in the streets. The Revolution had dried up, but it watered the seeds of revolt in Line as she watched Paris burn in that surreal fair on the Charenton Bridge.

And the Rémys were safe now to return home.

Charenton Bridge

The Charenton Bridge: May 1871[1]

The cart took the road from Choisy. The spring had come early and little cherry trees lined the whole way, glittering red like they were splattered with drops of blood. The country was in flower, the earth smelled good and the sun crowned the thatched roofs in gold. It was good to be alive.

It had been two months since we left Paris. They said that our "brothers and friends" were going to pillage and massacre everything. My family was scared, so they rented a little cart and crammed it full of all kinds of things. And they wedged me, poor little thing, between two mattresses, holding a parrot's cage in my right hand and a hatbox in my left, with two shoulder bags and a bunch of umbrellas between my knees.

"As long as the bandits let us through!" my mother said.

Before we got to the roadblock she threw her tartan over my head to make it harder for them to see me. I did not look like a little girl anymore even with my short skirts. She and my uncle hinted at this before bundling me up and they mumbled a lot, but I only caught snatches.

"Capable of anything… In June, remember?… And at Clamecy, right, the prefect's wife!"

I did not know what had happened at Clamecy, but I knew what was happening in the cart. I was suffocating. I was sweating blood and water.

"Don't move, poor child! We're there!"

My parents got down and I heard them talking… it was amazing how nice they were! I sneezed and the shawl shifted.

"So, you're hiding an animal back there!" someone yelled.

[1] Séverine, Pages Rouges, 1893.

They pulled off the tartan and Cocotte started squawking up a storm. The entire post watched me, laughing so hard I got tears in my eyes seeing how funny Mama looked.

"The kid's in a good mood," my liberator said. He was a member of the National Guard[2] who had a big moustache and a red nose but seemed to be the salt of the earth and merry as a starling.

"Move on! There won't be any trouble, get going! The Guard isn't mean!" The horse started trotting again and I heard a deep, cheerful voice cry out to me, "Hey, kid, make sure you don't drop anything!"

We were through and yet my parents were furious. They had called Mama "the mother" as if she were a fishmonger or was hawking slop and they treated my uncle like a "doddering old fool".

Then they cried out, "Dear Lord, the Prussians! We're saved!"

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That is what I was thinking about while we rolled on towards Charenton. The bridge had become the meeting point for high society in the area. It was the place to be: for two days they came to watch Paris burn.

While waiting for the end, to stave off the boredom of the trip, they talked about what was happening over there… Cavalry officers soaked in oil and burned alive like in the times of Nero. Policemen's wives thrown in the front lines of the battalions to be a screen for the enemy's bullets. The wounded Communards got drunk on eau-de-vie so they could be sent back to the massacre. In their filthy rage they finished off the wounded from Versailles by sprinkling their open wounds with tobacco and pepper to make their pain sharper and their martyrdom longer.

"Why don't you say something? Are you so cold-hearted?"

Ah, no, I was not cold-hearted. My eyes were burning and my heart pumping! But if I bottled up the trembling little heart in my young girl's breast, would you be so surprised or get angry with me—you bourgeoisie who raised me to be like you, to honor the family and the race?

I knew nothing. I understood nothing. But I could not believe what you were telling me! I remembered that the murderers you were talking about were the very ones who let us escape without touching a hair on our heads, without taking a penny from our pockets, without drinking one bottle of our wine—those drunkards!

I also remembered all the poor people whom they housed in the gilded apartments around us. I remembered how sad and gentle they seemed and how proud, too, never asking for a thing; and how uncomfortable they looked in that hostile luxury; and how much they wanted to get back to their crowded slums where they were free, at least, and not humiliated.

But I could not say this and I huddled back up in the cart, closed my eyes and tried to close my ears.

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The bridge. We arrived.

The whole sky was red, the horizon in flames! We could see nothing, nothing but a sea of fire and a thick fog of gray smoke floating heavily above it.

"Oh, the scoundrels! In front of the enemy!"

That was the general cry. Indeed, the enemy was there. The bridge was the border between the two armies: French on one side and Germans on the other. The armistice had put both sides

[2] Defended Paris against the Prussians and during the Commune included anyone able to bear arms.

in their place. They just sat there looking stonily at each other, especially when they laid down their arms and had nothing to fear but fistfights and brawls.

But for the moment there was no question of brawls. Everyone was friendly and fraternizing. Fried potatoes were selling over here and a barrel organ was set up over there. Some Bavarians had taken our young soldiers around the waist and were teaching them how to waltz. Our men were clumsy and stumbled at every step. Soon two of them took a fall with the German sprawled on top of the French.

"These guys are animals, always on top!" a swaggering soldier yelled.

Big laughs.

On the other hand—not to be lacking good manners—a seasoned officer offered his "fries" to a group of blonde, chubby Germans who dipped their fat fingers in the cone and licked them succulently before drying them on their caps.

A Tilbury carriage arrived. A fat landlord of Saint Maurice, the king of the country, got out with his two majors whom he put in charge of accommodations—and whom he accommodated magnificently. The taller one, they said, would marry his daughter after the peace—a real catch: 500,000 F dowry. While waiting the officer offered his arm to his future father in-law who had gout and heavy legs. And there they were in the middle of the bridge. The German watched in silence and his face clouded over. "Poor Paris," he murmured. But the other, the Frenchman, the bourgeois, waved his fist toward the city in flames. "In front of the enemy! Ah, the rats!"

The Eternal Masculine (I)

The Eternal Masculine[3]

Part One: Childhood

I am fourteen years old. For two years—since my first communion—they have been telling me, "You're a little woman now."

I am none the happier for it!

Since they lengthened my skirts and put up my hair the world does not seem the same to me. The faces of people have not changed, but there is a different look deep down in their eyes. Among old friends I sense the same surprise as when I was a child in front of the cage where they had replaced my warbler, who had died at dawn, with a parakeet. Even though the feathers were prettier, I was not happy. I was sick; I was upset; and I ended up breaking down in tears—I would have preferred an empty cage to this strange animal!

I wanted so much for people to look at me like they did before, with faces full of kindness—how my heart used to be filled with confidence.

Yesterday they joked about my calves, saying that they were too firm for a girl; and I laughed along with them. Today when only the tip of my toe peeks out from under my dress, if anyone happens to glance over, quick! I pull my boot back in and hide it on the highest rung of the chair, while I flush with shame all the way up to the top of my head.

I am glad to have gloves—me who never used to wear them—because they hide my hands. I prefer winter to summer because my body is buried under clothes. And I would really like to have a veil, a big one, and thick, with lots of dots sewn close together!

[3] Written as Jacqueline in Gil Blas, August 26 1892.

They examine me; they scrutinize me. They compliment my mother on this; they advise her on that—and I am in agony.

"It's a ridiculous age… the molting!" a visitor said yesterday on seeing my embarrassment. She could do with a bunch of molting herself, the great big guinea fowl who would have a lot to gain from a change in plumage—she was so ugly and unpleasant! And they were all wrong!

It is not because I felt awkward in my new clothes. It is not even because they treat my as a "young lady" that I feel like this, disconcerted, on the threshold of my new state. No, I feel like I am about to enter something sad, that my happy days are gone, and I remember grandma snipping the thorns, one by one, off the roses they had brought before handing them to me and gracing me with one of her sweet, serious smiles, "Here, my little girl. At least you've known something that didn't make you bleed."

Grandma! She is dead. I think those eyes of hers would have stayed the same, would never have changed—not like the others did, all the others!

In some, like mama's, behind the due severity, I could see the pity, which frightened me. So, is life so sad that they already feel sorry for me?

In father's and in my uncle's—so nice the day before, like friends just last year—a sudden hardness appears, an expression of authority that distances me from them whom I still love so tenderly. They have a way of unhooking my arms from around their necks and saying, "You're not a child anymore!" which chills me and kills in me all my energy, all my growth.

For the first time I feel closer to my mother than to them, that I am more like her. And a thousand things that I never noticed before bombard me all at once.

If grandma Louise, the dear thing, had had so much trouble in her life, it was because grandfather—who was, however, as those who knew him say, a *bon vivant*—was also a wastrel. He left her a widow at forty years old in squalor with two children to raise. She was still as beautiful as can be. She refused to give a stepfather to her children. She lived alone, worked like a mercenary, devoted herself and rebuilt the wrecked home, relit the family hearth.

My other grandma, my father's mother, was married to a school principle in Lorraine, a diehard Jansenist, savage and brutal. She had six children by him—she fed all of them. And to avoid paying for servants in her house that was threatened with ruin by the rival Jesuits, she waxed the floors at dawn before the children got up, did the washing and cooking, bathed the babies, took care of the sick—and found the time to go down into the parlor in her one and only, old silk dress to play the lady of the house and entertain her relatives.

She got a tumor in her knee… from fatigue, the doctors said. They cut off her leg like they did to Napoleon's soldiers when they were shattered by cannonballs. I can still hear the thud of her wooden leg on the floor, all over the big house where, even when sick, she took care of the household while her husband, my godfather, took care of his business under the green lampshade.

I was five when she passed away. My father lifted me in his arms to show her to me, lying on her bed with the crucifix on her chest. I was not scared—she looked so content!

Mother is happy; papa is good. They only get upset because of me… as if whoever is lucky in marriage should suffer in some other way.

I would prefer not to "marry into money" like they raised me. I would also prefer not to stuff my head with a bunch of things that will make me stupid, not to chase after those famous diplomas without which, my father assures me, you cannot be anything—and which I will never have anything, I am sure of it!

I would love to get into the theater, to be the mouthpiece of the great poets, make people's souls vibrate and sprinkle them with laughter or tears… I really think I could, that I would know how. Anyway, that is my goal, my ideal—I think about it during the day and dream about it at night. Oh, if they would only let me try!

I think that verses would soar radiantly out of my lips, like those birds I love to hold in my hands in order to feel their flight toward freedom, their trembling with joy when I let them go.

But my father is the master; his will prevails. "Married or a teacher!" he said the other day. And when my mother insisted, talking about a calling, he said, "I'd rather see her dead!"

The poor woman had nothing else to say. She came to hug me, for a long time, and I lowered my eyes so she would not see me crying.

That night I woke up and walked barefoot to the armoire where my last doll was locked up. I fell on the floor and with my head against the door I cried all night long. It felt like within those oak planks lay the corpse of my childhood. The heavy piece of furniture was like a tomb where the best part of my life was sealed up forever!

I had not felt so sad since the death of grandma Louise. So, it is always the women who cry. The older women because of their husbands; me because of my father. Ah, how much I wanted—since love is for novels—not ever, ever to marry!

I would live alone and have no children, but maybe I would have less grief!

2 From Marriage to Suicide

"You will be a teacher or we will marry you off!"

Even at sixteen years old Séverine was too much of a rebel to enter the world of civil service, like her father, with all the bosses and schedules to obey. Teaching was far from her dream of a happy life. Directors, inspectors, ministers, parents—they had to be obeyed. Timetables, meetings, social gatherings, obligations—they had to be respected. You could beat your head against the wall, but you had to conform. There was no place for freedom. And she wanted none of it.

Therefore, she had to risk taking a husband. Her parents were not rich, but had managed to save up a 30,000 F dowry. As was customary at the time, it was her father who was responsible for finding a husband. He found Henri Montrobert, an employee of the gas company[1], originally from Lyon, a serious, earnest man, and not bad looking. He courted the beautiful young lady like a gentleman for six weeks. Her knight who would steal her away from her repressive parents. The dream was short-lived.

On October 26 1872 they celebrated the wedding in Creteil. She was seventeen years old; he was thirty. The wedding night was a violent, dirty, shameful disgrace for her. A legalized rape. And she wanted to leave right away and run back to her parents, but there was an issue—she was pregnant. Nine months later on July 28 1873 their son was born, Louis, whom she immediately left with his father to go back to her parents. For the next five years she did not see Louis since she felt incapable of showing him any signs of motherly care. For one, she was never really comfortable with or interested in children until they could hold an intelligent conversation. Furthermore, her life was headed elsewhere.

The legal separation was declared on December 31, 1873. At that time divorce was illegal: in 1816 the Restoration forbade divorce, which had been allowed by the Revolution in 1792. So, in the eyes of the law she remained Caroline Montrobert for more than ten years until the Naquet Law was passed, legalizing divorce, which she was quick to take advantage of.

But now back at home she had to start her life over again, to earn a living, and she was ill prepared. She gave piano lessons and did some embroidery work, paid her board and managed to save a little money to go to the theater. She even did some acting under the name of Evans Montrobert on a small stage. But the inconsequential work and the typical poverty of unmarried, middle class girls were difficult to bear.

"Free, yes. Happy, no."

Then one fine day her uncle told her about a widow, Madame Guebhard, who lived in a huge apartment in Neuilly, but spent much of her time in her native Switzerland, in Neuchâtel, as well as vacationing on Lake Como in Northern Italy. The aging woman loved to read but her sight was declining so she was looking for a young companion to read to her, go to the theater and concerts and maybe travel with her. What a windfall—to pursue her love of reading while working at the

[1] Paul Coutiau (L'Insurgée, p. 53), however, notes that their great great granddaughter claims he was a very successful owner of a lumber company.

same time. Caroline went to see her, was hired right away, packed her bags and went to live in the house in Neuilly.

Madame Guebhard had two sons. The older, Adrien, was studying literature and science to become a doctor. He was gentle and shy and seduced by the red-haired beauty at first sight. But Caroline paid him little attention. When he finally graduated in 1878, he declared his love. She took her time to respond. He bade his time and gradually won her over, not by passion, maybe not completely by love, but certainly by affection.

Madame Guebhard was enamored of Caroline, too, and accepted the affair between the two young lovers. And she accepted the unexpected pregnancy. There would be no question of abortion. It was still only 1880 and they could not be legally married, so the child would be illegitimate, born in secret, in Brussels, but only six hours from Paris by train. She organized everything. Roland was registered at the French consulate with the father as Adrien Paul Emile Guébhard and "mother unknown". But Séverine did not want this second child any more than she did the first, so after his birth Roland was handed over to his grandmother.

Unbeknownst to her at the time, it was not her clandestine relationship with Adrien or the baby born under wraps that shook up her life. No, it was a chance encounter that would cast her headlong into her future. One evening at the doctor's house in Brussels, she met Jules Vallès, that old Communard bear who was living in exile in London and happened to be visiting Belgium while waiting to go back to Paris—amnesty was in the air—still writing and now tutoring in his banishment, still chased by creditors for lack of money or by the authorities for lack of holding his tongue. And they hit it off right away.

On July 11 1880, after years of dispute over closing the wounds left by the massacres of the Bloody Week, the republicans finally capitulated and granted amnesty to the Communards. The following day Vallès was back in Paris and he and Séverine were together again. He had told her, "You have to work, girl!" and asked her to be his secretary. Which meant? Make him sound good. Read and correct his articles, recopy his chicken-scratch handwriting for the printers, in short an apprenticeship in writing and journalism, not only his occupation but his passion.

She was ecstatic about it. But Jules Vallès was a fanatic, a homeless convict sentenced to death, a seditious upstart with blood on his hands, lawless and faithless, who respected nothing, who hated everything and everyone, Church, State, family, the bourgeoisie… her parents could not accept it—they threatened to lock her up. Even Madame Guebhard was against it. Only Adrien was not scandalized… anything if she was happy. Such fierce resistance from almost every side, however, was too much for her. She wrote a note to Vallès, went to the little corner dresser, pulled out a revolver that was kept there and shot herself in the chest.

"I die of what makes you live: revolt. I die of being a woman while a virile and ardent thought burns in me. I die of being defiant."

A spoiled child? A drama queen? A sudden impulse? A sincere desire to end it all? Certainly there is spite, rage, hatred and desperation in the act. A slew of hazy motives jumbled together, which remain hers and hers alone. Luckily, the bullet missed her heart. After she recovered there was no question of standing in her way. She went to Vallès' apartment every day to work in his shadow, to learn and to accompany him on his evening walks. Seeing them together, people talked, especially since Adrien was rarely with them—late nights in theaters, restaurants and cafes did not interest him—but she did not care. Between this grizzled old bear and the pretty young diamond in the bourgeois rough that she was, there was only deep tenderness and affection, and maybe a little flirting on the side.

#

As she learned under Vallès and as her grandmother had pointed out, she had a hard time snuffing out her passion.

Next: The Eternal Masculine (II)

The Eternal Masculine (II)

The Eternal Masculine[2]

Part Two: The Day After the Wedding Night

This, huh? So, this is it? This despicable action, this bruise, this stain, this crushing of the weak by force, of the will by violence, this torture, this profanation of the entire physical being while the brain is still working but the heart falters—this is marriage?

So that is why they taught us modesty and kept us chaste; why no rose was white enough, no lily pure enough for our eyes to look upon and no poem innocent enough to let them beat its wings, like a dove, in our immaculate room; why no collars were high enough, no skirts long enough, no eyes closed enough—it was for this, to come to this thing, for the "delivery" to be full and entire and for the soul to agonize in a wounded body!

And those people, all those people yesterday who surrounded me and hugged me and congratulated me. They knew, all of them knew! Women who saw me born were smiling tenderly as they watched me. Old friends of my father and uncle stared at me with funny faces, totally amused, and whispered jokes that I did not understand.

"Shush! Shush!" my father said. But his voice belied his attitude. Some gratification, some satisfaction showed through his scandalized mask. If he had not had an official role in the ceremony, I believe he would have dropped his usual discretion and willingly joined in with them. I hated him yesterday, all day long, him, my uncle, their chums… without knowing why. They, on the other hand, were very proud—especially of my ignorance and how calmly I listened to things that would probably make me cringe today.

Ah, I hold it against all of them! Really, what customs and traditions are these to gather around a virgin to celebrate her lawful disgrace—a poor child who makes a better laughing stock the more naïve she is and the less she knows!

Everyone laughed at me. Not one man or woman took pity or sensed my coming horror—and that my life might be spoiled forever because I was raised almost always in the house, without sisters, without friends, having heard nothing, read nothing, learned nothing… I was too pure coming into the marriage bed.

No, I do not remember any hug that resonated with mercy, not a single glimmer of pity in those eyes lit up with crude cheer. Completely the opposite. A burst of laughter when I answered mama, who wanted to go with me to my new home, offering my forehead like usual for a goodnight kiss, with my big, sleepy eyes, I answered, "Don't you worry about it, you're so exhausted! I'll undress myself just fine."

It is true: I was really an idiot… Thinking about it now, clasping my hands, the tears will not stop flowing…

#

[2] Signed Jacqueline in Gil Blas, September 2 1892.

But it is a crime, a true crime, in the name of I don't know what custom, that they committed against me. Yes, marriage is an abuse of trust, an abject and despicable trap.

I did not give myself; I did not give my consent; it is not true! They stole me from myself; they deceived me; they lied to me. I promised obedience—I did not know to what! I swore to be faithful—I did not know why!

Everyday the courts annul commitments that were entered into more consciously than the one I am enslaved in. They declare them besmirched with immorality if it is proven that one of the parties was exploited in ignorance. The men declare this—the ones who make the law!

For me, my life is lost. The life of the "other", too, undoubtedly. Because being so unfamiliar with the obligations that the wedding entails, I married without love. I would have taken the first comer, the first partner, the first friend who offered to share my life and help me in my honorable escape from a suffocating environment. I did not want to run after certificates and diplomas. I did not want to be a teacher—a hand reached out, I grabbed it without stopping to consider that my fifteen years knew nothing, were completely oblivious, I understand today about the fate of a marriage, but they made the decision.

If I had known, I would not have married, since I was not haunted by dark thoughts: I was as ignorant as on the day I was born about carnal acts. I was so romantic that that it was enough for me to revive ancient loves, dead lovers lying in the tomb.

Anyway, if I had known, I would have refused. I would have done what, in my opinion, an honest girl should have done: not "honesty" in the sense that my parents give—I know now what that "honesty" is worth!—but in the sense of uprightness, integrity and loyalty.

I would have waited to love someone before offering myself to him. At least this someone would be sure of my consent, it would be me myself who gave myself to him and not paternal authority or the law! And maybe I would not have wept all night long. And certainly my flesh would not be trembling in terror and disgust.

To love someone! That is gone forever. I am one of those whom destiny has robbed of their share of paradise. Even from afar I will not see the promised land. I am bound for life, my whole life, to this man I saw for the first time two months ago, who courted me for six weeks, sent a dozen bouquets, sang a dozen ballads—the number of his visits—who married me yesterday, took me tonight and has still not given me anything—not even a kiss!

#

My husband! At first he was rather nice, otherwise I would not have accepted his company—today I hate him!

In spite of myself, in this strange room where they did not even think of bringing my personal knickknacks or my favorite books, a little of that fatherland that is the maternal home, in this strange room, I see him again and I will always see him as he appeared to me out of the dark, with his beastly grin and his raised fists. Oh, the well-behaved fiancé was long gone. His blissful smile and smooth voice—finished! The image is frozen in the horror of my soul, like they say that you can see the image of the murderer reflected in the pupils of the victim.

When I knew from his heavy breathing of a sated animal that he was asleep, I jumped out of bed and opened the window. It is high. I bent over the railing ten times wanting to leap into the void, into the purifying darkness.

I am not sixteen years old. I am scared.

This morning he left. To leave me alone, I think. While I was getting ready, he came back and looking contented, happy with himself, almost a victor, he said, "My dear child, get your hat on

quickly and let's go see your parents. Today is the day your father is supposed to give me the dowry. Business is business."

It is true—he had won!

The Eternal Masculine (III)

The Eternal Masculine[3]

Part Three: The End

I lived. I suffered. At seventeen I had to start my life over, even earn a living. And I was unfit for it, with my idle hands only used to the piano, my shiny silks and soft wool—a stranger to the most insignificant errand in the workshops where you get an apprenticeship and the habit of working.

They had never made me think of it.

And, except for the toil of the university for which I was not prepared—fought so hard for, by the way, that the most diligent and the most deserving died of hunger, their hands outstretched, without receiving even a scrap—except for this toil, what could I do?

Individual labor remained a closed book to me: they had not shown me the great mechanism wherein every being is one of the active, positive wheels, the millstone where they grind the bread of humanity.

My father went to his office while I worked on my classics. I know that we were living on his salary. I also know that Lucretia spun linen, that Philopoemen sawed wood and Cincinnatus pushed a cart! I know, too, that we give rent to the landlord and wages to the servants, that everything is bought and paid for—but that is all I knew! No one ever explained to me that mighty and tremendous law of exchange, of balance between effort and result, the purpose of life for creatures down here; the sovereign morality that shames the useless and gives the idlest hands a feverish activity.

To produce is to live—to be worthy of living, rather. It is paying for one's part of the picnic and for the cost of one's fantasies. Even more it is the revelation of a force, the market listing of one's capacities—affirming one's will before oneself, like the unit before zero; multiplying by ten the sterile number, awakening the dormant value, fertilizing the dead soil.

No one ever taught me this. I had to learn these things on my own. Although no one ever told me, "You should work," when the time came they told me, "You have to work." I resigned myself and considered it—and it was the serene notion of duty that helped me get through this painful obligation.

My fingers were pricked while sewing and my eyes grew weary under the lights—but I was free, with no cravings, no regrets… feeling sorry for the idle.

#

Free, yes. Happy, no! At every step in the battle, nothing but deception and strain. They will never know how rocky is the hill of the feminine ordeal! Before reaching the top, in torture or triumph—usually both—there is nothing but tears and bruises, slips and sometimes falls.

The weak and frail drop to their knees as much to ask forgiveness as because fate bends them down like branches in a windstorm. The strong stagger but resist; many fall on the road like they

[3] Signed Jacqueline in Gil Blas, September 2 1892.

were hit by lightning and do not get up again. And the rare survivors follow their dream to the heights, leaving bloody footprints on the path.

You have to fight for your bread. You have to fight for your honor! And for the woman, isolated, weak, without support or resources, the man stands eternally before her—for the competition or the conquest!

Many give in, out of hunger; many give up, out of fear, tired of being insulted on the street, suspected by their neighbors, leered at by their apartment managers. It seems paradoxical and yet it is true. Scripture says, "Woe unto the man who is alone!"[4] But for a woman alone it says nothing… words fail it!

And the years passed—years so sorrowful, so dull and dreary that I prefer not to mention them, not to count them. And everywhere, always, the enemy: cruel and selfish man. So full of himself, so convinced of his omnipotence that today, like in the stone age when the Troglodytes lay in wait at the caves mouths, many of them try to get a female by starving her out.

Although I personally only had to put up with a little of this shameful self-interest, many around me suffered from it and died from it! And mourning them is painful and bitter for me. Purposefully parodying that ancient adage, I said, "I am a woman, nothing feminine is foreign to me."[5]

Moreover, I feel even more sorry for those women who shut themselves up in their pride and for those who asked love for comfort and hope!

#

Love!

There is where manly egoism shines brightest. There is where the bitterest, most incurable wounds are inflicted. Ah, the romantic visions of youth, that dream of spending your life together, staring into each other's eyes, hearts beating together, hand in hand! And the music of sweet nothings and that hymn of heavenly souls in springtime!

Souls? Ah, yes, well. We do not have time to have them anymore—it is old-fashioned. You look good to me, I look good to you, let's get on with it. Let's rent a room somewhere—and play house or have an affair.

There is no more gallantry. There are no more charming preludes where budding traps hide in the flowers. There are no more valiant passions that surmount all obstacles and break chains. Already in the time of Perrault[6] it was the brothers and not the lovers who went to free the wife of Bluebeard.

Man loves for himself, for his flesh, his vanity, his self-interest or his habit. He adapts his heart the best he can to the future—for love just like for war. Chivalry is a thing of the past.

And our sons frighten us when we think they could be worse than their fathers!

So? So, nothing. Here comes the dawn whitening my windows and my lamp is flickering, out of oil. Go out, little flame—you did your job. So clear and peaceful at first, a light as big and bright as the eyes of a child; and then steady and strong, drying the ink under your flame like dew in the sun; and finally lower and sad like the old people in the back of the chapel, on the threshold of the grave.

Go out, fragile lamp, without a flash, without revolt, in joyful peace—here comes the dawn!

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[4] Ecclesiastes 4:10

[5] cf. Terence, *Heuton Timorumenos*, v.77: I am human, I consider nothing human foreign to me.

[6] Charles Perrault (1628-1703) who wrote many famous fairy tales, like Cinderella, Little Red Riding Hood and Puss in Boots.

3 Jules Vallès

He was fifty years old. His hair and beard white like a biblical patriarch. Deep wrinkles slashed across his forehead above his bushy eyebrows. He was ugly, gruff and grim with the voice of an ogre, constantly grumbling about all kinds of tyranny… family, school, police, empire… and he was sick to boot, diabetic. The trials and tribulations of his life had taken their toll. But the gaze of his dark eyes was as hard as nails.

Jules Vallès was one of the lions of the newspaper jungle, an incorruptible fighter of the good fight, a horror for editors who had to answer to Anastasie (the name given to official censorship). He was an honest writer, sincere, ardent and full of striking images—he cried real tears and bled real blood. He was not one of those stuffy, pretentious, literary types: "Too bad for the barbarisms, I don't claim to be a man of letters." He was also independent of any particular school of thought. All forms of organized action by committees, parties, societies, etc. repulsed him. He wanted nothing to do with ideologies. He was unclassifiable, even among the rebels. Moreover, he was one of the most outspoken of the dissidents, having spent years founding short-lived newspapers that were seized by the police, fined by the government and ultimately responsible for his frequent visits to the prisons of Paris. He paid a high price for his audacity to be free.

The 19th century in France saw many, often contradictory laws and regulations limiting freedom of expression under the various political regimes. Although most journalists tended to accept the restraints, there were always those who shook off the muzzles. In 1870 after years of repressive laws under the Second Empire that gagged and governed the press, journalists got drunk on the expectation of freedom that the Republic could offer. But even the Paris Commune forbade the publication of newspapers that were hostile to it. Vallès was there, elected to the council, and was one of the few to oppose this: "I'm for the absolute, unlimited freedom of the press. Freedom without boundaries!" This was his attitude when he founded *Le Cri du Peuple*, one of the most influential papers of the period, which achieved the success he had been waiting for. 100,000 copies in Paris under seige. But it was a brief triumph. While a young Caroline Rémy was watching Paris burn from the Charenton Bridge, Jules Vallès was escaping the flames to spend the next ten years in exile. The amnesty granted on July 10 1880 freed 541 men and 9 women, including some of the most popular figures of the time, like Louis Michel, Henri Rochefort and, of course, Vallès himself.

"The Commune was a great big celebration that the people of Paris first offered to themselves and then to the world," he told Séverine. Through Vallès she met many of the old Communards who would sit around and talk for hours on end about the Ideal, reliving history, their history. They brought the Commune to life, from the taking of the cannons in Montmartre to the final hours in Père Lachaise cemetery. Also through Vallès she discovered the Revolution through hearing about his life and the life of common people. She learned how to listen, understand and sympathize with the poorest of the poor. And she learned the business of the press.

In the 1880s the heart of the press beat on the Boulevard des Italiens, near the luxury shops, banks and theaters, where almost all of the newspapers had their offices. The nerve centers were,

of course, the editorial rooms. But maybe more instrumental were the cafes on the boulevard where the journalists met to drink and discuss politics, culture and the scandals of the day.

At Tortoni's in the autumn of 1883 the men sat agape and astonished when they saw Jules Vallès enter. Badly shaven, in his old clothes, lumbering around, grouchy and rude, holding the arm of a blue-eyed, copper-haired beauty, half his age, elegant and reserved, but a little wild at the same time. He looked daggers at you when his hackles were up; she stared like a child, brazen and serious enough to embarrass you with those piercing green eyes that refused to turn away. He introduced her as his secretary. She was still Caroline, not yet Séverine but no longer Line who had been born around the corner in a house that was demolished in 1868 to make way for Baron Haussmann's grand boulevard. And they accepted her in this exclusively male milieu, which had never before admitted a female among their company, because she was sponsored by Vallès, whom they dared not refuse. Soon, however, she would be accepted in her own right, the first woman to be so "honored".

She was a good student; she learned fast. At first she recopied his manuscripts, corrected faults, proofread, and learned the subtleties of style, the art of dipping the pen in caustic ink. But she was more than just a copyist; she had to sort and order his scattered thoughts, make his hasty writing consistent and logical: unity, clarity and coherence. Her gave her advice that she appreciated, but her master was demanding and passionate; he could be excessive, impatient and hard on her, pressed as he was for time by publishers or by the need for money. Her sweet smile did not always tame the old lion. He was at his worst when she made a mistake, which was unforgiveable, but she rebelled against any criticisms she felt were unjust. It was more than just a collaboration, it was a communion of souls, acknowledged on both sides. At the end of 1883 a collection of his articles written during his years of exile in London, La Rue à Londres, was dedicated to her, the "beautiful comrade in whom I found the tenderness of a daughter and the ardor of a disciple." She, in turn, dedicated her first collection of articles in 1893, Pages Rouges, to his memory: "The little that I know, the little that I am, I owe to you, my unforgettable Master."

With the same passion and diligence that she devoted to his writing she took on her boss' new project: he intended to launch a new paper or rather revive an old one, *Le Cri du Peuple*. "It's only the pursuit of a goal that makes life 'alive'," he wrote to her, "We will pursue it together." So she became, in many ways, his partner. For one because he saw in her a kind of sister soul, a dissenter, a misfit—her wild seed. He trusted her. More importantly, perhaps, at the moment, was that she could finance it. Adrien Guebhard was easily convinced to furnish most of the money, though it was hardly a profitable investment—the press of opinion, the political press normally cost more than it brought in—but giving a paper to Vallès was like giving one to her. Although she had not yet published a single article, she had already proven herself capable of doing so by rewriting Vallès.

The first edition of *Le Cri du People* appeared on October 28 1883. There were twenty people on the staff around Vallès, who was grumpier than ever, and Caroline, who had chosen to wait to take the plunge into journalism, but not for long. Her first article came out on November 23, signed Séverin, the masculine form. The second article used the same male name. To appease the editorial team? To justify her writing? There were, of course, deep-seated prejudices against women writing substance despite such famous predecessors, mostly under male pseudonyms, such as Olympe de Gouges, who was guillotined during the Revolution, or Delphine Gay who signed Vicomte Charles de Launay to her influential articles on Parisian society in *La Presse*; Marie d'Agoult, the aristocratic lover of Liszt, wrote under the name of Daniel Stern; Victoire

Léodile Béra called herself André Léo; and Aurore Dupin who took the name George Sand to publish her writings. But none of these women had to make a living off their publications like Séverine would soon have to. Nevertheless, whatever the reason for these first two male masks might have been, on December 15 1883 she published her third article and Séverine was born.

While Séverine was embarking on her journalistic career, Vallès' diabetes got worse. At first he had to stop working so hard and soon he had to stay home entirely. Séverine took care of everything: his work, food, health and comfort. She brought him his papers and acted as agent between him and the editorial staff, which had not developed into what he had dreamed of. By the beginning of 1885 he was bedridden. For six weeks she practically did not leave his side. He became so thin and frail that she had to carry him in her arms, like a child, from the armchair to the bed and back again. He was virtually helpless and Séverine had to be mother, daughter, friend, collaborator and nurse all at the same time.

But his reputation as a troublemaker did not decline with his health. In *Le Cri du Peuple* was a column entitled "The Political Police" that denounced the corrupt agents of repression, gave their addresses and named them for public condemnation. A scandal broke out over the death of Madame Ballerich, the mother of two policemen, whose murderer, Gamahut, was sentenced to death. The author of the column claimed that the chief of police himself had sent Gamahut to kill her so as to distract public attention away from the budget deficit. The two police brothers invaded the offices of *Le Cri* demanding the identity of the writer, but almost all the staff claimed authorship to cover him. The office was sacked and shots were fired. There was blood everywhere; Duc-Quercy had been stabbed under his arm before shooting one of the drunken Ballerichs. Afterward more than a dozen policemen invaded Séverine's apartment where Vallès had moved, forcing him out of his deathbed to conduct their nine-hour search for documents about the real identity of the "slanderer". In fact, they knew perfectly who the author, Chastan or Chastenet, was—it was rumored that he was an informant planted by the police—but used the opportunity as a pretext to harass Vallès and *Le Cri*. The following day Vallès received two death threats, one of them from a police officer who, as fate would have it, did not have time to make good on it.

Less than a month later, on February 14 1885 Jules Vallès died at the age of fifty-three. The official estimate said that 15,000 people gathered in the streets for his funeral procession two days afterward. Just as he had always opened his papers to men of all faiths and ideals, so too at his funeral could be found socialists, communists, guesdists, possibilists, anarchists, collectivists, workers, freethinkers and the survivors of the Commune. But the hatred he had attracted during his life broke out one last time over his coffin: a group of German socialist students started yelling and shouting and started a violent brawl that the police had to break up. Finally the eulogy was given by Edouard Vaillant[1] who recalled the duty Vallès had fulfilled until his dying day: to serve the cause of the suffering and oppressed, to call for revolutionary action in order to install that Republic with no God and no Masters, which he had fought his entire life for.

And he had passed the flame to Séverine. She was his living testament, his posterity. And she was ready to fulfill the hopes he had placed in her. She may not change the world with the stroke of a pen, but she could die trying. For Jules Vallès, the most important thing was that she never give up the fight.

[1] A Communard who died in 1915.

A Memory

A Memory: On the First Anniversary of the Death of Jules Vallès[2]

When he fell back with a heavy sigh and I knew that death, that wretch, had just taken him, I cried out in revolt against anyone who tried to comfort me. "Leave me alone! Ah, you don't know what he was to me. He was my father… He was my child!"

My father! He did, indeed, instruct my mind and form my convictions. He pulled me out of the middle class muck. He took the trouble to knead and shape my soul in his own image. He made a simple and sincere creature out of the doll I was. He gave me the heart and mind of a citizen.

Ah, yes, dear father!

All those people who whispered to each other when they saw us passing by or who smiled seeing my twenty springtimes next to his fifty autumns do not know how unimportant their ironies and innuendos were to my utter indifference or to the deepest joys I experienced in the role I accepted by his side.

It would be easy to laugh at Antigone if she were not Oedipus' daughter—and especially if Oedipus' eyes were still young under his helmet of white hair. But how little did I care! And what sweet revenge for me when we sat at his desk and he sketched the legend of the proletariat, perpetually wounded, perpetually defeated. His style was visual, to create images—beautiful images always tinted with red… the blood of the oppressed that has run for centuries without its source ever drying up. And then he cradled my young beliefs with the carols of Dupont, the songs of Clément and the refrains of Pottier![3] And at his side, like a good little girl, I recited the alphabet of the Revolution.

My father, certainly, yes! And yet, how much better the second word: my child.

Ah! I am fully aware that for anyone who does not care or who disapproves this motherly name sounds funny coming from a young woman talking about an old man more than a quarter of a century her senior. But it is not for the indifferent or the hostile that I am writing this. Those who are reading me today on this anniversary are those who were part of Vallès' funeral procession a year ago and escorted me in my grief. This is the family I have chosen as my own, the anonymous relations of the lower classes, the great crowd of sufferers to whom I give all my heart and for whom I hope, one day, to give my life!

To them I can tell my sorrow—they respect tears.

But they only knew Vallès when he was rowdy and full of life, loud and spirited, when his voice filled up the room, his laughter shook the windows and his grip crushed, though it was the grip of such a warm hand.

I did not know this Vallès very well. My Vallès is the one with whom I fought through sickness for three painful years and the one for whom I grappled with death for six dreadful weeks.

In his life, which was almost happy and fiercely free of the old resistance, I was just some fun, some glitter, a common tease, a socialite signed up by his talent, as he strolled around the suburbs with his new recruit. I smiled at this sometimes, when he looked so naïve showing off and his eyes sparkled with cheer in front of the scandalized astonishment of the bourgeoisie yelling, "We've been robbed!"

[2] February 14 1886, include in Pages Rouges, 1893.

[3] Pierre Dupont (1821-1870), socialist songwriter; Jean Baptiste Clément (1836-1903), writer of "Le Temps des Cerises"; and Eugène Pottier (1816-1887), writer of "L'Internationale".

Except, I also felt good that I was such a little thing to him, that I had missed his vagabond years and that our literary collaboration—the strong bond between us—which was developed with so much appreciation on my part, was for him merely a master patronizing his apprentice. I was an extra in his life—nothing more.

But after!

When the sickness cast him down and hounded him like a vulture circling battlefields to finish off the wounded; when it tore off his flesh and gnawed at his lungs with its claws and beak; when nothing remained of the Hercules of old but a kind of ghost, thin as a skeleton and weak as a child, oh, then I was needed in his life and I was, I can say with pride, life itself for him!

In his old Christ's face, whose skin was as frightfully thin and pale as wax, his eyes burned warmly, full of tenderness and pain, as they followed me around the room. And I found the energy to laugh and cheer him up and distract him, all the while talking his ear off about the coming spring, about getting better, about the hot sun and the green grass that we would go find far away, very far away…

And while his face lit up, he huddled in my arms almost in fear and I felt It prowling around us—That which we cannot avoid—implacable Death waiting for me to let go of him so It could steal him away.

My child! I will never take that back.

He weighed less than a child when I carried his poor, wasted body from bed to bed. He called for me like a child, day and night, every minute, just to see me leaning over him and to feel me near. And I buried him myself like the brave mothers who sew the flesh of their flesh into a shroud.

I am saying all this, I swear, not to talk about what I did. We do not deserve praise for doing our duty when we get such bitter joy from it. And again it is not an "article" I am writing—it is my grief that I express, good or bad, come as it may!

But today on this anniversary there will be no shortage of people screaming out about the selfishness and inhumanity of Vallès…

Well, do you really believe that he was so selfish, cruel and inhuman? He who was able to inspire such motherly and daughterly tenderness and passion? He whom we keep in memory like a religion?

Battlegrounds

Battlegrounds[4]

Let's leave the "speechmakers" to their vain arguments, the troublemakers, the anarchy-mongers, the utopists and idealists, the theoreticians and philosophers, the subversives and dissidents, the whole sorry bunch that muddles order and afflicts, understandably, good thinking little brains.

Let's leave aside the casuistry and discussion, the turns of phrase and figures of speech, the arguments and the replies, all the confusion or sublimity of words—empty prattle! When it comes to social issues, nothing matters but the deed. It alone arbitrates; it decides the opinions, confirms or denies them, and irrefutably establishes where the truth lies, in what North is the pole, in what

[4] Included in En Marche 1896.

East is the dawn! For an unsure conscience it is like a compass needle for the hesitant traveler… Follow its direction, proceed from its deductions and no error is possible; no doubt can remain.

Therefore, let's go look for this magic talisman, in the thick of the social struggle, in the ordinary, everyday realities. Far from the orators and even from those precursors who, opposed to Jean Grave, do not make the deed sister to their dream, do not bind their action to their word, their existence to their Ideal. Very far from the empty rhetoric, let's enter the great battle of demands and interests to seek insight by contemplating the results. And they are a complete, very suggestive revelation of the antagonism in which the strongest (today!) insist on monopolizing all the rights and leaving all the duties to the weakest.

We can judge the mentality of a caste like the morality of an army: by following in its wake… by counting the pointless victims outside of regular combat, all the shameful plundering, all the inhuman devastation, all the massacres and fires.

There were surely honest men, whose hearts shook with revolt and whose brows were soaked in shame, among the Bavarians at the sack of Bazeilles[5]. History's fatality will remain forever ignorant. Impassively it will write in the book of memory: "The Bavarian army sacked Bazeilles, set fire to the town and slaughtered the inhabitants."

It is the same for the employers. They strive so hard to be impartial that the principle trumps the individual; and they cannot distinguish it in the work of collectivity.

"Wounded? Who hurt you?"

"I don't know. Whoever forged the weapon…"

This forge here has the insignia of tiny scales, a pledge of balance, and a mighty sword, a threat of punishment—it is better not to talk about the weights.

#

And yet, if we talk about them! Because they play their role among the most important actions worthy of attention that I have noticed recently.

This is only an illustration, but instructive. It concerns a simple fraud—the nibbled morsel of bread swiped from the meager wages of young girls earning thirty sous a day… for eleven hours of work!

In this instance, P***, the manufacturer of wire ribbing, not yet satisfied with his profits, decided to pay for piecework. He weighed both the raw materials and the finished work, incoming and outgoing, so that he would only have to pay for the labor. Now, there were always discrepancies and waste tallied against the worker, but under the threat of being fired, it was *forbidden to check*. One of these young girls, feeling rather bold one Sunday when the boss was absent, snatched up the weight. IT WAS STUFFED WITH LEAD; IT WEIGHED SIXTY-FIVE GRAMS—6.50 percent stolen by the manufacturer out of everyone's wages every day or nine centimes lost out of the pitiable thirty sous that was already so hard to get. P*** was sentenced to ten days in prison and a twenty-five franc fine for falsifying the weights. Great, but the fraud? Isn't it pretty blatant? Or are the gullible victims so worthless that the avenging equity of the Courts did not care?

Well, its wrath takes a nap when it comes to the flock of poor.

#

So it is that the metallurgists have salt scalers to help them. What is this strange occupation? What task does this name refer to? I am going to tell you.

[5] On September 1 1870 just before the Battle of Sedan and Napoleon III's crushing defeat.

To reduce the material, he puts into the boiler a thick layer of sodium chloride (otherwise called sea salt) that he has to attack with a pick. His eyes burn from it and from the acrid smoke coming out of the lamp. In winter the humidity freezes his body, ruins his lungs and brings on consumption; while the cooking of his eyelids and the near-suffocation of his breathing congest his brain horribly.

One of these damned, named Sabatier, talked to a journalist at the *L'Ouvrier syndiqué* of Marseille, from whom I borrow these revelations:

"I worked in construction; I made rope; I was a coalman; and now I'm a salt scaler. Well, of all the jobs I've done, the hardest work was in construction as a laborer. But the most exhausting, what's killing my chest, is the salt scaler. But I have to do it. If I want to get any scraps for my brothers to eat."

So, do you know how old this poor fellow is? *Thirteen or fourteen years old.*

For (here is the horrible crime!) they get children to use for this deadly work. The mouth of the machine is generally too small for adult bodies. The boilers are fitted with cross "turners" that block a man from getting all the way in. So they get twelve-year old children—AND THEY CHOOSE THE SKINNY ONES!

#

After the injured, the martyrs. After the martyrs, the dead.

They disappear when they are between fifteen and twenty years old, the poor little powder girls in Limoges, the ones who decorate ceramics with butterfly wings, tossing in the blush of their cheeks and the sparkle in their eyes.

The powder girl (with a cotton swab she fixes the pulverized colors on the still fresh tracing sheets for the ornamentation of luxury dishes) gets 15 to 20 centimes an hour *and rarely lasts more than three years*. Starting work at around fifteen years old, she is affected within a few months and at around eighteen—or nineteen for the laggards—she leaves to die wherever she can, poisoned, permeated with lead salts to the marrow of her bone.

It is useless to give them masks to wear. It is useless to give them milk to drink. They are rapidly reduced to nothing but skeletons, old women ravaged by disease. And the pain devours them, constantly tears them apart… until the grim reaper finishes them off!

It was, to say the least, the seventh death in a few months that made me cry out for mercy. And no worthwhile measures were taken—as always, my call was lost in the void, in the desert, in profound indifference!

There were seventeen or eighteen girls who passed away recently in the Limoges hospital. Two others died at their parents' house. And neither the Health Council nor the Inspection Office warned of such crimes being bound to happen. They let them do it!

Right now they are quibbling over the last corpse—sixteen years old. The inspector, being accused of negligence, says that he referred the matter to the Administration four times in two months: on November 3, 10 and 17 and then on December 1. How will the Administration respond? While all this red tape rolls out, other girls, being poisoned at four sous an hour, are breathing their death.

In the meantime, around the Somme[6], there is a silica factory where in four years forty-two workers have died of tuberculosis, this kind of work being so deadly, from breathing the dust that deteriorates the lungs. Those who wrote to me about this, in their vast, voiceless desolation,

[6] In Picardy in the north of France.

said, “Although they treat us like slaves, at least the master will feed us because our death would be a loss!” And they recounted the torments of six thousand workers in the region of Vimert, Saint-Valéry, Escarbotin, Fressenneville and Wonicourt.

#

Yes, it is monstrous, but an ordinary monstrosity, everyday and everywhere, which nobody worries about too much.

The sugar crackers[7] are vowed to gastritis and tuberculosis, wounded in their sides from carrying the crates to the scales; their fingernails are worn down to the nub, their teeth are gone, their chests hollow—who cares? Furthermore, when they tried to alleviate their misfortune, how many people did they find to support them?

The workers in the matchstick factories (a State-owned business) are guaranteed necrosis, i.e. bone death… the most horrifying torture in the world! They asked that a harmless phosphorus be used rather than the one that was inflicting them with such torments. They were refused—IT WOULD BE TOO EXPENSIVE!

#

Faced with such things, you see, the notion of legal good and evil is eradicated in passionate souls and all that remains is a morality freed of conventions, drawing its support from the conscience and its strength from righteousness.

A society that allows, that owns such murders for the sake of profit is rotten to the core—let the axe men through!

[7] The “casseuses de sucre” piled sugar onto crates and hauled them to the scales.

4 Propaganda by Deed

On the night of October 22 1882 a bomb exploded in the restaurant of the Bellecour Theater in Lyon, killing a waiter and causing considerable damage. The next day another bomb went off at an army recruitment center but resulted only in material damage. The investigation was naturally focused on the anarchists. Fearing a huge conspiracy by the "anti-authoritarian" International, the government rounded up the "leaders" all over France and brought them to Lyon to face the law. This famous Trial of the Sixty Six began on January 8 1883 against defendants who were divided into two categories: the first "to have, for 3 months, in Lyon or other parts of the French territory, been affiliated with or performed acts affiliated with an international society and with the goal of provoking the suspension of work, the abolition of the rights of property, family, country and religion, and having thus committed an attack against the public peace"; the second group for supporting and instigating such acts by publishing and circulating propaganda in favor of them. Stiff sentences ranging from six months to several years in prison were handed down to the likes of Peter Kroptkin, Elisée Reclus, Emile Gautier (who would later abandon anarchism) and many others. Antoine Cyvoct, a young anarchist journalist was sentenced to death for the Bellecour bomb[1] based solely on circumstantial evidence—in fact, they never even established that it was an anarchist attack. Nevertheless, thus began the Era of Dynamite and the government's absolute intolerance of the anarchist movement.

In that same year of 1883 Karl Marx died in London and Jules Vallès launched *Le Cri du Peuple* in Paris. In following his dream to have a newspaper open to all cries of revolt, not just to one school or one theory, Vallès had welcomed Jules Guesde onto the editorial staff. Guesde would brag that he had met Karl Marx in person and was the guardian of orthodox revolutionary dogma. Séverine, being deeply, thoroughly libertarian[2], felt an immediate, instinctive dislike of him. She feared that with Guesde the authoritarians had set up house at *Le Cri*. Her distrust was well founded. For a while Séverine and the doctrinaires lived a difficult co-existence—a great big family that may not have liked but tolerated each other—until the question of anarchy came between them. And it was Clément Duval who caused the rupture.

Clément Duval was in court in January 1887 for robbing and setting fire to an affluent house and later stabbing (not fatally) the police sergeant Rossignol who tried to arrest him. The incident would likely have been relegated to the police blotter if Duval had not defended his act as an anarchist attack—he did not steal but put into action the theory of individual reclamation of capital, a "just restitution made in the name of humanity". He stole not for his own benefit but to support the Revolution. It earned him a death sentence. The anarchist companions got to work right away to save him from the guillotine. Louise Michel spoke at one meeting where Séverine had the opportunity to meet her, the heroine of the Commune, the legend, who had written for

[1] His sentence was commuted to hard labor on Devil's Island in French Guiana until he was finally pardoned in 1898.

[2] Libertarian understood in the traditional, European sense, i.e. nearly equivalent to anarchist, and not in the American sense, i.e. free-market capitalist.

the original *Le Cri du Peuple*. Today, however, the new staff of *Le Cri* (save Séverine) thought the anarchists were too damaging to the cause. The conflict that would last for decades to come was waging between propaganda by word and propaganda by deed, which not only pitted socialists against anarchists but also anarchists against each other.

"I have the conviction that the time of grand theoretical discourse, printed or spoken, is over… The time for ideas is over. It is the time now for deeds and action," Mikhail Bakunin had said in his farewell speech in 1873[3]. Paul Brousse, in his article "Propaganda by Deed" in 1877, tried to show how much more effective action was compared to theoretical propaganda—it is the realization, the materialization of the idea. As the government became more repressive and corrupt and the workers became more downtrodden and poorer, many revolutionary militants became more radical and violent. When the Communards returned to France under the amnesty of 1880, so too did a renewed energy for anarchy, fiercer than ever. And it inaugurated a new era in the struggle against oppression.

There was no official anarchist party in France at the time. The anarchists called each other "companion" and formed only local groups with little or no links between them, adopting such provocative names as the Rebels, The Outraged, The Gun in Hand, The Starved, The Terrible, The Hatred. One group founded in 1886 was called the Anti-Owners: it was made up of "Midnight Movers", who would skip out on rent; it had no rules, no statutes, no office, no headquarters; it counted around fifty active members who helped anyone who wanted to relocate without paying their debts. Another group was The Panther of Batignolles. On the agenda of its first meeting was the item "How to fabricate homemade bombs." The soon to be famous Clément Duval was one of its founding members.

They practiced propaganda by deed, the idea first justified by Proudhon and then encouraged by Bakunin: "to destroy is to construct". Everything from insurrection to explosives, from riding the train without a ticket to counterfeiting money, all forms of revolt, as insignificant as they might seem, were worth the effort. But substituting deeds for words, action for speech gave the anarchist movement a bad reputation and was not welcomed by all companions and certainly not by their socialist comrades, especially because of the crackdown by the law like in Lyon following the bomb attacks. With Duval's defense, however, a new "crime" was being given significant attention. Later, Vittorio Pini, an Italian anarchist in France, with his better education would defend the theory of individual reclamation better than Duval[4], but with Duval's death sentence, completely disproportionate to the crime—the government wanted to make an example of him—the libertarian theorists were forced to take a stand.

See, Clément Duval was making noise, a lot of noise. And the people, the workers were not unaware that he, at least, had not stolen from them. While a number of rebels were trying to create unions to help the unemployed and injured, others like him acted alone. Exasperated by misery, they could not wait for the future revolution. They cried out their desperation and struck. They put theory into practice. Some anarchists like Jean Grave, while justifying the action, denied any real value to theft. Others, like Sébastien Faure and Elisée Recluse, approved of the right to steal. To some he was just a criminal; to others he was a hero; to others again he became a martyr. No one could just stand on the sidelines.

[3] *Bulletin de la Fédération jurasienne*, n. 27, October 12 1873.

[4] The two became friends in the hellish penal colony of French Guiana. See Outrage: An Anarchist Memoir of the Penal Colony by Clément Duval (translated by Michael Shreve), PM Press, 2012.

Séverine took up the cause and championed Duval. She did not justify his action but rather decried the reaction. Justice was not equitable. There was one for the rich and another for the poor—it did not judge the facts, it judged the classes. And worse than this, who were all these socialists who judged him? Where did they get their right to condemn him without his right to appeal? She did not condone the theft, but she sympathized with the convicted. For her, the individual always took precedence over the category—humanity trumped doctrine. As Montaigne (3.2) said, "Man regards theft as a dishonest deed; and he hates it… but less than he hates poverty".

Jules Guesde considered her articles a declaration of war. The staff rose up against her. Who was this woman who pretended to give lessons to the holders of the correct political line, who dared to contradict their dogma? It was the break. Marxists, blanquists, republicans, independents, all left en bloc. They quit, Séverine said. We were fired, they said. And the paper would die. Was it worth it?

Duval was defended by Fernand Labori, a young lawyer committed to his office, making his first appearance before the high court. He would go on to defend (along with his own life) Pini and Auguste Vaillant and the famous Captain Dreyfus, along with Emile Zola. All the uproar and popular support saved Duval's head: his sentence was commuted to life of hard labor in the dry guillotine, as they called the penal colony. After fourteen years in hell and countless failed escape attempts Clément Duval ("one of the most dangerous men that anarchy ever unleashed against our social state"[5]) finally managed to reach New York in 1901 to die there at the age of 85 in 1935.

#

At the same time across the Atlantic the Haymarket Affair in Chicago was causing shock waves : A bomb exploded during a labor demonstration for the eight-hour workday on May 4 1886 and the police reacted by firing indiscriminately into the panicked crowd, killing and injuring a number of people. No bomber was ever found, but eight anarchists were arrested and convicted despite no proof of a conspiracy. Four of them were sent to prison and the four others sentenced to death: one of them committed suicide in jail and the three remaining were hanged on November 11 1887. The injustice was an international scandal. In commemoration of the Haymarket Martyrs, it was first proposed in 1890 at the Second International in Paris and then formally recognized internationally in 1891 that May 1st be celebrated as International Workers Day. Today May Day continues to celebrate the Labor Movement all over the world except in the USA and Canada, which officially celebrate Labor Day in September so as to forget its origins.

The Responsible Parties

The Responsible Parties:

Concerning the Anarchist Duval[6]

I do not approve of the theory of theft—or better said, I do not understand it. It disturbs me because it seems to be the kind of thing that pushes away the undecided, intimidates the naïve and frightens the timid. But in spite of my confusion I still feel that it is the most distressing social problem that has ever shaken up the world…and I remain undecided, I suspend my judgment.

Someone said to me, "You preach collective theft and call it restitution. But you spit on individual theft and call it a crime. Why?"

[5] Flor O'Squarr, Les coulisses de l'anarchie, 1892.

[6] Le Cri du People, January 30 1887 (included in Pages Rouges).

Yes, why?

#

I have too much loathing for pompous doctrines, school catechisms and sectarian grammars to argue and go into endless details about the act of a man whose head is already in the hands of the executioner and whom everyone has the right to insult and condemn—except for us!

We spend our lives telling the humble people (it is our conviction and our duty) that they are being robbed, exploited and slowly murdered; that their bodies are machines, their daughters are playthings and their sons will be used as cannon fodder. We fuel their anger, set their minds on fire, burn their souls and in the name of supreme Justice and sovereign Equality we make citizens out of the outcasts and rebels out of the defeated.

We tell them, "The Revolution is at hand. It will free you and give you your daily bread and the dignity of being free. Be patient, poor people! Hold on and put up with everything! Wait for the right time, gather your sorrows and bundle up your bitterness and hopes—and have confidence in the Social Revolution for a few years of grief and sacrifice."

The stubborn and persistent understand. They notch their belt around their empty bellies and get back to the social work dreaming of the harvest to come.

But the others? The impatient and impassioned who are dying of hunger and hatred, who have suffered, struggled and endured too much, who have too many children in their homes or too much fury in their heads, with their minds impervious to any idea of discipline and organization, who listen to us but do not hear! The sound of our words enters their brains, but the meaning does not stick in their minds. And these madmen of misery, these neurotics of revolt get drunk on our venomous hostility like on too much wine.

And then they do something crazy or criminal…

Bourgeois society jumps up, grabs hold of the man and tortures him… and we excommunicate him. We come down on him hard, cruel and heavy like the last rock at a stoning.

Oh, no, not that! Everyone…except for us!

The road we have chosen presents us with grave dangers, not the least of which are these disturbing "compromises", but we have to accept them with our heads held high, like good people with enough honor to lend some of it to the unfortunates who are dishonored because they misunderstood us. All responsibility falls on us, the educated and the leaders of the crowd—they deserve leniency and pity.

#

So, turn to history and look at the past. There were always adventurous and deranged people who "compromised" the cause. And there were always blind puritans who branded these misfits with public condemnation. Babeuf was guillotined by the Republic; Proudhon was dishonored by the republicans; the rebels of June were defamed by Pelletan; and after '71 how many slanders were there against once fellow fighters![7]

And always, always this word "thief" tossed by one democrat at another. Babeuf, thief! Proudhon, thief! The June workers, thieves! The Communards, thieves! This or that opponent, thief! This or that, dissident, thief!

If the accusation is false, let us come to his defense; if it is true, let us sympathize! We other socialists have no other role in humanity. We are not judges. We are defenders!

[7] François Noël "Gracchus" Babeuf (1760-1797), anarcho-communist ahead of his time and one of the leaders of "The Conspiracy of Equals"; Pierre Joseph Proudhon (1809-1865), anarchist and pacifist; Eugène Pelletan (1813-1884)

I spoke of the legend of socialism, but you can take the legend of Christianity, its ancestor. A boy from Bethlehem, weak in body but strong in mind, gathered around him some workers whom he talked to quietly and simply about their great misery. They became staunch friends with him and left everything to follow him when he went to travel around Palestine. Like the vagrants of our day they had no occupation. They slept in the streets like our homeless. They held demonstrations on graves like us others and meetings like the unemployed in every Champs de Mars where they met.

There were twelve of them. Now there are a hundred. Tomorrow there will be a thousand!

Like a snowball turning into an avalanche, the group got bigger as it went along. Everyone whom the country considered prowlers, lost girls, bandits and brigands followed this young man who preached Equality. Since they had to live they foraged around and got what they could where they could. The bourgeoisie closed their doors in terror before this "army of crime" made up of the rejects of society.

The province was disrupted and the government went into action. Jesus was arrested for inciting people to pillage and to hate one another. They judged him along with a thief. It was the thief who got pardoned. Then Barabbas turned away from his co-defendant in disgust and said, "Take this criminal away."

Jesus was executed amidst a laughing, booing and spitting crowd. The drunken soldiers had a great time while he was dying and he breathed his last breath between two thieves on the infamous gallows. Beneath him wept an old craftswoman, his mother and a poor prostitute who loved him…

#

This "criminal" was resurrected—and now he has reigned over the world for nineteen centuries!

The whole strength of this religion is drawn from the shame of torture, from the humility of the tortured, from its contact with the poor, from its solidarity with the guilty. He was judged by the Pharisees and denied by his apostles and he loved his ignorant, criminal people enough to be glad to take upon himself all their slanders and then die like the worst of beggars.

How can you, Social Pharisees, not know the deep significance of this legend and the thought of this pale orator nailed like the first socialist poster on the tree of Golgotha?

It would be too easy, really, to give only one's life to the cause, to want only glorious punishments, brilliant martyrs, Millière at the Pantheon or Delescluze at the barricade[8].

So, let's go!

You heard me right, we have to give everything: honor, reputation, prejudices, and misgivings. Follow the people on the road and follow them to their cells.

With the poor at all times—despite their mistakes, despite their faults…despite their crimes!

The Chicago Anarchists

The Chicago Anarchists[9]

and the bloodily repressed uprising of 1848; reference to the Paris Commune of 1871.

[8] Jean-Baptiste Millière and Charles Delescluze were shot dead during the Bloody Week of May 1871.

[9] The Preamble to En Marche 1896, conerning the Haymarket Affair.

They took these four men, full of life and health, and covered their shoulders with the shroud that, a few minutes later, would wrap their twisted limbs and hide their contorted faces—and their eyes popping out of the sockets to punish them for having seen too far and too high into the future of humanity; and their tongues hanging out of their mouths, gags of purple flesh sealing forever those lips guilty of having spoken of truth and justice!

They staggered along because ropes bit into their ankles and hobbled their feet like tied up animals before being thrown into the slaughterhouse.

They were pale because the night before their dear friend Louis Lingg had sacrificed himself in the hope of saving their four lives. They heard a sudden explosion, then the commotion in the prison and the cries of pain that his horrible wounds wrenched from him. They counted the minutes of his agony before their last night's sleep was troubled by the double sound of hammering: the coffin they were nailing shut and the gallows they were building.

And the night before they had removed their hearts from this world. Their wives and mothers had wept in their arms, groaned against their chests and clasped their knees. There were dreadful scenes in that dungeon. Fisher's companion and Parsons', Spies' mother, and that poor, beautiful Nina Van Zandt, his fiancée, had watered the floor of the cells with their tears.

Parsons' wife came back in the morning. She dragged herself up the prison gate, knocked softly and begged, with words that would have softened up a wild beast, to allow her to give one last kiss to the man who was still alive but who had already made her a widow.

"No."

She said nothing, did not yell, did not cry, but her fingernails embedded in the bars of the gate suddenly let loose and she fell backward with a terrible shriek that resounded throughout the prison.

No one knows if Parsons recognized that cherished voice, but from that minute on his face was scored with frightful wrinkles so that he looked like he was sixty years old when the hangman took him.

The four condemned men had listened proudly, with something superhuman in their eyes, to the reading of the death sentence. Then while walking to the gallows, Fisher—the German Fisher—started singing at the top of his voice the French song, the heroic Marseillaise whose red wing hovered over these martyrs.

The executioner grabbed them. The ignominious ropes were knotted around their necks, the trapdoors dropped—and the four bodies swung in the air like four big bell clappers sounding the alarm of retaliation in the petrified air…

Before dying Spies said, "The time will come when our silence will be more powerful than our voices that you are strangling to death!"

Engel yelled, "Hurray for Anarchy!"

Fisher yelled, "Hurray for Anarchy!"

The last words of Lingg's testament were, "Long Live Anarchy!"

–November 1887

5 The End of Le Cri

The fight over control of *Le Cri du Peuple* had started even before Jules Vallès died. Guesde and his friends had tried to take over the paper during his sickness and impose their form of scientific socialism under the cult of Marx. They wanted a newspaper in their image: rigid, authoritarian and dogmatic. The little bourgeois upstart, the little anarchist in skirts (as they saw her) was tolerable while Vallès was alive because she provided the money, but after his death, it was time to put her in her place—in the bottom shelf of a desk in the basement, preferably. They did not know Séverine. She was not the kind to stand by idly and let them usurp the paper. And a couple of events shook up their plans.

Firstly, the Naquet Law was passed in France, authorizing divorce. Séverine took advantage right away and on December 2 1885 she married Dr. Adrien Guebhard. In spite of all the scandals that would follow and their separation soon afterward, they would never divorce. Their relationship always remained respectful and affectionate. Presently it meant that she continued to hold the coffers of the paper.

The other significant event took place the day after Vallès' funeral. A journalist by the name of Georges de Labruyère from *L'Echo de Paris* came to interview Séverine. Labruyère was young, handsome and talented, although less famous for his journalism than for his duels. Still, the article that he wrote, "Vallès' Friend", was not just a praise of the disciple, but a flattering portrait of the woman, the only one to be accepted as an equal among the editors of the press. She immediately saw in him an ally, which she sorely needed at *Le Cri*. When she invited him to join the staff, he had no trouble accepting. The Guesde clan saw that she was not about to step down quietly, so the battle was on. But they were willing to sink lower than she would ever go.

Séverine was trying to keep Vallès' dream alive: that *Le Cri du Peuple* be the voice of the people, the voice that was imprisoned in silence, a militant voice against economic and political exploitation. But she also wanted to modernize the paper that she saw becoming sad and boring. She wanted more than the traditional professors of revolution spouting propaganda from their high chairs. The workers deserved more. They wanted excitement and information and they wanted to identify with the stories being told to them. Georges de Labruyère had ideas. He, like Séverine, was part of the new "American" school of journalism popularized by the *New York Herald*—fewer commentaries, more facts. Who, what, why, where and when. Investigative reporting on the scene with eyewitness accounts. Séverine, however, never lost sight of the goal or sacrificed her role, which she saw as spreading the hatred of injustice and the love of truth among the people. But as Vallès used to say, you made no progress if you only preached to the converted, if you only reflected the opinion of your readers. So, *Le Cri* was anarchist, absolutely, but it was also collectivist, Blanquist, republican, independent or possibilist depending on who was writing.

She knew that this harmony was a façade and would last only as long as she yielded to the editorial staff. But with the source of money at her back they could not get rid of her and with Georges de Labruyère at her side they could not shut her up. Through Clément Duval they at-

tacked. Theft, they claimed, was unacceptable and thieves, no matter where they came from, were no allies of theirs. Séverine did not yield. Their mutiny failed, bitterly. When they abandoned ship, they went to war.

They founded a new paper, *La Voie du Peuple,* and resuscitated an old scandal. Back in December 1885 a certain Lissagaray started a campaign to bring down the competing newspaper. It denounced *Le Cri* as a vain, contemptible rag full of hot air, lies and exaggeration that compromised the Cause for the sake of sales and publicity for its director, Dr. Guebhardt, a shameless profiteer disguising himself as a revolutionary. Not only was Adrien unconcerned by this, but he was not a fighter. And yet such slanders demanded satisfaction.

The duel was illegal, but it was inseparable from the life of the press, as absurd as it might sound—but absurdity is part of the French spirit. Although they rarely proved fatal—they usually stopped the fight at the first drop of blood for swords or a limited number of shots for pistols—they still risked life. Of course dueling was exclusively male, which was another difficulty for a woman journalist—the editor had to represent her. Without a champion to fight for her, it could be an excuse for censorship. Astie de Valsayre, the secretary of the League of Women's Freedom, jumped in the fray, however, criticizing Séverine for needing a man to fight for her and demanding women's right to duel. Since it was impractical to fight in long frilly skirts and a corset she petitioned the right to wear pants—it was refused (it was still technically illegal for women to wear pants until the law was revoked in 2013). Séverine loved her dresses and therefore hated Astié de Valsayre and all her hype.

So, it was Georges de Labruyère who took the field for *Le Cri* and its sponsor. But far from settling the issue, Lissagary felt it was halted too soon, without enough blood being spilled, hinting that his adversary was dodging out of danger. Labruyère sent witnesses for a second fight, but Lissagaray refused. He claimed that he had just learned how despicable the representative of *Le Cri* really was and he would never have accepted the first challenge if he had known: George de Labruyère, he claimed, was a hired pen and a snitch for the police. A year later, in December 1886, the polemic was resumed by Abel Peyrouton in *L'Echo de Paris* who dragged Séverine's personal life into the battle, calling her a whore who squeezed money out of her john (Adrien, her husband) to pay her pimp (Labruyère, her lover). And there was worse: Séverine and Labruyère had been caught doing the dirty deed in the public restrooms of Tuileries by the police, but her connections had kept it quiet since Séverine's father had been a policeman.

Bad as this was, it was worse a few months later, after the confrontation over anarchy, when her former staff resuscitated the accusations and slung all kinds of calumnies, insinuations, insults and obscenities with no other goal but to destroy her. Worst of all, they sent a collection of the articles to Madame Guebhard. With her poor sight, it was Séverine's son Roland, now seven years old, who had to read all the slanders to her. After first refusing to answer such base recriminations, Séverine finally responded, point by point, to all the dirt. It was true that she was having an affair with Georges de Labruyère, but she had told Adrien all about it during the Duval polemic and he had accepted peaceably, leaving Paris to live with his mother and son in Provence. As for her father, she gives a long, sympathetic portrait of his career, describing the proletariat in ragged overcoats, the whole class of petty, pen-pushing bourgeoisie.

This would not be the last public confrontation for Séverine in her career, but for *Le Cri* it was the end. Not because of the scandal, but because of the spirit. Since the "revolutionaries" had been replaced by the "possibilists", more moderate reformers, the energy and hope of the debut had been snuffed out. She wrote her farewell article on August 29 1888.

Henceforth Séverine had to write for various newspapers, meet headlines, earn a living. Becoming the first professional female journalist in France, she had to hire out her pen, but she would not hire out her soul. Not only because she had a keen sense of responsibility of the press, but also because she did not have to: by now Séverine was famous. Feared by some, notorious to others, respected by most and in demand—her name on the front page sold papers.

Farewell

Farewell[1]

This is not the last time that I will talk to you, my dear friends in the workshops and factories, my working class comrades. Nor is this the last time that I will talk about you. But this is the last time that I will talk in *Le Cri du Peuple* and that my name will appear at its head.

Tomorrow I will be gone.

I am not deserting. The soldier who stops in the middle of the battle because he has been vanquished is not abandoning his fellow fighters. And if someone criticizes him for staying in the middle of the road while the others are moving on, he has the right to respond by showing them his wounds and telling of the weakness in his depleted veins. He has done his duty—and I also have done mine.

It has been five years now since I have been on the go and over the last three years especially I have spent every day defending the cause to which I am devoted and to which I would like to stay devoted until the day I die.

I have thrown 400,000 francs into *Le Cri du Peuple*. Personally I am going out a little poorer than when I came in. I do not like to talk about these things, but contrary to the custom today, my humble glory is precisely that I have given everything and received nothing.

But, yes, I got paid: a handful of insults and basketfuls of vile slander. If they came only from adversaries, I would not complain. When you are with the poor, you have to expect all kinds of insults and injuries and courageously take your share—and your sides! But sometimes they came from those fighting next to me and my heart is still bleeding…

#

I said what socialism has been for me from a "business" point of view. I was expecting no better from the other points of view.

Being a woman was a sure guarantee that I had no personal ambition. I had none for others either; I never wanted the people I loved to be "something".

My goal was not wealth or influence. I dreamed of something even more beautiful and worked at a task even more arduous. I wanted—expecting that my weakness would defuse the animosities and make it easier to give up their bitterness and to wipe out their pride—I wanted to give power and cohesion to socialism by reconciling the different schools whose divisions, all those personalities, were the only reason that the enemy triumphed.

I hoped (and I was cruelly punished for it) that in spite of and outside of the party leaders the battalions would merge and the great army of the poor would close ranks again. I dreamed of fraternity, but the leaders whose interests I damaged gave me a rude awakening.

I am not making accusations. I speak of the past with deep sadness, but without a hint of bitterness and only to explain why I welcome this retirement, which circumstances have forced

[1] *Le Cri du Peuple*, August 26 1888 (in Pages Rouges, 1893).

upon me, without rebelling in my sorrowful fatigue. And then because there is something greater than me at stake in this plague of hatred that is killing socialism.

#

I am being blunt, but this article is a kind of testament and has the right to say and show everything.

Look at where we were eight years ago and where we are today. The fasces[2] are undone and lie in pieces on the ground; they only have to be stepped on to be broken. Of course, there are a few big branches left, but do any of them alone offer the resistance of the fasces as a whole? No, and you know it.

Moreover, those who stand or fight against unity are guilty. And this in itself is a comfort to me in leaving *Le Cri du Peuple*. My disappearance will also take with it some people's envy. If my departure can in any little way secure some harmony, I will not regret it.

As long as the leaders of socialism do not sense the danger of these discords that are infesting the whole party little by little like gangrene, as long as they do not abdicate their resentments like the nobles once abdicated their privileges on the night of August 4[3], as long as they put themselves above their ideas, their personal interests above the common interest, their "me" above the "we"—the social state will stay the same and the poor will remain without hope… and without food!

They say that those who are about to die see the future clearly. Those who are about to leave maybe see the present from a little higher up and a little more distinctly. Well then, watch out! Socialism has never been in such danger!

For, besides their hostility, the leaders are now mixed up in politics. They no longer debate about the economic interest of workers, but about the electoral interests of candidates. In their hands socialism is no longer a goal, it is a tool.

They are for or against someone according to the profit they can get out of attacking or defending him. And in this political shell game they forget that those who have everything at stake are waiting downstairs. If they win, so much the better for themselves! If they lose, too bad for the others!

#

Le Cri du Peuple did not want to get mixed up in party politics—it stayed at the door with the "vile multitude", which was its sole preoccupation, concerned with its needs, its sufferings, its demands and its pains.

In this conflict, which it had no use for, it did not choose to support Boulanger or the Parliament[4]—it simply remained socialist, worrying more about strikes than elections and much busier with the question of wages than the question of the Cabinet.

Neither Rue Cadet nor Rue de Sèze—only the working suburbs, humiliated, defeated, dying of hunger!

That is what it will remain.

Those who will come after me were comrades of Vallès during the Commune. I know them through him. He loved them like childhood friends and like neighbors who lived through tragedy

[2] Roman symbol of power and authority—of the people and Liberty in France— consisting of wooden rods tied together in a bundle.

[3] In 1789 the Constituent Assembly officially abolished the old feudal system.

[4] See 9-General Boulanger.

together. Of course, he did not share all their ideas—no more than I do—but he respected them… and how many people would he respect today?

That is why I am glad that as my strength wanes they will be the ones to take my place in the fight.

#

They asked me to stay on the bandwagon, but I refused. I thanked them with all my heart for thinking of keeping me with them, but I am beginning to believe that I am too libertarian to ever write for a socialist newspaper. I love the independence of an adversary as much as my own. I do not think my neighbor's mind should be molded out of mine.

We are like that in this family. Vallès cried out for freedom "without borders" and during the Commune he was the only one to protest against the suppression of *Le Figaro* and *Le Gaulois*. So, I got this bad education and I stick to it.

Now, those who are coming here are a disciplined party. I would only throw a note of discord in what they want to be a perfect whole, like my little flowers sometimes look mischievous around the solemn wreaths of the immortals up there at the grave of old Blanqui[5].

What I am going to do right now is to play hooky from the Revolution. I will go from right to left following life's ups and downs, always defending the ideas that are dear to me, but without any responsibility other than that which I have signed my name to.

At present I am writing nothing that can make the headlines of *Le Cri du Peuple*—it will not change in the future.

#

And now, farewell, dear house that was mine.

I dreamed of making a good home for socialism, of seeing Guesde and Brousse, Vaillant and Kroptkin[6] toast glasses at the same table. Instead of this I had only temporary guests who swallowed the lusty mouthful, drank the last glass of wine, and then left shaking their fists and grumbling insults—some even threw rocks at the window from outside!

I had so many of these thankless guests that now it is time for me to go, in spite of the efforts of those who have been faithful allies for the last four months and put their youth, devotion and self-sacrifice at the service of a lost cause.

What does it matter! The house is still solid. It was only missing "an advantage" and supplies. Those who are coming have all that and into the bargain they will throw their firm fist to make the bad guys come to their senses. Good luck, successors!

A last look back, a final embrace of my true friends—and farewell!

My things are packed in a red handkerchief. When I want you to know where I am, I will break a branch on the road and lay it down…my friends will watch me go.

The Satisfied

The Satisfied[7]

[5] Louis Auguste Blanqui (1805-1881), revolutionary socialist founder of Blanquism.

[6] Jules Guesde (1845-1922), Marxist; Paul Brousse (1844-1912), Possibilist; Edouard Vaillant (1840-1915), Blanquist and Centrist; Peter Kroptkin (1842-1921), Anarcho-communist.

[7] Included in En Marche, 1896.

I have spoken about the poor, a lot; about their ever increasing number; about their distress mounting at every chime of the clock; about the rumble of weeping that still seems a long way off to hardened ears, but is sweeping in like a whirlwind; about the tide of tears that long ago passed the low level mark and is rising and rising like a tidal wave.

I have said that the great historical invasions from Asia and Africa pouring into Europe, just like the legions of rats and the swarms of locust, that the slave and serf revolts preceding the terror with torch in hand, followed by the devastation with scythe in hand, razing the ground, like the Helots, the Bagaudae or the Jacques[8], that the Revolution whose shabby dress they show us without giving us its soul—I have said that all this will look like and will be child's play after the Hunger Rebellion!

This is not a threat. Threats are useless, prove nothing and serve no purpose. This is the bleak observation of a social state whose only possible remedy is for the bourgeoisie, after a hundred years of pleasure, to agree to abdicate, imitating those from whom it had taken it before, and when the time comes to have the same vigor as its lords had on the night of August 4[9].

Will they consent? It is very unlikely. In spite of the heights they have reached, they keep their original blemish, the stamp of mediocrity of the intermediate castes—ignorant of the manners that acted as virtue, once in a while, among the nobles, and incapable of the instinct that leaps from the heart of simple people.

They snatched up the goods of the nobility, but could not acquire any of its daring, elegance or impartiality. They are just as unfit at dressing well as they are at dying well or at ruining themselves gracefully. They are hostile to every new art and every fine fiction, only the banality of success is acceptable to them. They are crushing under their black heels the fleur-de-lis of France and the red poppies of Freedom!

For a whole half century they have let us die for them, let a beggar's son die so that a banker's son, far from the fighting, could keep his mistress perfumed and pampered. Thus the bourgeoisie was unconsciously preparing its decline—in this country where courage makes leaders, after having made kings! When they felt completely despised, they agreed to be subjected to common law, but fifty years ago they evaded the blood tribute—and the legend of "prudence" was established.

It is not that there are no brave men among them and heaven forbid that I take the majority to represent all! If in the course of civil wars there have been no heroes in its ranks—the idea alone makes heroes and not the interest—there have at least been determined men who defend their situation risking their lives.

In June '48 especially, against that troubling riot that did not come from politics but from famine: mother of what we will see tomorrow. In December '51 also a few brave boys in top hats and frock coats were proud to kill for the pretty eyes of Marianne[10] who had mowed down the workers and then the workers saw them get butchered in turn, hands in their pocket, looking smug.

In March '71, as long as they believed that it was not serious, the bourgeoisie stayed put. But on the night of the 23rd, after the shootout in Place Vendôme, all the rich neighborhoods echoed with the sound of panicky galloping. Before every door, five or six carriages were waiting, soon rolling, loaded with baggage, carrying away the valuables… and the men. The 24th, in the morning, at

[8] Spartan slaves, Roman peasants, French serfs, all who rose up against their masters.

[9] In 1789 when feudalism was abolished and the privileges abandoned.

[10] Symbol of Republican France.

the homes of those who should have been defending against the gunfire like their fathers in ’48, there was nobody but women, children, servants, the elderly and the invalid!

It is true that the others came back—behind the army of Versailles!—after a two-month vacation, more relentless than the soldiers (after a ten-months campaign) in the work of repression!

#

Ah no! You know, it has nothing to excite that queen of yesterday who spent 300,000 francs for her last grand ball although in bread and meat vouchers and in back-rent this huge amount could have relieved a lot of misery, assuaged a lot of anger and dried a lot of tears.

Now the winter has come with its train of suffering, all the surplus of torture that adds to the miseries of the poor. Do you think that the old spirits of the Valmy[11] victors , with holes in their shoes and without lunchboxes, who saved the Republic, cannot be better honored than by giving their descendants (who got nothing from their effort), in memory of the ancestral heroism, should get a few days of warm soup, a wool-wrapped patriotic song and a pair of shoes?

But let’s go and ask the bourgeoisie about this inspiration! It cannot have any: it hates the plebes. Toward them it feels all the resentment of Harpagon[12] toward his heirs but abominably worse because they will inherit *while its still living*. They worry it, bother it, they are the guests waiting who will take the chairs and silverware while its feeling so hungry, while it prefers, in any case, to die of indigestion and throw the wine in the Seine and the food in the sewers rather than give them even a whiff!

But for a good man it will be a good man!

Its present socialism is made from its fear, as well as from its love of the army. The one will make it patient enough (or so the present generation of wealthy hope) for it to get out while the going’s good. The other is its security, its support, its guard. They want it strong “against the enemy”, they say with a wink toward the Rhine. But their eyes turn away, look down, come back to the interior: against those wanting to share…

Except that since our masters are stingy they do not even know how to make Praetorians, those elite Roman bodyguards. The people in uniform are not much better treated back in their barracks than the others back in their workshops. While weaponry is important, the individual well-being of the soldier is an illusion. He can die of typhoid fever in the dirty barracks, drinking water the city council would not give to a dog. He goes to die on foreign expeditions, tortured and decapitated, for the grand glory of such or such politician—without even being sure that his mother will grieve or that his beloved will not be informed of a false death!

Caesar loved the throng of weapons but Caesar was generous, Caesar worried about the health and morale of his men and wanted them, after risking their lives, to enjoy their lives…

#

There remains God, who, it seems, is the enemy! He was used for a long time to divert the attention of the multitudes: whoever looked at Notre Dame turned their backs on the Bank.

Today the method seems old and tired. And when we learn that the government allocated 20,000 francs for the removal of the cross from the Panthéon (which isn’t bothering anyone!) the least devout wonder whether this 20,000 francs would not have been better spent on relief for the poor.

No one was the wiser.

[11] The first major victory of the Revolutionary War in 1792.

[12] The title character in Molière’s The Miser.

But what, then, is left for this ruling class if it has no pity or heroism or faith?

What does it love?

Our bourgeoisie, in general, love Money… And it is strange to see how fiercely its selfishness and cruelty is provoked when it believes, when it feels its goods are targeted—or if the poor, tired of picking the crumbs out of the dust and off the soles of its shoes, stretch out their thin hands toward the coveted bread.

Listen instead:

Here in *Le Figaro* is the interview with Alphonse de Rothschild by Jules Huret. I do not want to dwell on this since after 48 hours the interested party has retracted some points. Still, it contains some statements about an extremely questionable philanthropy:

"The workers are very satisfied with their lot. They do not complain at all… If the share is not fair, if the workers are not paid enough, they have the right to strike. Let them use it! Isn't it natural that the one who provides the capital be better remunerated and have more pleasure than the crude, savage worker who gives nothing to the work but the clever use of his arms?"

After the great financier, we have the fat bourgeois, the subscriber to *Le Temps*, who calmly explains that Bonsans, the worker who died of starvation in Corbeil, had received in 15 days from the local relief committee, for him and his family, 6 kilos of bread and 500 grams of pot-au-feu, beef stew. Dr. Vigne's medical certificate said "Death by extreme need" which is very different, you will agree, from "Death by hunger." The *Temps* subscriber hesitated for a long time to make the correction. He opened his hand, full of truths, only because Bonsans, stuffed with all these benefits from his native town, had showed, by dying on the territory, his lack of tact and gratitude.

#

But these men are only snobs who do not care. There are harsher people out there. Witness this letter I received from a gentleman whom I will not name, since I know a few touchy, edgy people in his region of Mans.

After a few personal niceties, and therefore without interest, and based on this: that I defend "the rabble", my kind correspondence got straight to the point.

"You support the workers, that gang who want money only to get drunk. How many of them won't go drink it all up in the nightclubs? The same with your strikes. The strikers are really interesting people! Calvignac[13], among others, a dirty bum! When you want to be mayor, *you have to have the means to be one* or give it up. They're all scoundrels and bandits!

"You say they have one, three or six children. And why do they do it? Always for the same reason, because they're drunk, they go home, go to bed and…" (here is phrase forbidden to transcribe). "Too bad for them. They shouldn't do it! If they want to, let them suffer the consequences.

"Ah! If I could, do you know what I would do about it? An iron hand throughout France; suppress the freedom of the press over and over again; in case of strikes send in the army that would surround the country; and no more unions!

"As for all those who raise their voice in protest or organize meetings and keep the good workers from working—send in the firing squad and shoot them immediately without trial, that's what they deserve/

"Remember this well: we're heading for disaster and you're the one pushing us there!'

[13] Jean-Baptiste Calvignac (1854-1934), son of a miner became mayor of Carmaux in 1892. He was fired by the mining company that ran the town and it touched off a huge miners' strike.

#

I am not pushing, good citizen of Mans—I feel it coming like Cassandra[14] wandering in Troy. Except that after reading your letter, the revolutionary spirits to come, that were messing up my respect for others, appear to me, I don't know why, under a different light… says the shepherdess to the shepherd that you are, kind capitalist!

And as a reward for this gift of unwitting propaganda to change my feelings like this, to make the sheep grow fangs… no, absolutely not, I won't give out your bourgeois address… You are a too perfect example of your race—I'll hang on to it!

[14] The prophetess in Greek legend who was cursed to never be believed.

6 Martyrs of the Mines

Séverine was first and foremost a journalist. And she loved it. She was thirty-three years old now and beautiful, all dressed up for the social revolution armed with a pen that was sharper than a sword and ready to be put to use on behalf of all combats for tolerance, peace and justice. And she had already sacrificed everything for it. For, journalism was more than just a job or a business to her, it was a mission. The power of the press is that no one, no matter how highly placed they may think they are, is untouchable. The reporter is there to give information, reveal the news and tell the truth. Moreover, the press has the responsibility of being the voice of the voiceless, the weak and oppressed, the condemned and exploited, who otherwise would not be heard.

Séverine was always swimming against the current and kicking against the pricks—she refused to conform. She wrote and thought as a free woman. What she wrote was often provocative, sometimes shocking because she said not just what she thought, but also what she saw. And what she saw was not the same as most of her male counterparts. Being an intruder into that world of men that was journalism and politics, she often found herself the only woman tolerated at certain gatherings. The men might be courteous to her, but they certainly could not resist the cutting word or nasty remark that could make or break careers and her vitriol of anger and insubordination was fuel for their fire. But she thrived.

Since most places were still off limits to women, like the debates in the Chamber of Deputies, electoral reunions, etc. she had to sneak in or pretend not to be a journalist and then stand with other people, mix with the lay people as it were. This along with her woman's point of view gave a special flavor to her reporting. But even this was not enough for her.

Although being a journalist for Séverine meant mixing with the crowd, everywhere, in the streets and factories and courtrooms, in their sweat and blood and distress, to be a consummate journalist it was still necessary for her to go farther, to break as many barriers as possible. The Miners offered her an early opportunity.

Grand industry, big business, with its capitalist dynasties tried to regulate the lives of workers and their families in every place and in every way possible, in and out of work, from birth to death. Bosses were slave drivers ready to defend the despotism of profit. Workers were defenseless in a capitalist system that was made even more aggressive and oppressive by the economic crisis. Poverty wages, arbitrary firings and excessive hours were normal currency. In the mines the misery was aggravated by the frequent disasters that injured or killed the miners, leaving their families without resources.

The bowels of the earth begat the energy that made the industrial revolution possible, tirelessly producing the substance of progress and hence the profits of the modern social and economic system. But there was a price—it was the miners who paid it. The owners of the mines were fully aware of the occupational hazards as well as the danger of revolt by the workers, so they instituted appropriate measures to stifle any trouble. They had spies and the workers had to accept them. Just like they had to accept lower wages when coal was selling for less or sanctions

if they were late, absent or acted up against the bosses. The threat of being fired for any or no reason at all constantly loomed over the miners who could barely afford to live on the wages they received for their work so they could not risk losing their job. Sometimes, however, the line was crossed.

In the spring of 1886 the miners of Decazeville in southern France went on strike. In *Le Cri du Peuple* Séverine launched a call for donations to support the striking miners with more than just words because they needed real help to feed their families while they were being deprived of their salaries. Duc-Quercy was also writing scathing articles in her paper and he went to jail for it, perhaps because he was targeting Léon Say, the Chairman of the Decazeville Mining and Foundry Company and a typical representative of the hated capitalist system. In June the strike came to an end with some concessions made to the miners, but by then other workers throughout the region, glass workers, iron workers and fellow coal miners, had joined in. By the fall the strike had moved on to Vierzon in the center of France and Séverine continued her campaign. Her calls did not go unheeded. Donations were given to the miners and people rallied around her to fight the organized repression by the government at the behest of the companies. It was a never-ending battle.

Four years later in the summer of 1890 an explosion in the mine of Villeboeuf at Saint Etienne in east central France killed 113 men and wounded 40 others. Just like she had in *Le Cri* she opened a call for donations to the support the affected families, but this time she wanted to go down to Saint Etienne and write a serious of articles on the conditions of life and work of the miners. Even more than this, she got it in mind to descend into the mine where the explosion occurred. The Company made it difficult for her to get authorization, but her ardor and stubbornness won out.

Three other women had gone down into a mine before her, but without any risk. She was the first woman to go down into a mine after an explosion when the combustible gas was still in the air ready to explode again, which it did, twice, three days later, killing seventeen more men. But she was proud to be a pioneer. In *Le Gaulois* she simply told what she saw in all sincerity, but at the same time denounced the daily dangers that these crumbling coalmines presented to the workers. The next day she visited the wounded in the hospital and afterwards lay sick in bed for two days. She was turned into a heroine. But it was a bittersweet accomplishment for her since she was fully aware that she earned more money with one article than a miner earned in a month. Nevertheless, her sensational exploit and articles had the effect she was hoping for. People, even the rich, found her graphic descriptions exotic and picturesque. Donations came pouring in.

She spent almost a month in Saint Etienne with the miners, distributing the charity to the widows and victims, writing about their lives, their toil, their desperate, violent struggle—"Poverty kills more people than the machine gun ever will"—appealing to all people to place humanity above party politics. She was a militant of living humanism. However, despite some minor improvements and the trivial fines taxed upon the companies, she continued to find the same suffering and distress. It was a cause she fought for her entire life and earned her the nickname "The Little Mother of the Miners."

[1] *Le Gaulois*, August 2 1890.

Descent Into Hell

Descent Into Hell[1]

It is seven o'clock and the hotel awakener beats a reverberating drum roll on my door. It sounds like a warning.

"Madame, you have to get up! It's time!"

It is time, in fact, because at exactly nine o'clock I am supposed to be over at Villeboeuf to descend into the mine. I will be the first Parisienne, the fourth woman since the mine opened—a good while ago now—to take the journey. Two English women and one from Saint Etienne went before me, but when it was calm; whereas right now the earth is being cruel, treacherous, unappeased… in spite of its one hundred and fifty murders!

I am thinking about all this while getting dressed as best I can. Not at all my best because they already told me that before stepping into the "cage" I would have to put on miner's clothes. And, well, my nerves are really on edge! Not because of the danger, but because of the fear of the dark that always kept me from visiting the Catacombs and stopped me in my tracks at the entrance to the lava tunnels of Herculaneum.

My ancestors' blood runs strong in me—it loves sun and air; it is brave when the light laughs in the leaves; it is much less grandiose when the night snuffs off the moon, its big lamp, and blows out the stars, its lanterns. And insofar as there is darkness down in the burial, in the horrible suffocation that the depression of the atmosphere and the smell of mold cause, I am really scared—I only have courage in the free air full of free light.

But when you have my name and you are defending the poor, you do not have the right to be a coward, even out of nervousness.

I hurry into my duster like Decius[2] throwing himself into the gulf. I clap my hat on my head with the same heroic gesture as Jason donning his helmet before boarding the Argo. I am setting off a little like him in search of the golden fleece. If the readers of *Le Gaulois* find my story interesting, they will give more[3]… Onward, then!

#

Here we are at Villeboeuf. The troops have left the site. Only a pile of stretchers in the courtyard recalls the dreadful ceremony of the day before. But the disaster is here in the slightest details.

The ground is littered with wisps of straw and flakes of cotton, some filthy, others all oily. There are bits of human skin and lumps of clotted blood stuck together with field grass. The snowy cotton is the puss from the wounds and the fat they put on them that rolled into big, glistening balls. Moreover, everything is sullied with the ashen mud. The phenol [or carbolic acid] spread out in waves with its mix of the coal from the mine and the carbon from the miner.

I enter a small room to wait for the management. A small room cluttered with buckets and bars of Marseille soap, towels and rags. My future costume sits on a chair: blue canvas pants and smock, a gray and white man's shirt made of Vichy cotton, a small, purplish headband and a low felt hat with the brim folded up like the "capello" of the Calabrian bandits. On my feet I wear a pair of old, flat shoes thanks to the lady who runs the hotel. My "Parisian" ankle boots would have left me high and dry on the rugged, rocky ground in the tunnels.

[2] Trajan Decius, Roman Emperor from 249 to 251, who died in battle in the swamps of Abrittus.

[3] By way of donations.

In no time at all the transformation is complete. Now I just look like a little scamp, a bit chubby but tough enough to make a serious rat-a-tat-tat there on my left side under the man's shirt.

The courtyard is full of women with eyes ringed red from weeping. They shake my hand without knowing me and without saying a word. Those who have an almost religious fear of the mine—this mine that makes them orphans and widows, that takes from them their brothers, sons and husbands—(and in this region they have never gone down into it) have a superhuman idea of my act. They imagine, almost, that I am going down to conquer the Dragon, to kill the evil spirit of the firedamp[4] that is eating their men… their mute tenderness is tinged with worry.

We wait behind the "screening"[5] for the cage to come up. In the shadows there are still four open coffins on trestles. They contain their cargo: three poor men not yet identified, without any relatives in the convoy, awaiting the anonymity of the tomb. The other was in such a sorry state that they almost had to bring him up in the cage with shovels. His brother could say, "That's my brother!" only because the big toe on his right foot was missing, having been cut off six months before in a previous accident—and he hugged and kissed this rotting mess that stuck to his sleeves.

It is in this same cage that we are going to descend. Here it is. We get in: Monsieur Flamin, one of the young and most distinguished engineers of the Company, who very much wanted to be my guide, along with one of his colleagues and me. In the lower compartment crouch Dr. Alvin, the very eminent doctor of Saint-Etienne, and Michel Rondet, the Secretary General of the Federation of Miners of France.

"Goodbye!" the women say, making a big sign of the cross in tribute to the dead.

And the cage dives down. Or rather drops with dizzying speed.

#

Black and black and black. Barely penetrated by the flickering light from the lamps that we are all holding.

The frightful din is deafening. An icy rain drenches our shoulders. The descent is ghastly. It last six eternal minutes—one minute for every hundred meters.

A violent jolt. Two other little glimmers of light move in front of us in the darkness. We have arrived.

The timbering of this tunnel, called English timbering, is very beautiful. Imagine the trunks of three-foot tall trees locked together like the walls of certain negro huts. Supported by these two walls and joining together like the roof of a chalet, the ceiling is made in the same way. Because of the construction you can walk standing up in the middle of the tunnel, but on the sides you have to hunch over a little so as not to bang your head.

A stop: it is the point to check the lamps. An old miner sitting here examines them meticulously one by one. On the left lies a huge, battered door, four fingers thick. The explosion had torn it off its hinges and thrown it here like a broken toy.

The atmosphere grows heavy. The ceiling, squared off from here on in, gets lower and lower.

"Watch your heads!" the engineer calls out. And a minute later, "Watch your legs!"

The ground, in fact, is littered with all kinds of debris: pieces of wood, beams, tools. And I feel it turn softer. With all this they roll on the rails and you have to squeeze into the crevices every minute to let the wagons pass by, loaded, or so it seems in this murky darkness, with diamonds.

[4] Extremely explosive flammable gas found in coal mines.

[5] Where the coal is sorted.

A slip: it is me who stumbles, thinking I was stepping on solid ground but I am up to my ankles in water. It is the mirage of the mine, an optical illusion caused by the swamp. We have to go back up the slope because the mud is up to our knees.

Men, however, are slaving away down there, their legs stiff and numb, wet up to their waists, saving up infirmities for the day when the mine will want no more of them and they will have to die of hunger!

Their faces, black like the wall, blends in with it—and it seems like these walls, which have seen so many ghastly things, have eyes, very gentle eyes, full of resignation and despair…

#

We leave the "below" and climb to the upper tunnel.

"This is going to be hard, Madame," Monsieur Laporte warns gently, the experienced engineer who met us at the landing and really wanted to go along with our little convoy.

I know very well that it will be hard! But seeing that I "wanted" to come down, I "want" to see everything.

A cliff of coal shot which we have to climb up by crawling on our stomachs because the ceiling is so low to the ground. A mole's path where you lose your breath, sight and hearing because so much fine dust enters your lungs, eyes and ears… It is horribly agonizing. Sweat runs down your forehead and your clothes stick to your skin like they are soaked in boiling water. And all of a sudden the temperature becomes intense, unbearable: 40° minimum[6].

"Get up here… Sit down!"

If only I could sit down! But under my hands the coal is warm, as if it just finished being burned up.

The men work bare-chested, undaunted, with their slow and broad movements, a nobility of attitude that is almost Islamic.

None of them, when they recognize me as a woman, give a welcome smile, radiating all white from their black face, but they let off working for a minute before toiling away again directly.

"How much do these men earn?"

"Five to six francs a day."

Five to six francs a day! For which they accept this life underground, this awful labor, this ever-present danger and atrocious death! But the mutilations are worse!

"This is the place where we found the most corpses," one of the engineers tells me.

I can smell it! The noxious air full of putrefaction empoisons the atmosphere and mingles with a pungent odor of roasted hair, horn and leather.

"It's the horses," they answer me. They only pulled them out yesterday.

And in this heat, in this stench, in this darkness, all of a sudden a song strikes up, sweet and shrill… It is the only animal that accompanies man into these final depths, the one and only companion of the miner: the cricket of the mines. To the first call, a second one responds, then a third. Now they give us a real concert. They are so tiny, so puny that the firedamp that slaughters man spares the insect.

After that deep silence that follows disasters, the chatter of the crickets is the first sound that the wounded hear. Their little comrades in the walls ask them if they are still among the living and if they are suffering much! As help arrives, the sunless cicadas sing to them of the sun and the joy of surviving, promising them health and safety…

[6] 105° F.

#

I am exhausted. Now Rondet takes my hand and pulls me along behind him. Being so tall, with his terrible aquiline nose, his eyes like burning embers and his huge black beard, he looks like one of those Italian chimney sweep bosses who buy small boys from the poor families in Piedmont and drag them far from their homes.

We go back the way we came and arrive at the entrance tunnel. The air is freezing. We lean back against the wall while the two miners with big copper hats and leather cassocks who are in charge of the cage call it down by banging.

They put us up above; we get ourselves squeezed in; and the ascension begins.

This time the rain becomes a torrent. A relentless, violent swill pours on my shoulders. Oh, daylight! Daylight! The beautiful, delightful light! The dazzling, warming star!

We arrive, at last!

I spent three hours in the mine… three hours! The good women have been waiting for me. I say "hello" to them, hurrying past, rushing (that is the word) into the improvised restroom. A quick glance in the mirror and a cry of horror. It's me, this little negro, this "ramona"—little chimney-sweep girl—this abominable little fellow stunned at how nasty he looks…

Fifteen minutes later, changed back into a woman, I am carrying the lamp that I had used and that they were kind enough to offer me. I will keep it with me always!

Before getting back into the carriage, I turn around and take one last look. I just spent three of the worst hours of my life—and there are men whose entire lives are spent in these worst hours! So they can earn a hundred sous, six francs, and they all have between three and seven children. When they are dead, their widows get twelve sous a day, each child five sous…

Well, the thunderbolt lies dormant up on high?

#

P.S. I received from Monsieur Hervé, the editor of *Le Soleil*, the following telegram with 500 F:

Madame, I have just read your appeal in *Le Gaulois* on behalf of the victims of the disaster at Saint Etienne. I see that the resources put at your disposal have almost run dry. I am sending you by telegraph my modest contribution. I know that in your hands they will be distributed without any political involvement. Please accept, Madame, the homage of my respect.

Monsieur Hervé can be sure that it will be done as he desires, which is why I distribute the donations personally, without any administrative interference or any organization, receiving information from whoever wants to give it, but basing myself solely on one criteria: a man's suffering and not his opinions.

The Wounded

The Wounded[7]

A dark, narrow road, monotonously sad like almost all of them in this melancholic land. A tall, wide door topped by an iron cross is built into the wall: it is the hospital. Even though the ancient building looks gloomy and the façade appears forbidding, the impression is completely different when the heavy doors turn on their hinges.

The ceiling is a grill to make it easier for the caretakers to watch. Except that beyond this grill is a huge vista of light and space, trees and grass, a ranging park that is not kept up, which means

[7] *Le Gaulois*, August 3 1890.

that it is very beautiful. It does not look very much like the courtyards of our hospitals in Paris where chestnut trees shrivel up in the courtyards, huddled together under their hoods of gray planks, and anemic buds vegetate under their white cotton nightcaps. This park here is full of people right now. On the huge stone benches the sick—or rather the convalescents—welcome their visitors.

The gentle sunbeams cast the rose of recovery in their cheeks. But to the left, near a door on the ground floor, a crowd is huddled together, convulsed by waves of weeping. They do not see the joyful sky or the flourishing nature. Their eyes, like their thoughts, are desperately focused on that opening that they take turns going through in groups of three or four, no more.

They are the families of the victims. A mass of women of all ages; children looking dazed and instinctively serious; the elderly who lean against the walls to relieve their rusty knees. Not a word of anger but a humble and almost fatalistic resignation. Tears roll, heavy and slow, down their wrinkled faces, but their staring eyes do not turn away from that doorway whose access is so desired. *He* is or *they* are in there!

Through the open windows, almost at ground level, I am amazed that the relatives cannot recognize their men, make a sign to him, a tender gesture, giving some precious although distant comfort. I will find out why soon enough…

Monsieur Cenas, one of the young doctors from town, who has treated the victims with so much sill and urgency, and the director of the hospital come to meet me: the first to welcome me and the second to guide me. A little behind them stood an old nun. On her naïvely honest face I can read her mind like an open book. Her passionate sympathy has brought her here, but how should she welcome this terrible "red" who was the editor of *Le Cri du Peuple*, who will remain socialist to the end, how should she welcome her passion?

I go up to her and hold out my hand? "My dear mother, I thank you with all my heart for your devotion to the poor and unfortunate."

Her eyes fill with tears (mine, too) and she leads me gently to the room where the wounded lie.

#

Once through the door, I stop, choked by a cry of horror!

Men! These are men—these monsters, this slag, these nameless beings! They have no noses, no eyes, no ears! Nothing but a black scab leaking puss and streaked with blood.

They are lined up in two not very long but seemingly endless rows, their Harlequin masks made darker still by the white sheets and the white curtains. This is the first room; three more are full.

They look like tortured negroes with their hair frizzled by the firedamp on their charred leather skin and their huge, swollen lips oozing purple. Their cottony stumps shake feebly like the limbs of a crushed animal. You would think that they had just been snatched from a commander's whip, from a master's cruelty or from the tortures of hell!

They endure them!

Under the veil of gauze that protects the gnawed away faces of the most injured from the annoying flies, sudden twitches belie their unspeakable suffering. Others shake from head to toe with tetanic contractions—the pain twists their faces into hideous grimaces like Japanese scarecrows.

One of them is laughing silently, a stranger whom no one has identified. Death is playing with him… With the tip of its invisible finger Death is tickling his chin like happy mothers tease a

child to make it smile—the child whom they raise here so that when he is around twenty years old the scourge can make of him what it has made of this one! And he twists and turns while the poison he breathed in eats away at his guts and he slowly decays…

It is an incomparable horror! I go to make the rounds of the beds, stopping at each one, talking with the relatives who are here and giving them what the generosity of the readers of *Le Gaulois* have given me because the semi-corpses are no longer able to see or hear.

But I am wrong! In this darksome pillory two tiny lights emerge, two luminous dots, alive, intelligent and staring at me. The tumid mouth cracks open and voice—what a voice! Oh mercy! As feeble as the breath and formed out of muffled sighs—says dimly, "Thank you."

They have all their wits about them. They hear, they see, they savor the pain in its most subtle refinements. And even those who are about to die have their souls galvanized by hope…

I do the best I can to give them some.

These beings, so strong less than a week ago, as fragile today as newborn babies, listen avidly to the words of comfort that I whisper in their ears.

Tears of hope filter through the slits of their eyes; their flesh shivers and warms up under the pressure of my hand. I gently squeeze their wrists since their poor fists are wrapped in oiled cotton.

And some of them make me feel terribly sorrowful because while their entire soul vibrates with the desire to live, the gangrene is slowly, relentlessly gnawing away at their bodies.

Sometimes I lean over the graves. One man—the board says forty years old, although they all look the same age with the same face—tall, strong, hardy, seems to drink in my words. His lips are less hindered than the others. He stammers, pleading and energetic at the same time, "I'm going to die, aren't I? I don't want to die. I have seven children. The Good Lord wouldn't want me to die… it would be unfair. He wouldn't want that, would he?"

And I answer him, respectful of this faith nonetheless, with the supreme consolation for a dying man, "No, my friend, he wouldn't want that."

Right next to him is a young man eighteen years old, of all the least burned on the outside, but the most burned of all, perhaps, on the inside, sobbing and weeping. Standing next to him, with a grave and constant motion of her hand to ward off the tormenting flies stands his mother, a tall, old craftswoman, haughty and stiff under her white hair. "Oh, mama, I'm going to die. What will become of all you in the house when I'm not around? There's eight more, my God, who are going to die because I'm going to die."

"Don't cry, my boy," she replies, as stoic as a biblical matriarch, "you're not going to get better if you keep worrying yourself like that."

I look at her. She is not crying, no, but she is clenching her jaws, her cheeks are trembling and her eyes have dark rings around them from the effort of her will not to break down in despair.

A pregnant woman sits at the head of the bed, staring at the floor with her arms hanging down. There are six children around her. The oldest girl, who must be ten, is holding the youngest in her arms, who is still almost in swaddling clothes. They have not moved, the poor children, as a flash of madness passes over the face of their mother, still not moving…

In the three other rooms I face the same spectacle, the same ghastly wounds, the same panicked families, the same stinking, unbreathable atmosphere of phenol and putrefaction.

There are forty wounded.

"How many of them did you save?" I asked the doctor.

"Half… maybe!"

#

Now I go to the night shelter run by Léon Portier, the distinguished and eloquent attorney, the pride of the Saint Etienne bar.

In spite of his efforts the Charity Hospitality House in Saint Etienne, which has just started, is hardly rich. It is a poor house that the poor find asylum in.

There are five wounded men set up as best as possible at the last minute on the bunks of the needy. I will not describe them to you; I cannot find the words. One has his thumb free, saved by a miracle. He is the only one that can take the donation. A glimmer of joy blooms on his hideous face, making the scabs of coal and blood that are covering it crack in places. He wants to thank me and those on behalf of whom I give: "You're very kind and they're very good." *They* are you, readers of *Le Gaulois*, and it is true, to relieve these miseries, to comfort these unfortunates.

I thank you more than I can say! According to my calculation, I think that we can give one louis [20 F] per child. But I am also counting as children the elderly parents whose breadwinner is lying in the mine; the poor older folks who are so frail that their son or grandson took the responsibility and became in turn the real head of the family. I am right, aren't I?

#

P.S. I will give you daily updates about my rounds of assistance because I am going in person to the house of every victim.

Fraternity with the poor, when you are amidst their suffering, is not made of money alone.

7 On The Frontlines

Séverine's charity for the miners was not her only activism. She was more often called "Our Lady With A Tear In Her Eye" for what today we would call her humanitarian relief, or just simply "Our Lady of *My Carnet*". The "Carnet" was a recent invention of Séverine. Being buried by all the mail and visits she received from people asking for her help, she decided to open a call for donations in the newspapers that she was writing for. Every week she presented her readers with a cause in need of their charity and every day she appended a postscript to her articles enumerating the donations and exhorting the rich to help the poor. Whether workers on strike or a sick boy needing an operation or a mother of six abandoned by her husband or a jobless, desperate old man wanting to turn on the gas stove and blow it all away, there was no end to the distress and misery that was devouring the lives of the poor.

She, for one, could not remain deaf, dumb and blind to the death that stalked the streets of Paris. She rose up against the apathy and indifference through her Carnet. It may have been only a drop in the bucket and far from solving the real social problems, but how could she let people starve to death and wallow in misery while waiting for the Revolution. For this she was criticized and ridiculed and accused of anti-socialism. She did not care and did not give up. And it was a success. So many requests and donations came rolling in that she had to hire three assistants to help with authenticating the cases and distributing the funds, which was all done strictly by the book.

We must remember that this was the Golden Age of Journalism. The press in Paris nearly tripled its circulation between 1880 and 1914. There were daily, weekly and monthly publications, not to mention all the pamphlets and flyers. What was said in the press was spread everywhere and to everyone. So if you were on the front page you were guaranteed attention. Séverine was on the front page and besides the content of her articles her postscripts became the talk of the town.

The fact that she was not always Séverine did not change a thing. For, in *Le Gaulois* she signed her articles Renée (with a nod to Chateaubriand) and in *Gil Blas* Jacqueline (in homage to Vallès' semi-fictional hero Jacques Vingtras). Each had their own character: Renée was reserved and moderate; Jacqueline a little frivolous and fun-loving; and of course Séverine was always in trouble, sometimes out of control, the eternal rebel. So she could be at the same time the revolutionary from *Le Cri*, the worldly socialite of *Le Gaulois* and the smiling Parisienne of *Gil Blas*. She had fun playing with these personalities, writing to and about each other in a drama that was constantly invented by each other. But no one was fooled. Even when she used the pseudonym Credo, her readers recognized her unique lively style and sharp tone. And no matter what name she signed she always placed Humanity above all parties and schools of thought. Whatever their own political opinions her readers saw this and had to respect her frankness and sincerity.

"What are you doing for the poor, you who claim to be their defenders?" She wrote in *Le Cri* on April 14 1888. People, especially politicians, do not like this kind of question because they know only too well the answer: nothing. Faced with the hungry, weak, sick and wounded, she did what

she felt was her duty. Her duty also included defending rebels of all sorts, revolutionaries, militants and inveterate anarchists. By coming to their rescue she undermined society, order and the bourgeois morality. The real criminals in her eyes were not the ones being chased by the police and the press but rather the police themselves and the ministers, judges and company bosses. She became the queen of provocation and had to defend against attacks from every quarter. No matter how successful or famous she became, however, she always remained true to her humanitarian convictions. But before she could change the world, she did what she could to relive its suffering, both at home and abroad. Example: she spent every Christmas in Les Halles in front of Saint Eustache church distributing warm soup to the homeless before going home to prepare her articles for the next day's papers. Example: the Armenians who resisted the Turkish invasion at the end of the 19th century were being slaughtered by the tens of thousands and very early on they wrote to Séverine to ask for her help and protection. They overestimated her influence, but she was one of the first to raise her voice in support of the Armenians against the Turkish massacres.

Winters in Paris are generally hard, but the winter of 1890-91 was one of the worst Paris had seen in a long time. The Seine froze. Almost all of the deer and buffalo kept in the zoo at the Jardin des Plantes perished. Braziers were set up in the streets where poverty-stricken crowds flocked to the shelters and soup kitchens. The Welfare services had to add 1,200 extra beds for the homeless, but even that was not enough. Séverine went into action. By means of her Carnet she set up a "Press Shelter" in an old swimming pool on Rue Rochechouart and went every night to help give food and clothes to the 300 beds that were never empty. During this particularly wicked season the authorities tread lightly on the homeless, which was not their usual policy. A law passed on May 27 1885 targeted repeat offenders (like in today's three strikes policy) who were to be sent to the penal colonies for crimes that were considered a danger to the social order, such as theft, fraud, outrage to public morality, pederasty, *vagrancy and begging*. So, being homeless now was a crime. But in spite of their efforts to rid the country of "undesirables", the problem grew.

Paris of the "Belle Epoque" was a grand illusion, attracting people from all over France and from all corners of the globe with its picture of a Promised Land whose streets were paved with gold. Thousands migrated there every year looking for jobs and a decent life but finding only poverty and resentment, a reality far different from the postcards of progress—then they crashed, some for a while, others for life.

Séverine was extremely popular and not a small part of her celebrity in the suburbs with the struggling workers was due to her Carnet and her activism for those in need. If you had a problem, just write to Séverine because if she talked about it, it was sure to get attention. And the people applauded her for it. She, of course, was asking for more than applause. But still she must have been proud when sometimes under the balcony of her fourth floor apartment on Boulevard Montmarte, some passer-by would look up and cry out, "Vive Séverine!" A result of her profound integrity was that she could raise hope in the hearts of the hopeless.

Against the Winter

Against the Winter[1]

[1] *L'Echo de Paris*, October12 1894.

The date of October 8 took its toll: the close of autumn, which opens the season of all suffering! The old clothes are worn out—and the cold is coming! The home is being threatened—and tomorrow is winter: the bitter streets, the pitiless skies and the brutal winds!

All night long, with my eyes wide open, I thought about the shivering families that are wandering around, not daring to stop. The fathers and mothers taking their kids from bench to bench, from doorway to doorway, under the discomforted eye of the police, some of whom are good and despite the threat of reprimand they let fatigue rock the poor to sleep, let them have a taste of much needed rest.

But other cops harass them and revel in the hunt. They chase their human prey without mercy, moving them on constantly from one stop to the next. The quarry does not fight back. They obey the orders, stand up, stagger, and then hunched over on their weary legs, dragging their ball of fatigue after them, their ball of misery, all of them go to run aground somewhere else. The woman carries her infant, the man in front and the two, sometimes three older children—if not four—scamper along holding onto their father's hand or their mother's dress.

What thoughts could be brooding in the mind of this male seeing his female and his children homeless and hungry like this, hunted by some, hounded by others, rejected by all? If he is a hard worker and intelligent, who is only lack Girls Like Us ing a job and a little luck in spite of his sincere efforts, what must he be telling himself? And if he is an old man, succumbing to age after half a century of labor? And if he is sick with an incurable disease like I know so many of them are, or disabled or crippled?

And if it is one of those women who are alone and defenseless and without resources, from the young, sixteen-year old, unmarried mother bearing her mistake to the old lady who has survived all her children; or one of those widows, one of the abandoned, whose offspring prove the lack of social equilibrium—seeing that they urge the poor to reproduce but guarantee nothing for raising these productions?

What wild fears, what fits of madness, what anger and despair must be sprouting in their minds, burning up their souls, guiding these beings toward the worst excesses!

But who will admit it, who will think of it, who would even deign to condescend to envisage the problem? A restrictive law suffices: the prisons still have bars and the jails have guards. As far as searching for the source of the problem, dauntlessly, giving it over to fear and compassion, proclaiming, before everyone, that revolt is born of poverty, that it is the logical, inevitable result and that those who want to get rid of the one must be forced to alleviate the other—these are the words of utopists and the evil-minded!

And, well—this is horrible to say—but, perhaps, they speculate on the sheeplike gentleness of these wolves of Panurge[2] who would be a force, since they are a multitude, if they did not persist in their resignation. For every one who rebels, how many are there who submit? And the dynamic ones find refuge in death! Then they pity them afterward, they pity them a lot—but do they help the others any more? Because that is how the regret and remorse of the favored would really show itself in its most ethical conclusion.

#

Nothing! Neither foresight nor invigorating energy! And yet they know that winter, the dreadful winter, comes back at the same time every year, that the date of October 8 brings disaster and that *in September* they should have prepared to fight the elements and prevent calamity.

[2] Reference to the "sheep of Panurge" from Rabelais, i.e. blind followers or lemmings.

Ah, well, yes! This Welfare system, which is criminal—because to hoard money in the face of famine constitutes a despicable act—this Welfare system lying in ambush in their offices continues its normal daily routine like every season. If it has to force out a little of its natural generosity, it will be in January because that is the *ad-min-is-tra-tive* date when the cold is officially recognized… and when the days are getting longer!

I remember one year when wool items were handed out to schoolchildren *almost in February*. The spring that year came particularly early and the trees already had beautiful little blossoms.

So what is this hapless Welfare thinking? What does it do with the money? I do not believe it is fraud, even though, more often than should be, scandals break out and suspicions take deeper and deeper root among the people. But I believe it is a deplorable organization, an unintelligent and routine management and a profit-driven mentality that is incompatible with its mission.

When a donation of 100 sous is given to it, it snatches it up and closes its fist. It is like tearing out its soul to claim that it should always keep its hands open, lavishing good deeds everywhere.

That would finish badly for it, I have been warned! It is the greedy old lady, the penny-pinching millionaire who sows refusal and harvests hatred. Not to mention that they abuse the poor in its name. What's more, there was never an institution made to be blessed that has been more cursed or that has aroused so much bitterness and loathing!

Can it last? Shouldn't it be well aware not only of the suffering that harks back to it, but also of the suffering that the good people point out to it in the hope of being heard?

Should a city like ours, "the capital of the civilized world" as the biased say, should it be registering *ten suicides* out of poverty in the same day? In Petit-Montrouge, on Rue Reganult, there are the six Hoffmanns: the mother and five children whose deaths the public's pity has been talking about for four days. I would like to give as many gold coins to the grieving survivors as there have been "It's dreadful!" offered over these four days—we would avoid repeating such tragedies.

In Grenelle, on Rue Fondary, there is old Chapuis, a seventy-year old woman who gassed herself and her two grandchildren. Here again the landlord was being kind! The old lady and the little girl are dead; the little boy is not much better off.

In Folie-Méricourt, on Rue Morand, there is the Blosson couple, almost eighty-years old, unable to earn a living, they also lit a few sous worth of coal and went to sleep for the last time together, hand in hand—Philemon and Baucis[3] of misery!

#

But what is the point of these thoughts, these words, these phrases penned without the shadow of an illusion regarding their effect on official services? It is better to do something. You readers, do you want to help me? In two newspapers for two years running, with relatively pathetic amounts, I have managed to save around 300 families from both voluntary and involuntary death. Do you want to try again this year to save as many—if not more?

I hesitated. I procrastinated. Not because of the trouble it takes (I am somewhat used to that), but because of the agonizing heartbreak in case of failure. Then the ridicule of dear comrades and skeptics: "Séverine? She's annoying us with her filthy flea-bags!" I was cowardly in the face of possible disappointment and certain irony. And I want to confess this out loud because I am ashamed of it and because I am bitter and hurt from it—because these people, these ten unfortunate people might have come to us and might still be alive…

[3] In Classical mythology they were an elderly couple who were the only ones in town to welcome Zeus and Hermes into their home despite their poverty. They were granted their wish to die together and then changed into

This thought gave me courage. Make fun if you want; refuse if you can! The call *Against Winter* is open and I am donating as much as I can: 100 F. Who wants to go next!

#

My Carnet: District of La Folie-Méricourt—All the furniture is two chairs, a little table, a bed for three children, 11, 6 and 3 years old and a fourth on the way; the husband died a few days ago, which means grief is making the hunger worse; late on the rent (80 F) and threatened with eviction; such is the current situation of the widow Lecompte, 7 Passage Vaucouleurs. During her poor husband's illness, she had asked the city hall for assistance. It replied to her *six weeks later*… sending 5 F. My visitor cried out to me, "She doesn't have a sous to eat. I gave her everything I had on me, a few francs, but it's not nearly enough." That was two days ago…

Among the Poisoned

Among the Poisoned[4]

The carriage rolls past the animal market, the slaughterhouses, of La Villette by the desolate and sinister steppes of La Plaine Saint Denis. For the casual passer-by it is only dirty and bare; for the observer, especially for someone who thinks, examines and compares cause and effect, there is no region more desolate.

The south of Paris, in spite of everything, has a few open-air cafés, lattice walls, barrel vaults, more than one tree remaining from the woods that were here and whose edge has been pushed back not very far away. So, from the Bois de Boulogne to the Bois de Vincennes there is a thin green line like a strand of lichwort binding the little suburb stuck between "no man's land" grass and the flowering hills that demark the horizon.

In the northwest Neuilly stretches all the way to the Seine, extending the remains of the royal domain far to the right. Montmartre has its cemetery and the hill with its windmill; the Buttes-Chaumont has its park; Belleville has Lake Saint-Fargeau and the surviving forest of "little houses"; Charonne has Père Lachaise[5], the most beautiful and most shaded park.

Everywhere in these places the poverty and labor have the solace that emanates from the open earth or that falls from the leafy heights onto the saddened faces and weary limbs. Everywhere the social state can pluck off a leaf from a plane tree or a chestnut to hide the cancer that is gnawing away at its belly, the shameful evil that it would rather deny than cure—and that is killing it!

But here, nothing: the razed plain scattered with rocks and broken glass like a cursed land! For trees, like limbless trunks bare of branches and nests, the giant smokestacks of factories squeezed together as far as the eye can see… the organ pipes that carry the lamentations of a desperate people into the heavens!

In the air the eternal stain of soot snows relentlessly, impalpably down. Low houses that humidity plagues with its rashes; sections of leprous walls enclosing more scabby, bumpy land where children dressed in rags try to play: pale children with chlorosis whose lips and pupils have almost no color, whose hair is ashen, and who are afflicted—believe it or not!—with *malaria*!

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two intertwining trees.

[4] En Marche, 1896.

[5] The largest cemetery in Paris.

The atmosphere throbs with the incessant noise of wheels, reels and belts shuttling back and forth; the grinding gears of life as well as of matter. And while the roadways and alleys remain empty, the countless factory windows pour out the panting of an entire race toiling away under the strain, crushed by the yoke—a race kept in servitude by the scepter of Gold, like Israel in captivity under the Egyptian whips!

For, over all the building fronts, on the sides of all the structures are the famous names that are known for establishing useful industries but whose founders are dead, for the most part, and whose heirs (professional party-goers living far from the busy beehive or stockholders remaining anonymous) squeeze the last drop of blood out of this multitude in order to get the *summum* of their luxury and leisure!

#

The meeting of matchstick makers is being held in a little building that was or is, I cannot really say, the community hall of the district.

Two whitewashed walls pierced on two sides with high windows. Across from the door a kind of stage, as wide as a bedsheet, that forms a platform. A table full of papers, with the traditional glass of water, stands there. The five delegates in their work clothes. A few chairs in the back for strangers to the corporation, visitors and friends. Almost the entire contingent of strikers sits on the benches—because out of the 680 men and women working in the factories of Pantin and Aubervilliers, 680 joined the movement.

At the same time, their 500 comrades in Marseille, the 180 in Bègles near Bordeaux, the 320 in Trélazé near Angers and the 220 in Saintines in the Oise followed them. Now, since this is the total number of all the personnel in France, the manufacturing came to a grinding halt.

What, then, were they asking for? What was the basis of their demands, which were obviously absurd seeing that they were denied contemptuously and that for more than a month—while living on such minimal resources that they have almost had to starve voluntarily like heroes—these poor men and women have been waiting, hoping and pleading for?

This: Stop using white phosphorous which is causing necrosis in the workers who handle it.

What is necrosis? As the name implies, it is bone death. Among the male and female workers in matchstick factories it attacks the jaws first.

The Administration foresaw this. Every male and female applicant, in order to be put on the hiring list—EVEN THOUGH THE PAINFUL ORDEAL DOES NOT GUARANTEE A JOB—has to undergo not only a dental examination, but also *the extraction of any teeth that might look defective!*

Every month the employees undergo the same inspection. As their teeth slowly start to ache, they pull them out… twenty-year old girls smile and show their Carabosse[6] gums.

In 1894 all the personnel in the Factories in Pantin, Aubervilliers and Pont-de-Flandre rose up against the surgical procedures of the dentist attached to these establishments. The mandatory monthly visit forced on them by the rules had become a real session in hell where the employee, under threat of being fired, had to suffer every operation or experiment that the doctor was pleased to inflict. After the doctor was forced to resign, the employees went back to work, content with their minor victory and believing in the old theory of a character defect.

[6] The wicked witch or stepmother in fairy tales such as Sleeping Beauty.

However, since 1888 Magitot[7], the eminent professor, has pointed out to the Academy of Medicine the dangers of handling phosphorous and has proposed preventing the effects not with operations on the mouth but with a set of hygienic rules.

It was too humane. They did not listen to him! The Academy limited itself to republishing its vow already taken on several occasions for half a century regarding the abolition of phosphorous and the use of other products—and that was that for the unlucky workers.

And afterward that they carved them up more than ever. They "prepared" them, which means that they tore out their roots, opened up abscesses and every month performed on these poor jaws what they considered to be favorable to the "needs of the service"… without thinking for a minute that phosphorism, just like diabetes, does not tolerate open wounds or erosion, and the slightest danger can turn fatal.

They are dilly-dallying like that with the disease and gaining time. Did I say that these exploited workers get 3 F 30 for eleven hours of work? But in its motherly way the Administration guarantees them, after thirty years, a pension of 300 F for the women and 600 F for the men, and all this without any deduction in pay. We must admit that such generosity is uncommon, highly edifying, philanthropic and surely prone to encourage the good servants.

Yes, but nobody gets to enjoy it! Those who handle white phosphorous are all dead or gone before the time is up! The lame end up dying in some hovel, poisoned throughout their skeleton and unable to work. And the deceitful promise remains a despicable irony. Because whenever a "subject" is identified as sick, they throw him out! During the time of his forced unemployment he earns nothing. He eats, gets treatment and takes care of his family as best he can. If he gets better, they take him back. And this option lasts until he is utterly doomed, lost, without any hope of being cured. Then they drive him out for good.

Get on the road, old man of thirty years, and look for your living on the streets. Drag your hungry brood behind you—and watch out! The first policeman you meet will arrest you; the first judge you see will sentence you; and you will bear all the torments of hell in your carcass, in your tainted marrow, in your decayed bones.

#

Necrosis!

I saw the medical students, accustomed to lecture halls; I saw the "quacks", deaf to the cries, who shivered when pronouncing this word. And I heard them rattle on about the series of complications that linked, in such a dreadful way, the first attack to the last convulsion.

As I said, the teeth decay… first. Then the intermittent fever becomes constant; a quenchless thirst devours the patient who, however, can ingest no food. The hair follows the teeth, falls off the scalp by the handful. Then this sort of ghost, with his skin sticking to his ribs, writhes in horrible pain; his joints swell; his fingers and limbs deform. And the necrosis appears: it kills the bones, mortifies them, separates them, hollows them out and erodes them.

"What? Really? These putrefied rags were once a man or a woman?"

Well, yes. This poor body had to accept this martyrdom because he had a stomach to feed… and because it was worth 3 F 30 a day!

So, is it really an inevitable plague? Can't they try another product? What was the owners' response to their pitiful complaints?

Just this: "IT WOULD COST TOO MUCH!"

[7] Emile Magitot (1833-1897) considered the founder of stomatology (the study of mouth diseases) in France.

#

So, who is this greedy or cruel owner? Who is this heartless exploiter who chooses to earn money over the human beings shuddering in anguish under the tormentor's lancet, who chooses profit over the little crosses lined up as far as the eye can see in the cemetery next to the factory?

It is the State!

#

Yes, the State. The same called by Monsieur Ribot[8], its current representative, the "good father of the family." The State, protector of the weak and the expression of the sovereign people under this regime.

It is the State who refused Billau—operated on four times, part of his lower left jaw amputated and his upper right jaw just hanging, who can no longer eat—the prosthetic he has the right to. Because this prosthetic would cost 1,500 F and the State is too poor so can only give 300!

It is the State that said, "These people will die because I don't want to make less money off their salary." And they turn to smuggling, in spite of the law about foreign production, because these wretched, exploited cattle keep demanding the right to live.

A man with a furrowed face, frightfully thin, spoke to me just now, without even knowing it, in Shakespearean words: "We can't even have children. My wife and I tried three times. They were all born dead and already turned green."

#

But this is nothing compared to the procession that I watch, terrified—of the macabre, unforgettable vision I can still see with horror.

One man after another, one woman after another, whom the phosphorism has not yet led to the grave or to prison, whom the hospital did not take or did not take back, march before me. With the identical movement they pop out their false teeth, gums and palate. They tip back their head automatically, showing their injuries like soldiers in the ambulance.

There is nothing but open wounds, gaping holes, scars, voids hollowed out by the surgeon's knife. On Billau, like I said, they took off the entire left side of his chin. Marie Harpp—a young woman—is missing half of the roof of her mouth. Others, carved up to one degree or another, pass by while they hold in custody a comrade who became blind with rage and whom the nurses are going to pick up.

This is what exists in our country of France at the gates of Paris. This is what I saw. This is the lot of the unfortunates to whom Monsieur Ribot, Minister of the Republic, said, "I have nothing more to say" when they offered to go back to work if they promised, within a month, to stop using white phosphorous—their executioner!

#

IT WOULD BE TOO EXPENSIVE!

Was there ever a more appalling response? Was there ever a more cynical declaration? Too expensive! To save human beings from such torture! Too expensive! To avoid similar abominations! Too expensive! So that these poor young ladies not lose their youth, their beauty, their health, their living and their life!

These are the words of an ogre.

Don't fret! There will soon come a time when everything will be less costly…

[8] Alexandre Ribot (1842-1923) was Minister of Finance at the time.

8 Abortion and Feminism

They dubbed her "The Child Killer". In the backroom of a bistrot in Batignolles Constance Thomas had performed over 2,000 abortions before she was arrested in 1890. Along with this "angel-maker" they summoned 45 women to court: workers, maids, cooks, prostitutes, housewives, milliners, a flower vendor and a bookseller, many of them married and already mothers. They paid between 5 and 50 F to rid themselves of their burdens. Some could only offer a shawl or dress, a pound of sugar or their wedding ring. Officially only three women died in the course of the operation.

When the trial opened in November it was front-page news in all the papers, each participating in the heated debate on one side or another according to its editorial slant. Those calling for a harsh sentence supported the economists and politicians who denounced the crime as a veritable plague against society that was depopulating the nation and depriving it of necessary forces for the next war. With this in mind the government had raised taxes on bachelors, lowered taxes for fathers, made marriage mandatory and tried to enlarge its colonial population (even in the penal colonies). It also encouraged women to stay home and make babies. Abortion, then, was not only illegal, it was unpatriotic.

On the other side, however, the critics of this policy argued the real social causes of abortion. Women were faced with financial ruin if a child came into the world. Families that were barely scraping by could not afford another mouth to feed. Domestic workers would be fired if they had a child. There were also important medical reasons for legalized abortion that some doctors were quick to point out. And the upper classes wanted to avoid scandal, like in the case of Madame de Jonquières whose case had aggravated the issue.

When Constance Thomas, the Child Killer, was arrested, the public was still reeling from scandal of Toulon. Madame de Jonquières, the wife of a naval officer and the mistress of the former mayor of Toulon, was arrested for having aborted the fruit of her extramarital relation. In their privileged milieu they did not have to resort to the backroom of a bar, they paid 800 F for a clean and private operation with a midwife. On top of the abortion she was guilty of adultery, which was illegal, and sentenced to two years in prison. Ex-mayor Fouroux was given five years for complicity in the crimes. It was a tragedy worthy of a novel—with Fouroux's two other mistresses, one of whom helped find the midwife and the other who turned them all into the police—but it was also an outrageous display of the country's heinous and hypocritical laws[1]. "Hypocrisy is the thing that disgusts me the most in the world and it is a pleasure to rip off its sweaty mask" (Séverine in *L'Eclair*, March 23 1893).

With the case of "The Child Killer" and the lower classes, justice was even more heavy-handed. Twelve years of hard labor for Constance Thomas. Séverine was indignant. She had always defended the right to abortion (and the right to suicide as well) against the fetishism of life at any

[1] Male adultery was only punishable when he was caught at home. A woman's adultery anywhere could be punished.

price as can be seen in "The Right to Abortion", which carried a wave of controversy in its furious wake because Séverine's stance was rooted deeper than the feminism of the time. Female anarchists sought to emancipate themselves from the role of mother and wife, from their physical and economic dependence on the child and husband. For the most part they went much further than the feminists in their demands regarding the body and sexuality by adding the moral slavery of marriage and prostitution to the material and economic servitude and basing everything on their general resistance to society at large. In short, women's only hope was in revolution.

Now, Séverine's feminism was rather unconventional. First of all, she was not a feminist. No one was. The word did not exist until May 1892 when it was invented at the Congrès Général des Sociétés, an international conference, which was organized for women's rights, the third such congress held since 1878. Séverine had been invited to participate but had declined. Why? Well, it was not the first time she turned down her female peers. Back in August 1885 the Republican and Socialist Federation decided to present female candidates for the legislative elections. They came up with several names included Louis Michel, Marie Deraismes and Séverine. She was flattered but refused, giving three reasons: 1 – She was too much of a woman to do a job that required a more virile female; 2 – She was not and never would be part of any group or organization because she loved her independence too much; 3 – she long ago chose her post in the social struggle and so preferred to stay with the ambulance rather than mount the public platform.

Later we will see how she modified some of these opinions over time: she would join a group and she would speak in public, but she would do so only to support the feminists' claims for social equality that she was fighting for—the right to work, equal pay for equal work, equal access to scientific and artistic studies, etc. But we will also see one thing she would never compromise: her disdain for the parliamentary system—she would never become a politician.

So, she fought for change in her own way, in her own corner, being the individualist that she was, using her energy and talent as weapons in the service of justice against the powers that be.

The Right to Abortion

The Right to Abortion[2]

You have asked me, my dear editor and friend, for my opinion on the tragedy in Toulon. That was a dangerous thing to do—my opinion might be audacious enough to make the most daring stories published here seem innocent and tame.

Because, you know, there are two kinds of immortality: one that laughs while tickling the Senators' belly buttons—that's the one that all the regimes encourage—and another that stops, somber, before certain problems, that does not worry about how crude the subject may be but wades waist-deep in the filth without shivers or nausea if some being is drowning there and calling out for help at the top of their lungs in despair and in fear of abandonment.

It is that immortality that is mine and I am boldly and cynically going to give it free rein. It will surprise those superficial people who think that I am somewhat like the virtue of this newspaper, but it will not surprise those who are used to reading between the lines and who understand that what I write here today is only the logical, absolute, inevitable result of what I have written before.

#

[2] *Gil Blas*, November 4 1890, signed Jacqueline.

First of all a word on the affair itself that they have called from day one The Scandal of Toulon. Oh yes, a wonderful scandal not so much for the accused but for the judges, the ultimate stupidity of justice, the blunder of Themis[3] all right!

But is it really a blunder? It reeks more of vengeance—provincial vengeance that is rancid and moldy, with the stench of old maids and chafed honors. It looks infuriatingly like class revenge on a once powerful adversary, a man being torn apart by all the furies of the judicial authorities and high society—and the navy. Because the navy is involved as well. Monsieur Fouroux had once been under its command and when he was free of it he had fought against the abuses that he knew so well since he had suffered them.

Remember the Ginailhac affair. The mayor defended the local population and the newspapers against that arrogant second lieutenant—and he was right. Of course the maritime authority could not deny the evidence of the facts, but it was beside itself with anger for having to admit it publicly and punish the wrongdoings of one of its subordinates.

And of course Madame de Jonquières is the wife of a naval officer and the daughter-in-law of a rear admiral. The navy was sure that his choice of this woman had no other motive but to scoff at it and sully its collective marital honor.

Look at it carefully—never has the fight between the civil and military forces reached such a degree of underhanded intensity. Never has an elected city official come up against so much hatred and had to face so many traps laid out by so many tenacious paws clawing at the ground under his feet.

Read the details that were published—and so quickly! "Monsieur Fouroux was a republican…even a progressive republican…he knew how to make himself popular…the dock workers voted for him…" etc, etc.

There is something else in this affair than what they are telling us, believe me. Who turned him in? Who gave the immediate order for the proceedings? Why are they talking now about misappropriation and embezzlement and awful, pathetic slanders that make no sense? So senseless, in fact, that [Arthur] Ranc, Charles Laurent and others besides had to cry out "Silence!" and recall the angry men to some decency.

Do you know what the scandal of Toulon is? It is a warped novel of Malot[4] like Le Beau-Frère or Dr. Claude, a monstrous web of provincial bitterness woven around a man to bind him, hold him fast and suffocate him.

Mind you, I am not pleading his innocence. It very well could be that Monsieur Fouroux did what they accuse him of doing. And then afterward? Did he run his city worse because of it?

Among those who will be present on the day he goes to court—if he goes to court—of all the judges and witnesses, of all the jurors and spectators, including the bailiffs and police who will be in the courtroom, there will be more than a hundred of them, you understand, who are in exactly the same situation.

Abortion! I would really like someone first to tell me where and when it starts. I have got the readers of *Gil Blas* a little used to it by telling them explicit stories, but, really, I cannot mince my words this time.

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[3] The Greek personification of law and order.

[4] Hector Malot (1830-1907) was a French writer whose rather realist novels were very popular until the 1930s. He was a friend and supporter of Vallès, a philanthopist and a defender of the oppressed whom Sèverine called "Malot the Honest".

A man who protects himself from the consequences of a tryst and a woman who immediately protects her future commitments—are they then abortionists? Logically the law should say yes. And naughty Onan[5] was also an abortionist when he scattered his unripe seed, which did not, however, prevent Israel from sprouting and harvesting! But in this case, the high schools, boarding houses, barracks, ships, convents, monasteries and townfuls of teenagers and adults where the sexes are separated and deluded are all abortion factories.

And at what point is abortion legal or not? The Church, at least, is logical in its ban and its defense. But the Penal Code—ah, what a joke!

As if the conscience (the only law in the world) made these distinctions and hid behind the deception. When a being has been dropped onto the earth so little and frail and so touching in its ugliness and weakness and when it has let loose its first cry, shaken its tiny hands and unclenched its tiny feet, then it is alive and sacred! Before that, there is a woman—and nothing but a woman, do you hear me! This is so true that in case of a problematic delivery the doctors do not hesitate to save the mother and leave the infant in the lurch! They would be sorely amazed to be treated as abortionists.

"But the repopulation…" the economists say.

Repopulation! The miserable hypocrites! What does that have to do with it? And how could you even pronounce such a word?

Repopulation! So, what do they do for all the families, the "oodles" of ten or twelve kids who find themselves in our society with neither food nor housing? The other day my colleague Montorgueil[6] in the headlines of *L'Eclair* pointed out one of these facts to the public indignation. Listen to this:

"There is an artist in Paris, a worker of great merit, Monsieur Maingonnat, lately residing at 13 rue Bayen, who earned a medal at the 1889 Exposition for his exceptionally delicate tapestries. This honest and hard working craftsman had eleven children; seven are left. For six weeks he has been homeless because they did not want children in the houses he contacted. He rented a small apartment in ten different houses in a row and gave a down payment to the super in each of them, but every time he showed up with his children they refused to accept him. I can cite for example the apartment managers at 74 rue Demours and both 3 and 10 rue Poncelet. The police chief whom he contacted to demand fulfillment of the verbal contracts established by the down payments refused to get involved. This punishment of eviction because of his children has lasted six weeks, during which time the unfortunate worker has used up all his savings—he has not been able to work at his trade as a tapestry repairman even though he is one of the best. So, he piled up his poor family in a room at his elderly father's house, all except for his wife and two of his daughters who are in the hospital."

Repopulation! We need to take the last excrement of the Maingonnat family and smear it all over anyone who dares to preach repopulation to people dying of hunger!

What do they do for people with many descendants? Where is the reward and the encouragement they offer them, the support they promise, their generous aide, the lightening of their load, of their oppressive duties and their backbreaking obligations? Nowhere. Nothing—sorrow, misery and finally suicide—that is their fate!

[5] Genesis 38. "He spilled his seed on the ground to keep from producing offspring" and was killed by God for it. Onanism is masturbation.

[6] Octave Lebesgue (1857-1933) under his pseudonym Georges Montorgueil.

Before clamping down on the unmarried or searching through the dirty laundry of midwives, it would be better for the law to pay its debts!

More working class women—even if married—would increase their posterity if the future Paul would not snatch the bread out of the mouths of Tom, Dick and Mary. Denying oneself everything is hardship; with one more it is misery. Sometimes working women get an abortion purely out of motherly love—they know all about this in the social economy and in the courts as well!

As for those women who risk their lives not so much to save their reputation but to keep the men around them calm, they sacrifice to a prejudice that the Penal Code alone is responsible for because nature certainly has no idea of it. When men placed a man's honor under a woman's petticoat, they should have thought at the same time about not making it a crime and punishing every act committed by a woman to save the semblance of this honor. Anything else is illogical and cruel.

After all, I repeat, they risk their lives when they refuse the motherhood hanging onto their guts—and danger ennobles the worst actions.

To be a spy in times of peace is base and cowardly; to be a spy in times of war is heroic and noble. The agents of public morality are hated; the agents of public security are respected. Why? It is the same job that differs only in its motives and consequences.

Yes, but the danger is there! The twelve bullets of the execution squad and the blade on high form its insignia—death legitimizes it.

The woman in sin offers her sinning flesh to the grave. She knows that she can die, she knows that she can waste away for good, lose her beauty, health and strength—and the motive that drives her is stronger than her fear's revolt.

If you have stones in your yard, throw them at her—I won't!

#

"But your pretty girls," the respectable people say, "who worry about their waistline and their complexion?"

There are few of them. Women today are educated enough to know that a late "accident" often ages them and withers them less than a birth. And—wonderful thing!—the good people in question, who raise their offspring venerating Greek civilization, do not know that the people of Athens voted for Phryne's[7] abortion because they did not want to risk such a perfect masterpiece being ruined.

We have not got there yet. These poor little Phrynes are everywhere and cannot live without a job for a year. Most of these gallant women have a child—young surprises—but have no more afterward… there would be cancellations!

Change jobs? Seeing that there are more hands than there is work and the honest women workers are dying of misery because of the lack of work, what would come of this competition on the labor market? It is better that they keep doing what they are doing… and avenge the others!

Then their unconscious philosophy is affected by the fate of the children who are born of the doorways. Children of thirty-six fathers? Sons of young girls? Flesh for heartache like they have been flesh for pleasure? Ah, no! And their morality spares them this immorality.

You see, abortion is a tragedy, a calamity—not a crime! The law does not have the right to punish its own work and its work alone. As long as there are illegitimate and starving children

[7] A courtesan in the 4th century B.C. who became rich and famous for her rare beauty.

all over the world, the flag of Malthus[8] (stained with the blood of premature infanticide) will float above the band of rebel amazons who have been forced by your laws to keep their breasts dry and so have the right to keep their bellies infertile.

Child Killer

The Child Killer[9]

The somewhat brutal but deeply sincere article I wrote here nine days ago, "The Right to Abortion", raised a polemic that has not yet died down.

An evening paper, very evening, even wanted to call it a vindication what was only meant as a plea for a defense; and then in good fellowship to call the attention of the courts to my humble prose.

But this does not bother me much since I do not believe that there is a State Morality. If one exists, it is like that savage mist where we struggle, under the official lights in the streets of London during foggy weather. The street lamps are too tall and too dim; you know that they exist and that they shine, but no one can see the light. And everyone holds out his lantern or torch to see where he is going so as not to twist an ankle, step in the mud, trip or fall in the gutter.

Thus the conscience of every human being guides them and points out the obstacles, cesspools and perils. Yet, some people still fall down and get muddy—it is only because the light was weak, flickering, in need of wax or resin or because the wind suddenly blew it out, creating shadows and opening the way for mistakes…

But do you see the Queen's government forbid private lights on the pretext that it is an insult to the official street lamps?

They would end up nabbing anyone whose little light or candle bothered their neighbor, who threw some oil on their top hats, some tallow on their clothes or lit up those nasty shows. If there were a moral network of roads like there is a physical network, nothing would be better. Children and women walk around and we have to protect their innocence, vulnerability and decency.

As for snuffing out their consciences to establish the monopoly of a governmental conscience—one, indivisible and infallible—not that! Humanity has rights that take precedence over all the artificial legislations of the world. And when a question cuts to the quick, stirs up and inflames the people, go on and defend everyone's right to say what they think, to scream out their opinions or anger, to march onward, in short, following their nature, character and instinct!

They tried this autocracy in religion and politics. Whoever blasphemed God or criticized the King had their tongue pierced, their throats cut—the stake and the butcher's block were used as a pedestal for their apotheosis and the platform of their next statue…The blood of martyrs and the tears of the oppressed have fertilized the most unproductive soil—and freedom sprang forth one day, a giant flower flashing purple!

We almost have religious independence; we almost have political independence; but the centuries have marched on and the demands of man have grown just like his intelligence and his pride. Now he cries out for the right to life and all the old struggles, the old crusades start up

[8] Thomas Malthus (1766-1834) and his controversial theories on population growth.

[9] Gil Blas, November 14, 1890, signed Jacqueline.

again, rise from the grave against this demand as they will start and rise up against all the new demands that threaten the established order of things.

"You can choose your representative and you can choose your God," say the judiciary, army, family and property. "What more do you want?"

"I want to eat," the man says.

It is because he wants to eat that he does not have any more children and that deep in the heart of Batignolles[10] they just arrested the Child Killer. A bread peddler and abortionist who "operated" in the back of bar! More than two thousand women passed between her hands. Ah, those people who were choked up the other day over the scandal in Toulon and who discussed the pros and cons of the question of "honor" concerning abortion, will they deign to lower their eyes on the mass grave of human seed and discuss the question of "poverty"?

These women did not have 800 F to give to the sterilizer, like Madame de Jonquières had, the poor creatures who come pale out of the goring, leaning against the wall and then leaving a trail of red spots behind them like a wounded deer who had her teats eaten by the dogs but can still drag herself away… They did not have a louis, not ten sous; they paid in kind bringing a wool shawl, a new apron, their Sunday dress, a pound of sugar or a bar of soap—like for the wet nurse!

They were servants and maids of the leisure class who pitilessly threw them out into the street, and more than anything—oh, more than anything—they were workers. Not the worker seduced by rich boys who beguile our mothers, but married workers, legitimate wives who got married in the church and city hall and wear a wedding ring on their finger—they sold it sometimes to go there—and forced into crime, you understand, forced by too much despair, by their hopeless misfortune!

A mother of seven children came to the Child Killer to avoid the eighth. She cried and said, "My God, but the others still don't have enough to eat!"

So let the poor practice abstinence! Yes, there are people who say this, who dare to utter this blasphemy. And the strange thing, the bizarre absurdity is that they are the very ones who preach repopulation!

But it is the only joy for the poor! The cold pushes them into each other's arms and when their lips meet, for a little while they forget their troubles, their fatigue and tomorrow's cares—these beggars are happy like the rich!

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The unacceptable vice, you see, is only that the poor have a lot of children and society cannot feed them. What will the President/Judge say—for, they are going to bring these unfortunate women to court!—when one of them tells him what the mother of seven children said: "I killed that one so I could feed the others!"

He cannot tell them to be abstinent; another judge had united this woman to her husband so that they might procreate as much as possible. The law encourages and blesses mating and reproduction. But it is only a matchmaker, not a nanny. Would you like an example? I am sorry for always telling you sad stories, but, alas, life is like that…

Have you read about the suicide of Robin, the accountant, the day before yesterday? He was not rich and had given his half dozen children to the country. The parents and the whole brood were piled into a small room at 3 Rue de Birague—no more work, no more resources, nothing left to sell or pawn—the same, sad story as always!

[10] In the 17th arrondisement of Paris.

Welfare services, notified by the landlady, a good woman, had allocated a meager sum when the last child was born in August and then went on to other projects without thinking any more about this poor family than about a litter of starving cats.

What did the father do? Oh, something simple and heroic. He threw himself in the river from the top of the Pont des Arts[11] and drowned to attract the attention and pity of the public for his family. A letter left on a bench explained this.

He succeeded. The welfare services have finally become concerned and are probably going to take the four youngest children. That leaves two—and the sick mother, half-crazy with despair. We can hope that the poor man's sacrifice will bring them some condolence.

But again what is this social state that forces a man to kill himself to ensure a life for his children?

Yes, justice has subpoenaed the "clients" of the Child Killer. Two hundred women accused! To punish this clandestine scandal, the law is going to make it the most appalling public scandal that has maybe ever been seen. For, not all who resorted to the matron did so out of poverty. Some were sternly raised middle class girls or married women who wanted to hide their mistake. They are going to snatch them away from their parents or husbands and drag them to the infamous bench to tell everyone what they had risked their lives to hide—to cut off their future, wrap them in shame and throw them into the Morgue or onto the streets!

And you will tell me that it is morality! That the bud left to nothingness deserves tearing these mothers away from their children's cradle whom a steady income or a legitimate family allowed them to have—and this is their absolution!

My word, they would say that women have abortions for fun, just to pester the police and thumb their noses at the judges! But their crime (if it is a crime) was committed in tears, despair and shame. They would have preferred not to commit it, come on!

They are the victims, not the culprits; victims of a social organization that in its desire for repopulation crowns the virgin girls and excommunicates the young mothers; it abolishes the "hatches"[12] and punishes infanticide; it does not recognize but brings disgrace on illegitimate children and forbids abortion; it says to the poor "increase and multiply" and lets their many descendants die of hunger!

It is society that inflicts misery on the poor and then denies them the right to refuse one too many! It is society that instills the fanaticism of honor in women and strikes them down if they are forced not to be dishonored! It is society, the ogress, that feeds on the flesh of young children murdered by its stupid laws and hateful prejudices. It is society that is the Child Killer!

[11] A bridge that crosses the Seine from the 1st to 6th arrondisement in Paris.

[12] A small door in the exterior wall of a hospital that allowed women to leave children anonymously.

9 General Boulanger

Séverine was not one to mince words and was always ready to give her opinion on the most controversial subjects of her time, but there was one matter in which she remained undecided and ambiguous, largely avoiding taking sides: General Boulanger.

A decorated military man, General Ernest Boulanger started to rock the national boat when he was appointed War Minister in 1886 under the aegis of the radicals who considered him the only republican among the monarchists and bonapartists of the army. He was fifty-years old, seductive, elegant, and the press loved him. He also had a loud voice that served him well when he shouted out for revenge against the Germans and introduced measures that provoked the Empire. He was so vociferous, in fact, that he earned the nickname General Revenge as he defied Bismark to a point just short of war.

Men and women, rich and poor alike fell victim to his charms when he rode his gleaming black horse, Tunis, down the Champs Elysées. Still hurting after the defeat of 1870 and the Paris Siege, not to mention the loss of Alsace and Lorraine, the French people were easily impressed and attracted to a swashbuckling figure defending their national honor. Of course he had fought against the Communards, but he was wounded early, which kept him from participating in the Bloody Week. And although he had no real political convictions he was extremely ambitious and was able to lure support from both sides of the political spectrum by criticizing the slow progress made for workers' rights, the insolence of wealthy owners, the corruption of politicians and businessmen, the neglect of social reform and even the colonial misadventures paid for in soldiers' blood. In fact, he was trying to straddle all sides of the political fence, but it was not seen like that at the time. Some royalists thought he might be used to restore the king. Republicans saw him as the best guarantee of democracy. Nationalists listened to his anti-German rhetoric. Everyone fabricated a Boulanger to fit their needs. And Boulanger flattered them all.

The men in power started getting worried and when just over a year after he took office a new government was elected in May 1887 and it saw the general as a real threat to its stability. He was so powerful, indeed, that he could organize its fall—so they fired him. Huge crowds stormed the train to bid him farewell as he left for Clermont-Ferrand as the new Commandant of 13th army corps. Exit Boulanger. Yesterday's idol, today's demon. But it was not so easy to get rid of him.

Suspected of being in league with the royalists the army expelled him in May 1888. But his political career continued to gain momentum. Henri de Rochefort, ex-Communard, future anti-Semite and nationalist, enemy of Séverine, with the help of bonapartists, nationalists, radical republicans and all those dissatisfied and frustrated with the parliament, beat the general's drum during next parliamentary elections. Along with a number of his supporters in seven different departments he was elected into office. With his electoral triumph in Paris in January 1889, rumors of a coup d'état were being bandied about, but under the influence of his mistress Madame de Bonnemains he missed the boat. In the end he proved an abler horseman than politician.

Where was Séverine in all this? She was still at *Le Cri du Peuple* for one. Georges de Labruyère, her lover, was a boulangist at the start in 1887. He quit *Le Cri* to found his own paper, *La Cocarde*, a thoroughly pro-boulangist paper—the general, too, needed publicity. Georges would later abandon it all for a new anti-boulangist paper, *La Jeune République*, which was rumored to be financed by the minister of the Interior. Well, Georges was never the bulwark of honest consistency. But in the meetings of *La Cocarde* Séverine made the acquaintance of George Laguerre and his ravishing new wife, the ex-actress Marguerite Durand. With her feminist and socialist ideas, she and Séverine hit it off right away. Their lifelong friendship and collaboration began in her salon where Séverine met General Boulanger in person with all kinds of his supporters. She could not appreciate his nationalism or his military bearing in all things, but she was attracted to his anti-parlementarism, his hostility to the hypocritical republic that was rife with corruption and was slowly strangling the poor to death.

At *Le Cri*, however, the socialists attacked Boulanger. Not only could they never forgive him for fighting against the Commune, but they saw in him the menace of dictatorship. Séverine answered them with her "Letter to Boulanger" in the name of freedom of thought and expression. Her "rabbit" made all Paris laugh, including Boulanger, but her stance was unclear. Was Boulanger any better or worse than other politicians? At least he spoke in support of the workers. And the people were behind him, if only for one simple reason: they were all fed up with the Republic. She supported the people.

Séverine was fully aware that her relationship with de Labruyère along with her ambiguous attitude toward Boulanger would cause problems, but she could not be dishonest and bridle her thoughts. Although suspected of boulangism, she kept her distance and her independence of thought. She remained skeptical, but like the people she had a weakness for the underdog, for the victims of power, whoever they might be, and Boulanger was being beaten down.

The government had decided it was time to end the threat once and for all and accused Boulanger of conspiracy to overthrow the government with the royalists. He fled into exile first to Brussels, then to London, later to Jersey and then back to Brussels while being sentenced to death in absentia in Paris. In the face of this and the general's sluggish reactions, Boulangism was dying out in France. In the general elections later in 1889 most of the boulangist candidates were defeated. By this time Séverine had left her editorial position at *Le Cri* and was publishing her habitually libertarian opinions in other papers. With Boulanger hiding in England the movement seemed dead and buried. But in 1890 a series of anonymously written articles entitled "Behind the Scenes of Boulangism"[1] was published in *Le Figaro*, which revealed the intrigues and secret negotiations that Boulanger had with the royalists on one side and the bonapartists on the other, right under the nose of his republican staff. Financed by the bankers as well, Boulanger was manipulating everyone for his personal ambition. Séverine wrote a slanderous jeremiad against the author, revealing Mermeix[2] as Boulanger's Judas. Georges de Labruyère backed her up and since he and Mermeix had fought an undecided duel once before after the Lissagary affair[3], now again witnesses were sent to demand satisfaction. The outcome of the duel was disputed and Labruyère accused his adversary of perfidy resulting in Mermeix being

[1] Les Coulisses du Boulangisme.

[2] Nom de plume of Gabriel Terrail.

[3] See 5—The End of Le Cri.

blasted by the press and losing his credibility. Séverine came out the winner in this round, but she would be haunted by boulangism for years to come.

The Boulanger romance finally ended in tragedy. Marguerite de Bonnemains, his mistress, died of tuberculosis on July 15 1891 in Brussels. Two and a half months later, on September 30, abandoned by his faithful partisans and now forsaken by his beloved, George Boulanger stood over her grave in the Ixelles cemetery and shot himself in the head. A picture of her and a lock of hair were plastered to his bloody shirt. He was buried in the same grave.

Letter to Boulanger

Letter to Boulanger[4]

Dear General,

Three days ago now the word hatred was printed next to your name. In this newspaper everyone is free to feel what he wants and so interpret as he sees fit. I acknowledge no right to revise their writing, just like I do not acknowledge their right to modify mine. But seeing that they have expressed their opinions, I am going to say what I think, without beating around the bush, in all simplicity.

I do not hate you. I feel worried about your young popularity and I feel a little of that anxiety that mothers feel as they watch over their threatened brood. I love my poor like others love their children; they are my soul, the flesh of my flesh, and (keep this in mind) whoever might think of attacking them better watch out!

They are distrustful of the sword—however much it is tolerated! The people are like a faithful but proud dog. Because they have been beaten they stop, arch their backs, growl and snarl at the sight of the whip. There was no intention of whipping them? It does not matter! They were not threatening, they were remembering!

The people remember. Every time the pages of history are printed with the pommel of the sword, these pages are illuminated in red like the pages of a gothic missal.

It knows the legend of the gladiator's sword by heart—the sword that was hard on the poor in antiquity just like it is today.

They told people in school about the words of Brennus[5] as he threw his heavy blade into the scales crying out, "Woe to the vanquished!" whereas he, the pariah, had respect and love for the vanquished—who were always his own people. And they taught them about the harsh words of the great knight in white armor who leaned on Charlemagne's mighty sword, looked out over the Vosges at France and proclaimed, "Might makes right."

They know by experience in our working suburbs (go on and see) that might makes right!

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That is why, general, you have the population with you, the indecisive, fickle mass that shouts Long Live this one and Long Live that one; that goes everywhere a racket is being made; that is headed by a sorry cook in a chef's hat, a grocer in a brown smock; that at tragic times, once in

[4] Included in Notes d'une frondeuse, 1894.

[5] A 4th century Gaul who defeated the Romans. When they tried to ransom back occupied Rome with gold, they disputed about the weights.

a while, out of its childishness turns ferocious and can both shoot Lecomte and stone Varlin on the Rue des Rosiers[6].

You, however—for, I do not wish to be unjust—you have all those who are tired of the present state of things: the small shopkeepers threatened with bankruptcy, the politicians threatened with elimination, the women who love the unexpected, and also the fanatics of patriotism who see in you, I would swear to it, with your blue eyes, red hair and white skin… a living French flag!

All of them follow you because you speak well, you look good, your gilding blazes in the sun—you incarnate, my general, the heroic follies of warrior France.

But this is the crowd, not the people! While the one is awed by your scabbard, the other thinks of the sharp, cutting sword that sleeps inside it—and that this blade was brandished against it in 1871…

Oh, I know what your people may say: that you were thirty years old, which is just a kid for a man of state; that whoever belongs to the army has to choose between obedience and death whereas because of his education and the barracks he has no choice—the brain, barely developed, received that dreadful helping hand of discipline.

I know all this and do not say that these arguments are insignificant. I come from a family of soldiers and only have to remember the words that enraged me as a child to know what, from the philosophical point of view, an officer's baggage weighs.

There is more.

My teacher in literature and politics, Vallès the citizen who knew how to write and the gentleman who knew how to think, Vallès had more hatred for the vile bourgeoisie sweating fear and cowardice in the aisles of Versailles than for the soldiers launched against him who risked their lives in the streets of Paris. His only exception was for the one who was not content with waging a civil war like they wage a foreign war, an inroad here, some headway there, but who was the virtuoso of slaughter, the champion of massacre, applying his incomparable expertise in cutting the throats of women, children and old men.

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However, the logic is simple and inescapable. They see the deed: the commander's cross[7] received after 1871—go on and tell them that they only rewarded your service record abroad and that it was much more for blood spilled before the Prussians than for the two bullets caught in Paris.

Here I am slandering my people by treating them as implacable. No one is less so than they are; and the good people believe in all the conversions—that is what defines their glory and their saintly goodness. On reproaching you for your past, I forgot about Cluseret[8] who after having been decorated for his part in the repression of the rebels of June '48 became one of the most ardent generals of the Commune. I forgot about that young orator of the socialist party, a former noncommissioned officer in the Versailles army who today is defending his adversaries of seventeen years ago.

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[6] General Claude Lecomte (1817-1871), shot by the Communards. Eugène Varlin (1839-1871), lynched, blinded and finally shot by a mob during the Bloody Week.

[7] The Legion of Honor.

[8] Gustave Cluseret (1823-1900), ex-military officer who joined the Paris Commune but was arrested there and then freed by the Republican army which then sentenced him to death. He returned from exile in 1884 and was elected a deputy in 1888.

That is the proof that they are certainly not implacable! And what you said during the strike in Decazeville[9] did more for your popularity than the song of Paulus[10] and the articles of your bootlickers! It was human, that idea of making the soldiers share their slop with the striking miners, of ameliorating the insurrection of hunger by putting them in the mess line.

They said more to me. Everyone knows that you are penniless; maybe that is what makes your glory good and cheerful. They told me that the big stockholders down there [in Decazeville] would have liked to rinse the black throats with lead and they would have willingly shod a horse in gold for whoever gave them this pleasure. They missed their shot—and you your fortune! If this is true, it is good… you started paying the debt of 1871.

But I am dawdling and I want to tell you this:

If ever, my general, you get the crazy idea to tear down the Chamber, do not bother about the socialists—they will not bother you. I even think that the people will laugh hard and the League of Anti-Patriots will give you a hand… if you are really so inclined.

They will justify themselves afterward, that's all.

For, I have a strange theory that you might not like at first, but on reflection is really quite nice. In the shooting galleries at the fairs I prefer the one, big, plaster rabbit—the pride and joy of the place—that is easier to shoot down because it is more "substantial"; more flattering, too, because the spectators get more excited. I prefer this big fat object to the hundreds of wretched little targets that are hard to get in your sights and less glorious to hit.

At the Palais-Bourbon[11] there are five hundred glairy heads that stick to your fingers and would be hell to unglue. Whereas only one man…

Be the rabbit, my general!

The Ricochets

The Ricochets[12]

Yesterday while I was watching the boulangist demonstration from my sixth floor window, the cops were agitating the bystanders by hitting and kicking them. Someone said to me, "Bah! Let it go! You're wrong to be upset. It's just boulangists that they're hitting after all."

I know very well that they are boulangists being hit, but I have, like with many other things, very particular ideas about it.

When the police bash a crowd, I do not care what the crowd is. My Parisienne rebel blood starts to boil. I clap my hands and shout Bravo—if the roles are reversed for one minute; if the bonapartists, royalists, anarchists or boulangists get to dish some out to the officers who have such heavy hands and ready feet.

Then I look a little farther.

In the old Gospel that they make us learn when we are little children, there is a pretty sentence that can be translated thus: "Do not do unto another what you do not want them to do unto you." That is very fair… and very crafty.

[9] "Don't worry because maybe right now every soldier is sharing his soup and ration of bread with a miner." And see 6—Martyrs of the Mines.

[10] Jean-Paul Habans (1845-1908) was famous for his song about Boulanger, "En revenant de la revue."

[11] The seat of the French National Assembly.

[12] Included in Notes d'une frondeuse, 1894.

For, there are some cops—with all due respect to them!—who are like all animals trained for the hunt: they take a liking to it.

There is training for bashing heads like there is training for battle. Whoever likes drumming on a voter's skull will love "knocking" on a socialist noggin. And when an officer's boot makes direct contact with a citizen's seat, the impact is always felt before the citizen has had time to voice his opinion.

That is why I am wary whenever I see the guardians of the peace in a warlike mood. That is why I consider every police intervention in the streets as a threat to us others… even when it is directed against adversaries or the apathetic.

And that brutality of April 9 is quite simply—unless the government is kneading the Revolution out of fear of the Baking[13]—the appetizer of our May 28[14].

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But that is not all.

My outrage is struck, frequently, by what they call, in government style, the national interest; and what they call, in revolutionary style, the Party gossip.

Now, it is precisely this gossip that I would like to lay aside. Every time a bad or vile deed is committed I would like the Social Republic to take the floor and denounce the infamy—let it take a direct interest in this infamy!

We others are not politicians and it is because we are not politicians that we do not have to hem and haw or cheat and con. We do not have two moralities like the academics; we have only honesty, which is made half of logic and half of integrity. Integrity rarely goes wrong for us—logic often does. However, it is logic that I hear calling.

We are witnessing right now a curious duel between the opportunists and the boulangists: the former have force on their side, the latter the crowd. In my humble opinion, there was no need to ally yourselves with Ferry [the President] or to indenture yourselves to Boulanger; the socialist party could have crossed its arms, remained bystanders and waited for the outcome of the fight to play its role as the third thief[15].

Others thought otherwise—and the Supreme Being keeps me from discussing the slogans of leadership! I am giving my personal opinion here, which I never tried to impose on anyone else and I give it for what it is worth without sitting around defending it.

But what I strive to support for example, with all the energy of my conviction, is our duty to protest against certain acts: first because they are hateful, and then because they are a threat to us and our ideas.

In the battle that I just mentioned, there was police intervention and awful things were done that we have to raise our voice against without worrying if they were done to this one or that one.

To get a letter of General Boulanger the police faked a robbery, rifled the desks and broke the locks—let's call it an infamy!

To get a case either before the Board of Inquiry or the Chamber, the postal service reinstituted the black chamber, stealing letters and holding onto telegrams—let's call it an infamy!

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[13] Play on "boulanger", a baker, like boulangerie, a bakery.

[14] The fall of the Paris Commune.

[15] Like in La Fontaine's fable where two thieves argue about a stolen donkey while the third thief comes to ride off with it.

To fight a candidacy that we, too, fight, but in good faith, the Secret Fund bribed the reptilian press, bought newspapers, acquired consciences—let's call it an infamy!

That is our role, a role full of grandeur and that the people alone can play, to tell the whole truth, plainly and openly. It is when you stand up that you learn how tall your enemy is… and woe unto those who do not feel the supreme force of justice!

#

In these smear-worthy actions there is, I said, a threat to us. It is that, in fact, no measure has been taken against such or such person without it turning into heavier, darker practices.

The fake robbery of this person by the police is the brother of the bomb planted by an officer in searching someone else's room. The black chamber reinstituted means the letters of Kropotkin stolen just like Boulanger's mail. The Press being sold means the life of any socialist can be dragged through the mud like the general.

Let's defend our security! Let's defend our secrets! Let's defend our honor!

I went to the school of a man who said, "The deputies who voted for Article 7 likewise voted to banish Lawroff[16]. Every law or every revolutionary action has its ricochet against us."

Think about that, you who are clapping!

[16] Piotr Lavrov (1823-1900), Russian philosopher in exile in Paris, was expelled in 1882 for helping Russian political prisoners and exiles. Article 7 states: The exercise of civil rights is unrelated to the exercise of political rights which are acquired and kept in accordance with constitutional and electoral statutes.

10 Soldiers and Spies

The world of labor was in turmoil. Unions were forming and strikes were multiplying, but workers' rights were slow to improve. So, the demonstrations organized for Labor Day on May 1 1891, the first such celebration of International Workers' Day after the Haymarket Riot[1], were bigger and bolder. In Lyon they marched with red and black flags—red for the socialists, adopted during the 1848 Revolution, and black for the anarchists, which had been introduced by Louise Michel back in 1883. As the procession went to put wreaths on the graves of bygone revolutionaries there was a clash with police, shots were fired and casualties were numbered on both sides. Other disruptions occurred in Marseille, Toulouse and Bordeaux. Dynamite exploded in Nantes and Charleville doing little damage. But in a number of towns the workers did not even take to the streets; they just signed petitions. In Fourmies, however, tragedy struck.

Fourmies was a small town in Northern France at the height of its industrial development whose population consisted mainly of workers in the textile and glass factories. A strike was organized for an eight-hour workday and higher wages, which the owners of the factories had adamantly opposed. At the bequest of the mayor two infantry companies from the 145th regiment were brought in from nearby Avesnes. Armed with their brand new Lebel rifles (8mm bolt-action rifles that could shoot through walls, an innovation of General Boulanger when he was War Minister) three hundred soldiers faced off against fewer than two hundred unarmed strikers. Some stones were thrown at the uniforms and in retaliation they opened fire. Nine workers were killed at the front of the march—two men, four women and three children—and around forty wounded in less than a minute.

A few days after the massacre *Le Temps* published an article that tried to console its readers about the shooting: "In the front rows among the dead there were, we can say now, women of very loose morals." Did they fire on a crowd of morals? Séverine vented her anger in "Sort the Dead". For these men, every women who was not a housewife was a whore. And by leaving behind the traditional roles assigned to females, they left behind any protection or consideration that might be offered by society. But who was really at fault for this?

The public was certainly indignant and disillusioned once again about their security forces. Their peacekeeping brothers ceased for the moment to be brothers. But no one of the troop was ever found guilty of any misconduct. They were just following orders after all. On the other hand, the instigators of the strike, Hippolyte Culine the director of Guesde's French Workers' Party, and Paul Lafargue, the son-in-law of Karl Marx, were sentenced to prison for six years and one year respectively for "provocation to murder" or inciting the crowd to violence. Lafargue, however, skillfully used the tragedy to get elected deputy in Lille in November of that year and was thereupon released. He was the first Guesdist in the Chamber. Séverine, a long-time antagonist of Guesde since *Le Cri*, denounced his exploitation of the carnage—another source of her beautiful anger.

[1] See 4-Propaganda by Deed and "The Chicago Anarchists".

Séverine wrote these articles for *L'Eclair* because she was no longer collaborating with *Le Gaulois*. Her participation in the Padlewski affair six months earlier was unacceptable and they had cut her off. Padlewski? Of course. It was the talk of town at the end of 1890, a real cloak and dagger story right out of a spy novel.

On November 18 1890 in a Paris hotel room Stanislas Padlewski, a Polish nihilist, assassinated General Seliverstoff, the former chief of Russian secret police who was responsible for the repression of Polish revolutionaries fighting to free their country from Tsar Alexander III's barbarous occupation. Padlewski fled and hid with friends in the city. It was the Russian socialist poet Procope Bazilisk who showed up at Séverine's door one evening early in December; she did not know him, but they had friends in common. He asked her to help him find some money and get Padlewski out of France. She agreed, but how, seeing that he was wanted all over France? She thought of Georges.

Georges de Labruyère's reputation as a duelist came in handy. Under the pretext of fighting a duel in Italy with Padlewski disguised as his second, they could sneak him over the border. To assuage his misgivings, Séverine convinced Georges that, besides helping a righteous cause, if he wrote about the adventure he would have all the publicity he dreamed of: the escape of a political criminal right under the nose of the French police and the Tsarist agents—what a report. He accepted and got a 2,000 F advance for the article to finance the expedition. For Séverine it was the first time she had done such a thing and far from being motivated by self-promotion she was compelled by justice—it was a political attack in a war of liberation.

It was a success. With Padlewski traveling as Dr. Wolf, they got to the Lyon train station where one of the chiefs recognized Georges. They joked about his upcoming duel and to make it easier for him to get his swords across the Italian border the chief wrote a letter to his colleague in Modane. Padlewski arrived safely in Italy and boarded a ship for the USA. Georges returned to Paris and published his "extraordinary report the likes of which have never been seen before": "How I Helped Padlewski Escape" in *L'Eclair* on December 15 1890. It was a sensation.

It did not last. On December 24 Georges de Labruyère was summoned before the 9th correctional court of Paris and found guilty of aiding and abetting the escape of a murderer. Thirteen months in prison. Merry Christmas. Séverine was implicated as an accomplice, but no criminal charges were brought against her. However, since France was trying to woo Russia as an ally in the face of deteriorating Franco-Germanic relations, it was a very sensitive issue. To be an outspoken rebel was one thing, but to help a red terrorist against Holy Russia was quite another. With her lover in prison and her reputation now more vitriolic than ever, she was no longer a reliable profit and *Le Gaulois* let her go. Luckily Charles Cazet at *L'Eclair* welcomed her—she would never forget him for this favor.

Meanwhile, Georges did not have to rot in Mazas Prison for long. After one month the court of appeals acquitted him. He had got his publicity, but he did not get much work after that. And Padlewski? He lived in Texas under the name of Otto Hauser before committing suicide on October 4 in San Antonio. It was said the gun he used to shoot himself in the head had been given to him by Georges de Labruyère.

[2] *Gil Blas*, May 15 1891, and in Pages Rouges, 1893.

Sort the Dead

Sort the Dead[2]

I do not want to upset anyone, but really, I wonder where that editor's head is who was ill-advised enough to offer the following consolation to the good people who were saddened by the shooting in Fourmies: "In the front rows among the dead there were, we can say now, women of very loose morals."

One point and that is all. The charming conclusion is self-evident: the tragedy is not so awful, the catastrophe not so distressing and the sub-prefect Isaac should not be booed because the victims were not virgins!

The 145th regiment, which did the shooting, was a morality regiment, a vice squad. Commandant Chapus was a Public Health leader, even though he went a little overboard in his practices. And shelling out lead to the young people was simply a prelude to the distribution of pretty little cards with first and last names, age and complete civil status—the signs pinned to the murdered victims' shrouds as their mothers had to spell out their names while tearing out their hair!

In fact it was just a roundup that was just a little more radical than the others. The hearse replaced the paddy wagon—which was more preferable for respectability and public health—the great Saint Lazare becoming the patron saint of the French regiment!

I have rarely read anything more detestable, including the famous saying of Monsieur Dumas fils about the tragic, random shootings during the repression in 1871. He tactfully called them "Females" because he did not want to talk about them "out of respect for the honest women whom they looked like…when they were dead"![3]

#

At least he recognized that the Grim Reaper, an ironic equalizer of prejudices like it is of situations, makes all the scraps that have left life behind the same and the good, ignorant earth accepts all manure, not caring about where the flesh we give it to rot came from.

The pure have no more right to maggots than the perverse—and the mocking wind sows the abortive Rue[4] on the sepulcher of the fertile—it makes the orange tree spring up on bellies that knew nothing about uprightness.

But *Le Temps* is harsher than Monsieur Dumas fils and puts nature to shame for its disgraceful indulgence. It wants none of that troubling confusion, even after death. It gathers the corpses of the deceased on the field of massacre and before mourning them it sends them for a visit to the health clinic to determine what their moral standing was.

"Was this one a virgin? Ah, what a shame! And was this one a sinner? Good riddance!"

And they sort them in two: the bodies of the respectable dead and the bodies of those we should not respect. *Le Temps* mourns the first and I prefer not to say what it does to the others!

Then it counts them up and since the pile of "loose" women is much bigger than the other, its grief vanishes right away. Obviously the Fourmies affair is unfortunate, but not too unfortunate since we have learned about the behavior of these little hussies against whom the soldiers, after all, were probably just defending their virtue.

The girls were getting too close… poor lads!

[3] Alexandre Dumas fils (1824-1895), the son of Alexandre Dumas père (1802-1870), writing about the Paris Commune.

[4] Also known as Herb-of-Grace, it was used to induce abortions.

Ah, if a monarchist newspaper or a religious newspaper had delivered this unprecedented sentence, *Le Temps* would be screaming about it at the top of their lungs! They would be protesting in outrage against the obscurantism of certain opinions, the intolerance of the Church and the lack of humanity of its reaction.

They would bring up '89[5] and the immortal principles: equality before the law, the Rights of Man and all the wonderful things that make the Republicans today declare that it is certainly upsetting that the Lebel has made its debut on women and French women at that, but it is, after all, less upsetting than we might believe at first—since these women were not so well behaved!

#

Poor girls! I was curious enough to reread the list of the dead and see again how old these inveterate sinners were.

Maria Blondeau, who held the "May" decorated with ribbons and flowers that was, along with the *tricolor* flag that the young man Giloteaux held, the banner of this rowdy demonstration of young girls—Maria Blondeau was fifteen years old. According to a witness, a bullet took the top of her skull off like the lid of a teakettle. But she was suspected of being a little more than just engaged to Giloteaux (reread the delightful story of Miette's death in La Fortune des Rougon[6]), so *Le Temps'* pity could not be given to her. Yet at fifteen, if you have done wrong, you have hardly had the time to do much wrong.

Ernestine Diot was shot four times, part of her head was also blown off and one of her eyes was plucked out. She was nineteen years old. Out of decency our colleague could not have any compassion for her either…she left behind a young child.

Louise Hublet, two bullets, twenty-one years old; Félicie Pennelier, one bullet, seventeen years old. They were both shot down at the same time as the first two. Should we feel sorry for them or not, according to the austere theory of *Le Temps*? I do not know.

As for young Bastain, seventeen years old, shot six times in the thigh and Elisa Dupont, twenty-five, shot in the knee and Elisa Lecomte, twenty-four, three bullets in her foot—I am also not informed. But for the last young woman, a question is raised. She was with a child, her child, who was two and a half years old. Was this child legitimate or not? If it was conceived in sin, the wounds and suffering of the mother do not matter much. But if it was the fruit of a legal marriage, ah!—the reporter from *Le Temps* would find this unlucky wound very regrettable and mourn the poor victim!

The same sorting needs to be done, of course, for the poor eleven, twelve and thirteen year old kids that they piled up in the Church Square like drowned cats on the riverbank. Did they or did they not have the stain of original sin? Had the mayor presided over the unions that gave birth to these children or not?

#

I am dumbfounded at this reasoning. And all the common sense of the human race, all the feminine pity, all the bruised tolerance that my heart is full of is outraged and protests against this monstrous theory!

Life is a battlefield like any other where especially the people who claim to be representatives of the republican tradition should remove the wounded from the battlefield without distinction, without worrying about their past before they fell victim to their wounds.

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[5] 1789.

[6] Novel of Emile Zola published in 1871.

Society makes prostitutes so that lucky women, called honest women, can enjoy virtue and cross the street without suffering the attacks of men. Society makes the poor so that the fortunate can have more than they need: excess, more than excess—luxury.

Every paving stone on our roads is a pauper's heart that the dashing, pretty, gussied up herds of rich walk on!

If the dead at Fourmies were debauched—which they were not!—they would deserve even more pity since they had been sacrificed even before the shooting threw them on the only bed where they were allowed to sleep alone!

But they were poor girls who worked hard to earn a little money and who barely knew any other joy in their brief existence than the few caresses and embraces that the puritans of the Republic call a crime; and that they are using as a pretext to stop people's grieving.

It is funny. The Mother Superior of the Sisters of Compassion at Fourmies did not think of this. The seventy-six year old nun washed and dressed the corpses with her own hands, closed their eyes (forever dead) leaned over them and with the sign of the cross gave them a motherly, contrite kiss on the forehead!

Apartments For Rent

Apartments for Rent[7]

As I told you here the other day, Séverine is my comrade, my confidant, my close friend. We are from the same "region", both born right in the heart of the 9th, Rue du Helder, in an old house that Baron Haussmann tore down around 1868 and that has since been replaced by the office of the Taitbout-La Muette tramway.

We grew up together. We played with the same dolls, wore out our seats on the same school benches, shared the punishments and rewards, the wallops and the candy. In brief, we almost never left each other's side.

Likewise professionally. When we had to choose a career, destiny held out a pair of blue stockings[8]—always fraternal we each took one. She matched it with a black stocking and red garters, battle colors. Me, being more frivolous, was satisfied with pastel pink frilled with pale pink ribbons. And while I worked on the society columns, smiling a little at everything, rarely getting angry, mostly discreet and proper, that good, nutty Séverine went running off, running wild, starting controversies, fending off attacks… the kin of Louise Michel for her sincerity and the cousin of Déroulède[9] for her windmills!

I call her good?… hmm. I do not want to belittle her, but that is a legend that needs to be cut down to size. She is good, of course, but often with such lack of tact! Look, we could never make her understand that when an abuse is commmitted by the rich, the right people, or the people in government keeping silent about it is proof of a good upbringing, good taste and good manners; and in betraying the unspoken freemasonry that binds people of the same social status you have everything to lose and nothing to gain; and finally that it is bad form and degrading to look too low. Seriously, she is doing herself a disservice!

[7] Writing as Jacqueline in *Gil Blas*, March 18 1892.

[8] For intellectual women interested in the literary world.

[9] Paul Déroulède (1846-1914), nationalist founder of the League of Patriots and supporter of General Boulanger.

But when you tell her these things she gives you that cocky, I-don't-give-a-damn-what-anybody-thinks look—and, like the marshal's negro, continue!

In truth she is very mean. So, when I see this usually gloomy girl laughing, I am suspicious. Surely, while pretending to defend the weak she just ran into some distinguished person again. And I never fail to greet her by asking, "Well, what did you do this time, you scamp?"

#

Now, this morning she was laughing so loudly and so cheerfully, with tears in her eyes, that she could not answer right away. She slumped down in the cushions and wiped her eyes. As I was getting impatient she said, "Wait a minute. It's so funny."

"Well, what?"

"I'm going to move."

"Oh, great." And here comes the best part. "Where are you going to move?"

"The left bank."

"Why? It's been barely a year since you got your new apartment and you're set up so nicely there."

"Yes, but I'm paying for it."

"And over there?"

"Not a sous, my dear! No matter how much I insist, the landlord will keep my rent very low and the other tenants will provide me with soap, sugar and coffee."

"Give me the address, I'll be there in a heartbeat."

"Oh, there's nothing there for you, sweetie."

"Well, are you going to tell me everything?"

"Here you go. Thirteen months ago, you remember (right after the Padlewski affair), I was looking for an apartment. I needed something not very expensive for reasons that I'll let you guess, but very spacious because of my books and papers, my collection of newspapers, my birds and what the good old master Cladel[10] would call my litany of dogs: Rip, Tiote and Mégot.

"I scoured the districts, went up one street and down another, up one flight of stairs and down another, without finding that pearl of a nice landlady and that other pearl that is no less precious: a smiling, helpful concierge!"

"But you have them where you are, ingrate, and you want to leave!"

"Hold on, I'm not finished. In brief, I'd run all over Paris from east to west, from north to the Midi, without finding the nest of my dreams when I noticed on Rue d'Assas (you'll understand in a minute why I'm not giving you the number) a lovely apartment. Huge and on the first floor—with a little garden where roses could grow and where all the animals, including myself, could lie in the bright sun.

"I told him timidly that I had birds but the doorman remained calm. I confessed my four-footed friends… and with a smile that looked beatific he said he loved them. 'Animals are good' he even deigned to add. You understand now my enthusiasm and the down payment I handed to this fellow beastiomaniac. I got him to arrange a meeting with the manager for the next day and I went dancing back home, happy as a lark.

"The next day I showed up with mama because we had to rent in her name. We settled everything with the manager, a nice man who was the spitting image of Hector Malot. I pointed out the wall partitions that needed to be taken down and the ceiling in need of repair. We agreed so

[10] Léon Cladel (1834-1892) was a French novelist.

marvelously on every point that there were no misunderstandings and no discussion. We decided on what the owner would pay for and what would be my responsibility. I saw the cellar and the maid's room and was already arranging the furniture. We parted. Everyone was delighted.

"The day after that, mama came home and broke down in tears. 'My poor child, they don't want to rent to us!' I was startled, 'Why?' And she explained that they gave full credit to me as a renter and that even my character as far as being a woman was in no way questionable, but that the house was full of judges and that they were disturbed by the idea of having as a neighbor the former editor-in-chief of *Le Cri du Peuple*, a 'petroleuse', a hell-raiser, a Communard, a journalist imbued with the most 'subversive' attitudes toward their association. And my dear mother finished with this predictable comment: Your father and I told you that by choosing that position you would have nothing but trouble! If you were with the government, they would rent to you right away!

"So, I went elsewhere and I'm fine. But now…"

"Now?"

"Take a guess."

"No, go on!"

"Well… so… the guys on Rue d'Assas got a real scare put in them by the explosion on Boulevard Saint Germain[11]. And all of a sudden they feel terribly guilty and passionately sympathetic toward me. They thought it wasn't good that their occupational prejudice prevented a poor little woman from living wherever she pleased and that they had lost a unique opportunity to bond with friendly 'companions', those young anarchists who are so interesting and admired and slandered! Nothing but positive could come of us getting to know each other, right? And so much incrimination and hatred and reciprocal danger might be avoided that way…"

"You're joking, come on!"

"I swear it's the truth. They figured that the anarchists might think twice about blowing to bits a woman who has always defended them and…"

"And?"

"THEY CAME LOOKING FOR ME! A envoy who was 'subtle and sensible', as they say in *Lazare le Pâtre*[12], came on behalf of the tenants to know if I would accept being the fireshield for this tribe of magistrates."

"And you accepted?"

"No worries, my dear. I love quiet houses with nice people. So, I'm not going there. There are judges in that house!"

[11] In March 1892 a bomb planted by Ravachol exploded in a judge's house. See 11-Ravachol.

[12] A play by Joseph Bouchardy that was first staged in 1840.

11 Ravachol

While the soldiers were shooting innocent demonstrators in Fourmies on May Day 1891, a group of anarchists marching through the streets of Clichy, a working-class suburb of Paris, also came into conflict with the police. Although shots were fired on both sides, no one was injured. However, three of the demonstrators were arrested. After being "questioned" at the police station they had to be transferred to a hospital before appearing before a judge—the police denied any knowledge of how their wounds had been inflicted. Two of the prisoners were given five and three years hard labor and the third was acquitted. The anarchists were in an uproar over the harsh punishment but almost a year passed before they tried to avenge the "Clichy Martyrs." Then a wave of anarchist attacks swept over Paris.

On March 11 1892 a bomb exploded at 136 Boulevard Saint Germain in the house where two judges were living, one of whom was the presiding judge of the Clichy trial. Four days later another bomb went off at the Lobau barracks, followed by a third on March 27 at the residence of the prosecutor in the Clichy case. A man by the name of Ravachol was arrested after the third explosion, but the fuse had been lit on both sides. Thus began the Anarchist Terror of 1892-94. The militant anarchists were more driven than ever to destroy the symbols of bourgeois order: the justice system and the military. Out of the rhetoric of propaganda by word, dynamite started talking through propaganda by deed to which the government responded in turn with ever more ruthless laws and practices. The clash culminated in the assassination of President Carnot.

Illegalism had been a hotbed of contention since Clément Duval's trial in 1887[1], but it was not the first time that propaganda by deed caused a rift in revolutionary currents. As we know, Pierre Joseph Proudhon's The Philosophy of Misery in 1846 used the epigraph *destruam et aedicabo*, I will destroy and I will build, meaning that every social constraint must be torn down in order to establish social harmony. In 1873 Mikhail Bakunin bid farewell by saying, "If ideas alone could save the world, I challenge anyone to invent a new one. The time for ideas is over. It is time now for deeds and action." Then at the International Congress in London in 1881, the militant voices voted to back up their talk by studying and using modern scientific discoveries for their cause. This was the point where the anarchists separated from the socialists. It was this joining of science and politics, of technology and social philosophy that was characteristic of anarchy, but the rather violent eruption of bombs in the early 1890s stained the idea of anarchism for generations to come.

For the anarchists, on the other hand, in their competition with Nobel to create a powerful explosive like nitroglycerine, as a means to political ends, chemistry became a kind of alchemy: chemical transformation for social transformation, explosion for revolution. But these experiments lasted only a short time at the turn of the century. Very soon, at least in France, the calls for dynamite would change into calls for general strikes, "propaganda by deed" would change

[1] See 4-Propaganda by Deed.

into “direct action” and the individualists would be eclipsed by the syndicalists. The explosions of 1892 would become legend and Ravachol was the hero.

Ravachol[2] grew up poor, supporting his fatherless family, and remained poor. He worked and struggled and fanned the fires of his revolt. After first turning to counterfeiting he soon committed more serious crimes In May 1891 he heard that a Countess of Rochetaillée had died and been buried with her jewels. Ravachol took the opportunity to expropriate the riches from the grave, but apparently came up empty. Later he heard about the Hermit, an old man living alone in the hills with a hoard of money. Ravachol killed and robbed him. Unfortunately he and his companion were arrested, but they somehow managed to escape.

On the run and more determined than ever, Ravachol decided to avenge the Clichy victims. First he plotted with some partners to steal dynamite. One of his accomplices was a young man of eighteen named Simon, called “Biscuit”. The two of them staked out the house of the judge and on March 11 1892 planted the bomb on the third floor. The property damage was substantial, but no one was injured.

Then on the eve of the anniversary of the Paris Commune, March 15 1892, there was an explosion at the Lobau barracks. This, however, was not the work of Ravachol, but of Théodule Meunier. Again no loss of life, but the government introduced a bill that would demand capital punishment for such crimes. This did not discourage Ravachol. On March 27 he carried a more powerful bomb to the house of the public prosecutor. Besides the even greater property damage, six people were injured this time.

Paris was seized by fear and panic. Despite the bloody battles it had seen in recent war and the growing number of poor dying in the streets, it was these benign but direct attacks that made the government tremble and the bourgeoisie stand aghast with horror, as if the cost of property damage was more valuable than human lives. One discontent worker had brought Paris to her knees.

After the last explosion, Ravachol went to lunch at the restaurant of Monsieur Véry on Boulevard Magenta. When speaking to the waiter, Lhérot, he boasted of his crimes in no uncertain terms while trying to propagandize him. Lhérot informed the police immediately and they arrested Ravachol with a number of friends.

Ravachol was praised in the anarchist press. Emile Pouget in Le Père Peinard, Jean Grave in La Révolte and Zo d’Axa in L’En-Dehors along with the likes of Sébastien Faure, Octave Mirbeau and Bernard Lazare, to one extent or another, supported and justified his militant actions. Some of these outspoken supporters who saw a general revolt of the poor on the horizon went to jail for expressing their opinions; others would later change their opinions when faced with more serious consequences of anarchist strikes. But no one could sit idly by and not voice an opinion.

The authorities were worried about more attacks, but they did not address any of the issues that were at stake. Séverine responded by saying that in 1789 they cut off heads, so it was only natural that the people would start blowing up the bourgeoisie. But, “Come on, they only blow up once!” And whose turn will it be tomorrow?

The more serious consequences followed quickly when Ravachol’s trial opened. Théodule Meunier took revenge on Véry’s restaurant by planting a bomb that killed two people, including the owner. Thus the anarchists could talk about “Verification.” But the explosion also wounded a little girl, which pulled the public’s heartstrings. Séverine had a dilemma with these fatalities.

[2] His real name was François Auguste Koenigstein—he used his mother’s name.

Who was really responsible? Did his supporters in the press now have blood on their hands? How deeply were they entangled in the struggle? And how deep did they want to go? As with Duval, however, she looked beyond the mere act and addressed the real causes: the social injustices that pushed people into the pit of despair. As long as the exploitation continued, the violence would never stop.

In the trial, only Ravachol and young Simon were found guilty of the bombs and thus sentenced to hard labor for life. However, as result of the investigation, Ravachol was sent off to answer for his crimes committed in other parts of France. When he was sentenced to death for murder, he cried, "Vive l'Anarchie!" He refused to appeal, refused to ask for a reprieve and refused the priest who was sent on execution day. He was publicly guillotined on July 11 1892 in Montbrison.

He would become a martyr, a cult figure, a thing of legend over time. But immediately, perhaps the most surprising response was how quickly things went back to normal, how easily people forgot. No changes. Case closed. Move on. People could breathe more easily now because Ravachol was gone. What they did not know was that the threat of dynamite was just beginning.

De Profundis Clamavi Ad Te…

De Profundis Clamavi Ad Te…

After the Explosion at the Véry Restaurant[3]

With the poor at all times—despite their mistakes, despite their faults…despite their crimes! – *Le Cri du peuple*, January 30 1887 ("The Responsible Parties")

For the first time in ten years since Vallès taught me—a selfish little bourgeoisie—to think and ponder about and bow before human despair, to picture its breadth and measure its depth, in the seven years since his death that I have had to come out of his shadow in order to continue the good fight, gathering up weapons like the sword of Angantyr[4], too heavy for my weak hands, and marching faithfully down the path of his wishes—for the first time I am hesitant, confused, worried about making a mistake, wavering in tears before the innocent victims whom they found among the ruins and carried out on stretchers and who are bleeding on their hospital beds.

I seem to have come to a crossroads filled with darkness where every light has gone out inside and outside of me and where the smoke from the bombs, settling on women and children and veiling the sun in mourning, has made night fall on all my hopes, all my courage and all my convictions. And I stumble in this dreadful darkness, with my hands out in front of me and my feet trembling in fear of tripping over one of the victims whose cries tear apart my heart. Where is my way? What is my path?

How awful and painful it is to tell yourself, "What if I was wrong! If the cause to which I have given ten years of my life and sacrificed my family's fortune, for which I have suffered so many insults and received so many wounds, risked and lost my livelihood so many times, what if this cause was not on the side of truth and justice—what if I was wrong!" Ah, the unbearable anguish, the painful torture!

Meanwhile the shrill voice of Guesde cuts through the moaning darkness. He has no doubts at all! Neither his brain nor the metronome ticking in his chest has the slightest fear or even a

[3] Pages Rouges, 1893. De Profundis from Psalm 130: "Out of the depths I cry to you…"

[4] Cf. Leconte de Lisle's *L'Épée d'Agantyr* from the Old Norse about Hervor getting the magic sword Tyrfing from the ghost of Angantyr, her dead father.

moment of hesitation and humility. He is sure of what he does—and what he hates. He joins his anathema to the general outcry. His socialist hand throws the first rock at the stoning…

"All anarchists are fools, madmen or snitches."

Those whom he claims to fight against also support him and cheer him on and turn out to be the surest ally. Later in the day, after he speaks out, on his signal, a crowd of innocent men are arrested.

Five years ago it was the same with regard to the impersonal theft of Duval, but I had the courage then, while not approving of it, to stand up before it and say that the bourgeoisie might condemn these extreme doctrines but they had no right to condemn the revolutionaries; that the chiefs in the army of revolt were *always* responsible for the acts of its soldiers; and that if they criticized this enraged soldier, they should not choose the moment he was being threatened with the death penalty to tell him this and put the Social finger on the trigger of the guillotine. And God knows how much they sullied my dress when they answered me!

Blood has been spilled today. And I do not dare anymore, I do not know anymore…My master is dead and my conscience wavers. I am without a guide or compass, nothing but my pity, which rises up before that injured little girl, that half-mad woman and that dying man! Who will cast a ray of light into my night? Who will explain to me the reason for this growing, savage anger? Who will help me see beyond this barbarity?

#

Voices from the Shadows

"We are the poor, little souls of Limbo, the children whom love's work began and who were not born. We would have loved to exist like the others and clung to life with all our atoms' energy, but there was no substance for us in our poverty-stricken mothers and we fell, withered before blooming, like buds in April. Their blood was so weak and limpid, more watered down than beggar's wine! Their flesh was so pale and faint, almost dead already from fatigue and hardship!

"In their bellies shivering under their thin skirts in the chilly evenings under the roofs or sweating like beasts of burden in the factory ovens and in their bodies constantly standing behind the counter or ceaselessly bent over their work, we could not grow and develop. Misery, like an abortionist, caught us in its claws and ripped out our anemic guts!

"We are the poor children who could not be born because our mothers were too hungry and cold, were driven like animals without ever any rest. And from this existence that was promised to us, to which we had a right just like rich children, we, the seed of social outcasts, knew only the echo of suffering, the remnants of our mothers' anguish and an inkling of our future joys.

"We are the children whose mothers were scared, whose mothers preferred to see us dead right away, embryonic, rather than to watch us die slowly for want of blankets or milk. We are those who died of hunger in front of a dried up breast and died of cold on December streets when our parents wandered homeless. We are those who passed away in some small room at the backstreet abortionist… where they tossed us because it was cheaper, where they killed us because no one could watch over us. We are the poor kids whom they picked up frozen on the roads, in the woods, in the corner of carriage entrances or who groaned in the sickrooms of reformatories. We are infantile humanity, banned, bruised and dispossessed!"

#

"We are the women, the sad women of the common people for whom all is mourning and misery. At eight years old we become mothers of our many brothers and sisters crowded into our lodging. When we can read, there are no more games. At twelve we have to be self-sufficient

and contribute to the household expenses. If we are haunted by a dream of routine, we are married at fifteen and we start the sad life of endless pregnancies, continual labor and constant worry, which is the fate of women of our race. And we learn all about unemployment, strikes and the awful catastrophes that carry our men away on stretchers, crushed and massacred, so disfigured by death that they are unrecognizable—even by us!

"Or else at thirteen some foreman rapes us in a corner of the factory. At fourteen we have a baby. At sixteen, by hook or by crook, the police nab us and register us—flesh for pleasure, flesh for work, doomed to all the contempt and filth and sickness!

"Drudgery by day, drudgery by night, a worker bent over the workbench twelve hours a day to earn forty sous or a pitiful streetwalker offering her empty belly and her hungry mouth—the same destiny on the horizon: hospital, dissection room and a pauper's grave!

"We are the poor women, fading at twenty years old and withered at twenty-five from whom fate takes everything, even the flower of youth and the ray of beauty—such luxuries are not made for us! It is the rose of our cheeks that we sew into the pretty ladies' dresses. Their make-up is composed of our radiance. Their diamonds are fashioned with our tears—and the poppies that our fingers weave for their garlands are less red than our weary eyes and our tattered hearts!"

#

"We with our hoary heads, our trembling knees and feeble hands are the poor old people worn out by work and thrown out now. For thirty or forty years, we did our social duty, striving in the common labor. As long as our lungs breathed strongly, as long as we could move our arms, as long as we stood up straight, even under the snow of ages, we boldly faced the fight every morning.

"Then when we grew old, they threw us out on the street. We are the shamed old people who kill themselves rather than hold out our hand—our calloused, scarred hands, not made for begging! We are the pitiful elders who drag their half-bare limbs, their worn-out shoes and their quiet, hopeless despair down the boulevards when the night owls go home. Sometimes one of us falls down and the few passers-by gather round. "He's drunk," someone says. But a voice replies, "No, he's hungry!" Unless they say, "He's dead!"

"We are the old workers without support, without help, without retirement, without a way out, good for the street when we no longer produce, less fortunate than the mangy dogs kept by their pitiful masters, less fortunate than broken down horses—whom they shoot, at least, whom they are kind enough to shoot when they are nothing but useless mouths!"

#

"Court of Miracles[5], more deplorable than in the past, wreckage of humanity, hideous bunch of all the deformities a creature can suffer—we are the crippled, maimed and mutilated in the great industrial battle. All the wheels have taken our skin; the teeth of the machines have chewed up our meat; the ground has drunk our blood. A few of us rest in the earth, above or below ground, in the mouth of the puddling furnace[6] or in the guts of mines, here and there. Every factory, every mill, every mine is a cemetery where we lie in pieces, arms here, legs there, not counting the eyes and teeth and all the skin and bones of our poor bodies.

[5] An area with no law and no rights called thus because disabilities and sicknesses would seem to disappear at night as if by a miracle. Most cities had such an area for the poor, unemployed and homeless. Paris had a dozen.

[6] Puddling was an old process for smelting iron and steel.

"While we moan in delirium during the amputation, our wives and children fast. We need savings while waiting for the outcome of the legal process. Savings! We don't have any. They know it and we have to compromise—because we have to eat!

"One thousand francs per hand or foot, that is to say per tool for eating or walking—that's well paid. And we accept it, even if it we hold it out to passers-by later on, like a blind man's spaniel with a begging bowl between its teeth."

#

"We are the strong young men, full of energy and courage. We ask for nothing but work. So much energy circulates in our veins and so much goodwill swells our breasts that it would serve our employers well. But no one wants us. We have knocked on all the doors in vain. In vain, almost begging, we have asked for work, running around day and night all over the place without ever giving up. They turn us down everywhere.

"Hey! What! Such a thing is possible? That boy in good shape, determined and brave, can't get hired? And then we starve. It gnaws at our bellies like a wolf. We're hungry and we have no more place to stay, no more clothes, no more hope! Why were we put on this earth if we have no right to live, when *they* have everything and we have nothing—not even the right to use our strength? But we are stronger and more numerous—and if we wanted…"

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The Governments

"Listen, free citizens, it is time for you to be free of the old beliefs that have deluded you for so long. The priests lied to you about the eternal soul. They lied to you when they promised you a better and sweeter life that would amend the iniquities of this one. Lies! Abominable lies! Born out of nothing, Man will return to nothing. He has nothing to hope for except from himself. He will taste no joys except for those he can offer himself here and now…Matter is everything. Matter is God!"

And then?

Coffee Grinders

Coffee Grinders[7]

This is what they call the Criminal Court nowadays at the Palace of Justice: the jurisdiction that crushes, that "grinds", in the blink of an eye, without stopping, in a continual, monotonous movement, the honor and future of the poor.

Whoever comes out of here—except for the very rare acquittals—comes out scarred not on their shoulders but on their criminal record with the mark of suspect. Sometimes just minor offenses, often insignificant in the eyes of philosophers, but mortifying to honest people. In small towns or in the countryside, the man "who has a record" is treated like a pariah and has to starve to death or suffer the most humiliating exploitation.

I know farmers who pretend to be philanthropists and hire only ex-convicts—they cost less! An unblemished citizen who is out of work with a family to feed and happens to knock at these doors and offer his services will be ruthlessly booted out. Because although he is poor, he would have the right to normal pay and could argue over lower wages or accept it only temporarily to go and find work elsewhere. Whereas the others! They are forced to accept whatever is offered,

[7] From En Marche, 1896.

under any and all conditions: being down and out they can be shaped and worked at will since they have only one choice: submission or death.

Or they might hide their past and manage to get hired. Then, denounced by some friend or recognized by someone from the trial or from prison or maybe wagging their tongue too much some Sunday night at the bar, they are fired on the spot, ruthlessly. The master draws his gun if yesterday's servant makes a move to come back; the lady of the house, like a frightened hen, gathers the children around her; the maid throws his bag into the dirt and gives it a snide little kick.

He is lower than the dog who comes running up to rub against the man's leg, the man who never beat him and sometimes gave him scraps of bread. But he is an animal…

Go on, bum, pick up your sack and get back on the road where no one trusts you, Ashaverus[8] of poverty and labor! One day here and one day there, you will find work to earn your living—but calm, steady work is not for you.

When you pass by, the girls will run back inside and lock the doors, the men will look upon you with hostility, the police will threaten… Being the stranger you will be the enemy! For ten leagues around not a single millstone will burn, not a single coin will disappear, not a single chicken will wander off from the henhouse without them blaming you. You will be lucky if no crime gets committed because without proof, without evidence, just by the look of things, Pandora will slap her suede-gloved hand on your ragged collar.

And it will be like this ALWAYS—until the day your carcass, with no more breath in it, rolls into some ditch. Unless you become too exhausted and take off your belt to escape, hanging it from some branch and slipping it around your neck… and take refuge in eternity!

#

But what did this being do to deserve such a destiny? Often nothing—or very little.

Just as the whole fruit is contained in the pip and the whole tree in the seed, so all of existence is contained in its origin, in its unconscious and *innocent* beginnings. I emphasize this last adjective on purpose because even though the Church has determined maturity to start at seven years of age for the ideal notion of good and evil and the psychological conception of free will, nevertheless we know very well that for social relations, regarding rights and civil duties, we have to triple the age at least. He whom the law does not recognize as fit to vote, get married and be a soldier, has he not yet fully developed his intellect or physical abilities? He could not, therefore, take full responsibility… so why does the independence of a minor only apply to the penal colony and the scaffold?

The current social system creates wild beasts against whom it then has to protect the weak. There are, I admit, 18-year old scoundrels who are hopelessly rotten and whom I wouldn't trust with a mutt off the street! But they are almost always marked, like an original stain, either by being abandoned by their parents or by being sentenced too heavily for some minor offense. At their first mistake their life falls apart and runs into the gutter.

The terrible thing is that the blasé judges don't see any malice here. Since the duty of the magistrate is to pass sentence, they pass sentences—very naturally, like an olive tree gives its olives and the medlar tree its medlars. They fulfill an artificial function with the ingenuity of a plant or a bush, very astonished that anyone could dispute their authority… and necessity! They are plainspoken and sincere—they are honorably wicked.

[8] The Wandering Jew.

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More than one of them will jump out of his chair at the sound of these two words so strangely coupled, which I write without anger, without passion, without the slightest hatred; but as an observer who has to pinch herself sometimes in certain courtrooms to make sure that she is really witnessing such a spectacle, that she isn't the victim of some antiquated nightmare as comical as it is cruel, some vision crawling back from the bygone days of Sesostris or Confucius[9]…

This implacable law that they appeal to; these articles of the Penal Code, mumbled out like Our Fathers in an incomprehensible blabber; these men either robed in black or robed in red; these guards with their golden tassels; and these prisoners with gray or brown faces, the color of the earth or of manure, escaped from the slave chains whose fate is decided in the blink of an eye—maybe ten grains of sand through the bottleneck—all this, yes, falls under archeology more than history, dream more than reality, the past more than the present!

A great curiosity, mocking some and pitying others, a profound amazement… that is all that this machinery, this ceremonial, the very principle of which they are the accessory, inspires in the attentive thinker!

And this is confirmed nowhere as much as in the court of misdemeanors. In serious crimes the thought of the victims, of their spilled blood and the suffering they endured, troubles the listener's indifference. A little primitive savagery, of Talion and Lynch[10], makes the blood boil. Humanity, in showing its least noble aspect, awakens in the heart of the onlooker.

Here in the "Coffee Grinder" it is completely different. No fury, no frenzy makes their souls quiver. Reason is not impassioned either for or against. The battle instinct lies dormant. We see higher and farther. And the stakes, although they seem less important to superficial people, look far more important to me—like some trivial death next to life!

For, the blade of justice falls as the first sentencing for these hardly guilty opens onto the desolate horizon where they will be penned up forever. The death of a leper leaves me indifferent, sometimes relieved—what fills me with anguish is the moment of contagion, the instant when a healthy being gets the sickness. Now, the hotbed of the epidemic is the Correctional Court. To punish a man for having no bread, for having no home, for holding out his hand, is an abominable act! Just like for some childish thing, swiping some fruit or talking back to a police officer, it is a terrible thing to stigmatize indelibly the future of an adolescent.

They sentence them in a hurry, files flipped through, cases flippantly recited. And other judges, afterwards, armed with this sentence make it the basis for even stricter sentences…

Oh how right Banville[11] was: "For the poor everything is grief and misery!"

[9] Sesostris ancient king of Egypt in the second millennium BCE and Confucius (551-479 BCE) the famous Chinese philosopher.

[10] The Lex Talionis and the Lynch Law, i.e. an eye for an eye and hang 'em high.

[11] Théodore de Banville (1823-1891), French writer.

12 Pope Leo XIII

The crisis of conscience that Séverine faced in 1892 over the rising tide of "terrorist" attacks, both by the militant revolutionaries and by the authorities, was coupled with another more personal crisis, a mystical crisis that would haunt her for years to come. We can sometimes feel mystical accents peeking through her writings, but they never strained her morality, which always came from her conscience and not from any ideas handed down by acceptable society. How could they when she was openly having an affair with Labruyère while still married to Adrien Guebhard? For Séverine everyone had the right to live according to their own beliefs and so she always fought fiercely against fanaticism, both religious and political, sometimes even more fiercely when it came from within her own camp. But her fight was never against any one dogma or party—it was against all intolerance and injustice, regardless of social standing, religion, nationality or gender.

At the end of the 19th century, anti-Semitism was a growing problem that was about to explode in the famous Dreyfus Affair[1] and that would mutate, as we all know, into the hideous monster of Nazism in the 20th century. The campaign that was spreading in France in the 1890s was already a deep concern. Pope Leo XIII had apparently condemned this developing anti-Semitism in his *Encyclical* of May 15 1891, ch. III, which stipulates: *All the goods of nature, all the treasures of grace belong in common and indistinctly to the entire human race.* Although his predecessor, Puis IX, in his *Syllabus errorum*, the Syllabus of Errors, in 1864 condemned the "errors" of secular society, notably democracy, socialism, modernism, the right to vote, freedom of religion and the separation of Church and State, Leo XIII came into office with more liberal social views. But while trying to reconcile the Church with the modern world and for the first time addressing issues of social inequality and labor, he still denounced socialism, anarchism, nihilism, communism and capitalism alike as societal evils. Some anarchists, like Kroptkin, back in 1879, had even advocated using propaganda by deed against him. Then Séverine got the crazy idea that she would interview the Pope to find out his opinion on anti-Semitism.

Now, Séverine never believed in God or the Church or life after death. Basically she was a socialist, if not an anarchist as many would have called her because her socialism was not limited by any party or school of philosophy. She fought in the ranks of the people, the poor. She was the voice of thousands of anonymous workers sweating their lives away trying to survive. She supported them always and never apologized for it, whoever might be standing in the ring when the bell sounded. And this rebel wanted to interview the Pope? *Le Figaro* was astonished when she asked them to finance the trip, but more so when she was accepted by the Vatican. After being the first Parisienne to descend into the mines on the day after an explosion, she was now the first "socialist" journalist to receive a private audience with the Pope. A sign of the times, perhaps, that they would choose this anti-establishment dissenter to explain to the French the encyclical *Rerum novarum* and the new social doctrine of the Church.

[1] See 17-19.

On July 15 1892, just a few days after Ravachol was executed, she headed to Rome in company with her aged mother. The interview took place on Sunday July 31, lasting an hour and ten minutes. It was published on August 4 and was a sensation. The readers of the special edition might have been struck with awe or dismay, depending on their sensibilities, but no one could deny Séverine's feat in bringing back these "very curious pages." Although Pope Leo XIII did not say much specifically about the plight of the poor, he did condemn anti-Semitism implicitly and clearly, in his denunciation of the race war. Furthermore, Séverine brought back from the Vatican a message of tolerance and mutual understanding that the Catholics were free to accept. As history would tell, however, the message was lost and the messenger decried.

The Pope and Anti-Semitism

The Pope and Anti-Semitism: Interview with Leo XIII[2]

Séverine is at this moment in Rome where she went on behalf of the *Le Figaro* to ask His Holiness Leo XIII what must be thought of the issue of anti-Semitism. The project, which seduced us with its originality and which we left, of course, all liberty to the author to develop, is well worthy of this very curious page here from the Sovereign Pontiff in the Vatican and his very interesting papal declarations.

Wired from Rome on August 3 1892.

Since anti-Semitism claims to be orthodox and tends to present itself if not inspired by, at least emanating from the Church, it seemed to me terribly interesting to go to consult the supreme head of the Church, he who blames and forgives, the incontestable pilot of Catholic conscience.

I did not go to ask the Holy Father to make a pronouncement—the Pope's political situation would forbid him this, as it does from every debate where his *veto* is not immediately necessary and from every intercession that might raise arguments or polemics and upset such and such power or such and such party beyond strictly technical questions on points of dogma or matters of faith. In a word, I was not trying to know what Leo XIII condemned… only what he did not endorse.

And there, right up front, is a casuistry that I am not used to. I usually prefer clarity to such subtle distinctions—but such is the way at the Court of Rome!

Everything here proceeds in halftones, barely revealed nuances and gradations, rarely surpassing the midpoint on the scale rising toward intensity. At the Vatican, just as in the dark rooms where everyone walks with muted footsteps and talks in muffled voices, so too everyone thinks in whispers. Steps slow down and eagerness folds its wings, voluntarily, forcing itself to develop within the narrow framework of the ecclesiastical domain.

Hence, thundering radiance, soaring wonder, when there is an exception to the rule, a rupture of this reserve, a decisive action—it is done with repressed excitement, with restrained flight. Therefore, you must read between the lines, listen between the words…

I would be ashamed, I would consider it disgraceful and disloyal to attribute to the Holy Father a single word that was not absolutely exact or even to add to what he was pleased to answer. So, if he did not even once say to me, "I condemn", but ten times in one hour said, "I do not approve," I leave it to the Catholics to conclude what they want from this attitude.

[2] *Le Figaro*, August 4 1892.

For my part, beyond and despite my own opinions—maybe exactly because of them—I respect everything grand, even if it is opposed to my ideals or differs from them in a few points. And I would rather lose the best arguments in the world than give grief to those of this throneless king, this old man who is so touching and august, incapable of anathema, raising his right hand only to bless, absolve and spread the divine indulgence over all creatures, whatever their race, whatever their religion!

#

A brief parenthesis is called for here that will seem pointless to those who know me, but I still have to add, seeing fairly easily what kind of anti-Semite response will follow—after yesterday's slander will come tomorrow's slander.

Although I belong to the "cheap press" according to some sectarians and although I am—as everyone knows!—"corrupted" by rue Laffitte[3], I will be cynical enough to state that I have undertaken this of my own accord. I have not written this article "to order." It was my project, as I sometimes have ideas that are my own and that I carry out because it pleases me… for the love of the art!

I allowed myself the unheard of luxury of taking mercy on the Jews without getting paid—the clarification of the term does not frighten me—by the Israelites… my socialism is not hung up on questions of belief or origins, its only enemy is the Grabber, yid or goy. He steals from the poor… that's good enough for me!

And I am with all the poor: lamentable Hebrews wandering in the steppes, crossing Europe on foot, like beasts of burden dragging their carts on which their elderly sick are piled; their children and some rags escaped from disaster, battered and broken down in the court of the Chief Rabbi of Paris, completely exhausted, staggering and starved—poor wretches plundered by the Catholic financiers over there like the farmers and workers of Christendom are plundered by their wealthy coreligionists here.

How can we talk about a race war or a religious war?

"I'm hungry," says the poor man.

And an echo, broken and strained, but still haughty, answers from the Vatican: "All the goods of nature, all the treasures of grace belong in common and indistinctly to all of mankind" (Encyclical of May 15 1891, chapter III).

#

I arrived here without references and without support. I had no ally but my stubborn will and a letter from a comrade for a high dignitary of the Holy See. But I believe in that magnetism that works across distance and time, that shortens the one and removes the other, under the influence of an ardent will that impregnates the atmosphere between the goal and the effort, that brings them together, inevitably, without which we have nothing to do but hypnotize our dreams…

And here I am sitting in one of the rooms in the Vatican, lost in the huge space, me with my black dress, my black veil, my gloveless hands and not even the humblest jewelry, just like all the devout who come here only to satisfy their pious curiosity. Their hearts, certainly, are not beating as fast as mine—and yet God knows how calm it would be if my job happened to send me into the palace of any monarch. I know what scepters are worth and what crowns weigh under the heavy fist of the crowd or the light finger of destiny.

[3] Off Boulevard des Italiens in the 9th arrondisement in Paris.

But the Pope! All the memories of my pious little childhood rise up like a flock of sparrows out of the grass in the cemetery. Just yesterday didn't I say to the cleric who was explaining to me the ceremonial triple greeting (one at the door, one in the middle of the room and one in front of the Holy Father's chair), "Like in the month of Mary[4], then?" recalling the time when I was on duty in the chapel, responsible for replacing the flowers and fomenting revolts—already!—between two *Aves*. He looked at me, pleasantly surprised, then with an indulgent nod, "Yes, like in the month of Mary."

It is my great fear to commit some blunder. Not that I am bringing an ounce pride or worried about not knowing proper etiquette, but because any negligence—on my part— might be taken as offensive arrogance and in very bad taste. Also, I keep repeating the formulas, like repeating the catechism before the recital… in days gone by.

How huge the Vatican is to get to this little area where the Pope is confined to live. And how high up it is! You have to climb the front steps, march down the monumental gallery, stared at by the Swiss Guard who are dressed like the Reiters[5] of Julius II, climb the marble staircase—three floors that are really like six—enter the Cortile San Damaso, climb three more floors, also twice as big, and walk through so many rooms that it makes your head spin and you end up seeing nothing. I only caught a fleeting glimpse of a marvelous tapestry: Christ greeting the sinner woman huddled at his feet, looking for a refuge against human cruelty…

All of a sudden, in the solitude and silence, I hear cannon fire, as discordant as a wrong note. It tells the Romans that it is noon. And then in answer, one after another, like old ladies scampering off to mass, all the clocks in the palace chime. There are loud ones and slow ones, lively and tired ones, little ones with shrill tones and big ones with contraltos. It is a familiar carillon with naïve grace.

Footsteps slide over the marble, which glistens like it was water; a barely audible whisper in that melodious idiom; a soutane bows and waits, then walks in front, bows lower at the threshold of the next room and is gone, as if he vanished into the wall…

It is my turn for the audience.

I enter and bow three times. A hand takes hold of mine and raises me up gently.

"Sit down, my daughter, and welcome…"

#

Very pale, very straight, very thin, not very much to be seen of the earthly matter in that sheath of white cloth, the Holy Father sits at the end of the room in a huge armchair backed against a shelf with a dolorous Christ atop.

The light coming from the front falls perpendicular on the admirable face, drawing out the planes, the modeled sharpness, the "primitive" structure in the pictorial sense of the word, invigorated, animated, galvanized so to speak by such a young, vibrant soul so combative for the good, so understanding of moral miseries, so sympathetic to physical suffering that his gaze is as stunning as a miraculous dawn rising over a sunset.

The incomparable portrait by Chartran[6] can only give a hint of the intensity of his gaze. But still there is a rather splendid brilliance and all the crimson that blazes behind the snow-white soutane puts a glow in his cheeks, a sparkle in his eyes that mellows in reality. To express my

[4] The month of May in the Catholic Church is consecrated to the Virgin Mary.

[5] Cavalry formed in the 16th century and widely used in religious wars.

[6] Théobald Chartran (1849-1907), French painter whose portraits included such famous figures as Sarah Bernhardt and Theodore Roosevelt and whose caricatures appeared in *Vanity Fair*.

impression I would say that I found the Pope "more white", with a radiance more intimate and more moving; less the sovereign and more the apostle—almost the elder. A tender, timid bounty, it would seem, lurks in his frown and is only betrayed in his smile. At the same time, his long, sturdy nose reveals the will, the inflexible will—*that knows how to wait*!

Leo XIII is like one of those models of Le Pérugin[7] and like all those portraits of patrons that we see in the paintings of sanctity in the windows of ancient cathedrals, kneeling, in profile, dressed in wool, with elongated fingers humbly clasped together, at the apotheosis, the nativity, the triumph of the holy and the glory of God.

He also seems to me to incarnate the coat of arms of his family, the blazon of Pecci, with his slim, stately stature like a pine fir that stands like an "I" against the blue sky and beneath his eyelids that morning-star brightness, harbinger of the dawn, fluttering at the summit of the grand heraldic tree.

But what attracts and holds your attention almost as much as his face are his hands, long, slender, diaphanous hands whose purity of design is incomparable. Hands that, with their agate nails, look like they belong to a precious ivory ex-voto brought out of its case for some celebration.

His voice sounds like it comes from a distance, exiled by use in prayer, more accustomed to rise toward heaven than to fall upon us. And yet in conversation it comes back with an occasional reminder of that more serious tone that cuts off its Gregorian chant. Then a trifle, a local accent spices his remarks with a peculiar, national flavor. Although the pontiff expresses himself very correctly, very eloquently in French, that ultimate Italian exclamation "Ecco!" (There you are!) keeps popping up; he slaps out these two syllables like a little whip that spurs on or turns aside the conversation. And then his gentle words start to take off, stray, go wherever the Holy Father wants to go.

#

I follow him respectfully, keeping in mind as we go the answers he wants to give me, prompting them with brief questions when I can, noticing how much his thought, always with an evangelical essence, willingly dons the Latin peplos to be translated into harmonious, rhythmic sentences, revealing the thoughtful and erudite man of letters.

When I spoke of Jesus pardoning his executioners, alleging their ignorance as an excuse for their savageness, when I asked if, above all, it was not a Christian duty to imitate his example:

"Christ," Leo XIII says, "spilled his blood for *all men*, without exception; and even in preference for those who do not believe in him and persist in this ignorance and so need to be redeemed all the more. For them he left a mission to his Church: lead them to the truth…"

"By persuasion or persecution, Holy Father?"

"By persuasion!" the Pontiff answers ardently. "The work of the Church is only kindness and fraternity. It is error that it must get hold of and strive to bring down. But any violence to people is contrary to the will of God, to his teachings, to the character that I have donned, to the power that I have at my disposal."

"So, the religious war?"

"The two words do not go together!" And the hand that wears the episcopal ring makes a categorical gesture.

"There remains, Holy Father, the race war…"

[7] Pietro Perugino (1450-1523) was an Italian Renaissance artist famous for his religious paintings.

"What races? All of them came from Adam, whom God created. What does it matter if individuals, depending on their latitudes, do not have the same skin color or do not look the same seeing that their souls have the same essence, imbued with the same ray? If we send missionaries among the infidels, heretics and savages, it is because all humans, all of them, you understand, are God's creatures! There are some that are fortunate enough to have the faith and others to whom it is our duty to give it, that's all! They are equal before the Lord since their existence is the work of his common will."

Then the pontiff adds, "Even when there was a Ghetto in Rome, our priests went everywhere there, talking with the Israelites, doing their utmost to know their needs, taking care of their sick, striving to inspire enough trust to discuss the texts and finally to convert them!"

"And when the people wanted to massacre the Jews?"

"The Jews put themselves under the protection of the Pope… and the Pope spread his protection over them!"

#

"Except," the Holy Father resumes, "if the Church is an indulgent mother with ever-open arms for those who come to it just like for those who come back, it does not follow that the impious who refuse it should be its favorites. It is not angry with them; they are its sorrow, its wound, but it keeps its preference for the faithful who console it, who are its pious and fervent sons. So, in the end, if the Church has a mission to defend the weak, it also has a mission to defend itself against every effort to oppress her. And now after so many other plagues, the reign of money has come…"

The successor to Saint Peter straightens up his stiff chest even more and with a sudden hardness in his eyes says, "They want to conquer the Church and rule the people with money! Neither the Church nor the people will let them do it!"

"So, Holy Father, the grand Jews?"

Under the veil of his eyelids the sparkle has gone. And suddenly fading his voice responds, "I am with the simple, the humble, the dispossessed, those whom Our Lord loved…"

I understand that this subject is closed and I do not press it. Moreover, now Leo XIII is talking about France, about the deep feelings he has for it, about his desire to see it prosper under whatever government it chooses. Then all of a sudden, out of nowhere, with a little mischief in the corners of his mouth and in his eyes, "And your people, what do they think of the Pope? Are they happy with him?"

"Holy Father…" Because I do not know what to say, truthfully.

He sees my confusion and with good-heartedness, rubbing his hands, "Come, come, don't be afraid."

I build up my courage and say, "Holy Father, would you allow me to use a very brazen word toward you?"

"Go on, go on!"

"Well, although the monarchists are upset with the Pope, the republicans in the government loathe him… it's a 'competition'!"

The word is greeted with a little laugh, very hushed, very discreet. "And the socialists?"

"For the socialists in the government, the leaders, more competition."

"And the people?"

"The people? I never allow myself to speak in their name. They are rather undecided, I believe,

a little distrustful… they've been deceived so often! But still, a Pope who cared for them… and suppressed the cardinals would surprise them!"

The long pale hands made a satisfied gesture. Then, smiling, "However, I do not want to be king of France! (sic)"

#

Now, as I dare not interrupt him, his thin voice, alone, breaks the silence. "So when will they all understand that the Church does not want and has nothing to do with politics, that it listens and stays outside, keeps well away from it? My master said: My kingdom is not of this earth. Therefore, mine is not either! I aspire to the dominion of souls because I want their salvation, because I desire the kingdom of brotherhood among men, the repression of discord, the advent of holy peace, holy mercy! And nothing but this… only this!"

The tall, old man is almost standing up and his eyes, even more luminous, are shaded in mist. He stays quiet. So, very quickly, almost in a whisper, pleased as I was to hear something good about France, in this city officially full of other tendencies, I say, "Holy Father, you know Abbot Jacot[8], that renegade from Alsace-Lorraine, who preaches to our people over there, your spokesperson? Is it true? Do you approve of what he does?"

"I find it regrettable," the pontiff answers solemnly. "I love France. I am always looking toward it when I speak from the depths of these rooms where I have wandered for fifteen years… without ever leaving!"

"Without ever leaving!" he repeats melancholically, this captive without straw or dungeon, this prisoner of his lonely dignity, but more shackled by his invisible bonds than by heavy chains of iron.

I bow to take my leave. The long pale hand poses gently on my forehead: "Go, my child, and may God watch over you!"

How I Interviewed the Pope

How I Interviewed the Pope[9]

Hey, come on! All this noise for such a simple thing? So much excitement because the vicar of Christ, imitating his Master, allowed a visit from if not his little children at least one whose thoughts (a naïve flock) timidly approach everyone's Father, the white Pastor of Christianity?

And so much anger, too, against both the Sovereign Pontiff who trampled etiquette under the heel of his mule and dared to revive the serene, evangelical tradition, and against this newspaper "that is not a sanctuary", has bitterly invaded the neighboring sacristies—and against me, as well, a humble woman who was doing her job conscientiously and not really expecting any attack to come from what she did.

I had not taken into account the "professionals", more papist than the Pope; those for whom he is less a chief than a commodity; who allow him to be understood by no one but themselves or do not allow him to voice any opinion that contradicts theirs—an opinion so reduced, so faded, so shrunk, so made in their image when it reaches the public that he does not turn his head to listen or see, being apathetic to such a pale reflection and weak echo.

[8] Auguste Jacot (1845-1919), germanophile priest awarded the Order of the Red Eagle by Wilhelm II in September 1892.

[9] *Le Figaro*, August 9 1892.

Leo XIII is the prisoner only of his enemies!

And some of those who call themselves his servants really seem to be bent on perpetuating the antagonism that saddens him, on veiling him in shadow, on forbidding him any relation with the crowd of people who look up to him and reach out to him. Their intolerance mounts a jealous guard around him whom their mission is to defend and not to isolate.

They prefer, it seems, the Pope to be unknown instead of popular, remote instead of revealed. Their selfishness adapts to what their duty should want to see abolished—like the judges whom the end of crime, the return of the Golden Age would put out of work in a new society and so they acclimate themselves to it.

Of course, in this criticism I do not mean to include the whole Catholic press, a part of which, in this present case, has been extremely courteous and absolutely loyal. But it is impossible not to be alarmed at seeing the devious resentment that some piously restrained papers show because I spoke of Leo XIII with respect and sympathy in a popular newspaper and because I gave a portrait of him that I certainly believe true and might even bring him closer to people.

Insulted rather than praised—that seems to be the watchword of these strange papal partisans. And then the almost imperceptible campaign begins, quite petty in any case, of innuendoes, hesitations, hints and insinuations.

How can you not say that I lied; maybe I "amplified", mistranslated, altered… Or maybe it was the telegraph transmission… And while some declare that they will forget about the Pope for the anti-Semite proscription if he does not want to make one, others criticize Saint Peter's Bankroll—asserting that he is the product of huge donations even though one just has to look at the parish accounts to see how rare are the big offerings but how frequent the little coins—while the "faithful" of the Holy Father reprimand him, I naturally have my role in their bad mood and my account of little offenses.

#

I was not troubled any more than was reasonable.

Certainly when I undertake and especially when I succeed in some difficult task, let's even say unusual given the goal of my trip and the nature of my opinions, I have to figure on rampant spite. I put myself at risk and it is only fair. I do not know how, without falling into ridicule, to not suffer it with good grace.

When the *Spectator*, in a brilliant column, full of Attic style, conjures up the risqué aspect of my move—I'm the first one to smile and marvel at these fireworks, even if my seriousness feels a little burned. When Messieurs Pichon, Pelletan and Lepelletier, the lay trinity, unleash or declare anathema on my impertinent head, the cheeky Sicambrian[10], I almost feel cheerful. Messieur de Kerohant attacks me by treating me as a libertarian, which is pretty nasty when I am only defending, isolated and alone, and sometimes taking sides with its ides, Free Thought! And when the *Triboulet* says that I am burning to pour petrol in the cellars—I who forgive all excess for which poverty is both the cause and the absolution but do not allow myself, even for this, to commit any—I admit I remain indifferent to its fantasy.

All this, or nearly all, remains in the domain of judgment. If it is fair, so much the better! If it is unfair, so much the worse! But when we enter the domain of facts, it is something else.

And although I prefer to stay calm and cool, now I have to drop it. Point by point I am going to respond very clearly.

[10] Ancient Germanic peoples who became Franks, the Celtic ancestors of the French.

#

I did not arrive in Rome with "letters of recommendation." Only one reference had been sent from Paris at the same time that I requested a *justifiable* audience, which I addressed to His Eminence Cardinal Rampolla, as follows:

July 9 1892

Monseigneur,

I would like to request, through your intercession, a private audience with His Holiness.

Who am I? My name will mean something to you. It is that of a servant of the poor following your law; of a woman who was Christian and remembers it to love the children and defend the weak; of a socialist who, although not in a state of grace, has kept intact in her wounded soul a deep respect for the faith and veneration of the august elders and captive sovereignty.

The pen that is writing to you, accustomed to other defenses, has more than once, even against its political coreligionists, dared to affirm its independent admiration for His Holiness' concern for the disinherited of this world.

It is this Vatican policy, so true to Christ's spirit, so encouraging for those who dream of fraternity, so Christian in the most sublime aspect of the word, that has suggested to me the idea of coming to Saint Peter's successor to attempt what no Catholic has dreamt of doing—and the audacity to write to Your Eminence.

I am sent by the *Figaro*, accredited by Monsieur Magnard, its editor-in-chief, to request His Holiness to make a statement on the question that is again threatening to divide men, to sow discord and hatred among them, to spill blood in fratricidal battles.

I would like His Holiness to deign to make a statement on anti-Semitism, convinced as I am that after He has spoken there will be no more Christians to rebel against His view.

Finally I desire personally, if it is possible, to make a favorable portrait of Leo XIII in writing as my compatriot Monsieur Chartran did in painting.

I pray to Your Eminence that my wish be granted; my fate is in your hands.

With all due respect, etc.

Séverine

And here is the response:

Madame,

I received your letter of this past 9th and showed it to the Holy Father. His Holiness sees no difficulty in accepting a private audience with you, as soon as you will let Him know, through my intercession, when you will arrive so that He can accommodate your wishes. It is important, therefore, that you inform my of your arrival so that I can organize the audience that is the purpose of the your trip.

Meanwhile, I will take this opportunity to assure you of my respectful sentiments.

Cardinal Rampolla.

Rome July 15 1892

So, I got on the road, not absolutely certain of success but with some reason to hope and wishing it with all my heart, not for my ego but to do something beautiful and good—if possible!

I was not "received in a simple audience like the Pope grants all pilgrims." I had not come on a pilgrimage. I was sent by the *Figaro* with a specific goal and that was how I saw the Holy Father. One detail alone will suffice to show the significance of this reception: I entered the room where Leo XIII was present at 12:15 and I left at 1:25—after an hour and ten minute interview.

Finally, my visit took place on Sunday, July 31. I used the rest of the day to write down my impressions right away because I feared the shadow of error and worried about any false interpretation… I would say a false intonation! And the following Monday at 11 o'clock sharp I gave to Monseigneur Rampolla—the head of Christianity after the Pope—my entire article concerning Him, portrait and interview, from the words "Very pale, very straight, very thin…" all the way to my signature.

The minister of State asked me remove four lines of personal judgment of the kind that might raise difficulties for the Holy See. I did so voluntarily. And the copy that left the Vatican that day is such as appeared here without a syllable—I swear to it—being changed.

This is my response to the scandalized members of the Catholic press, to the Pharisees who prefer to deny rather than to believe and who would recrucify Jesus for being improper if he came back to us in his poor robe of whiten linen, barefoot on the rocky road, bowing down to the poor, consoling the afflicted…

They make your gentle benediction, Holy Father, heavy to bear and your effect on souls they would snatch away—unless we remember you!

Secrets of the Salon

The Secrets of the Salon[11]
My main character trait… To love well—To hate well
The quality I prefer in a man… Loyalty
The quality I prefer in a woman… Kindness
My favorite quality… Will
My main fault… Excess
My favorite occupation… My work
My dream of happiness… Food and joy for everyone
What would be my greatest unhappiness… To survive the ones I love
What I would like to be… A peasant woman with faith
The country where I would like to live… Where it is always sunny!
My favorite color… Red
My favorite flower… Chrysanthemum
My favorite animal… Dog
My favorite bird… Chaffinch
My favorite authors in prose… Lamennais, Vallès, Zola
My favorite poets… Hugo, Baudelaire
My favorite painters… Il Sodoma, Corot, Renoir, Claude Monet
My favorite composers… Wagner
My heroes in fiction… Don Quixote et those who sacrifice themselves
My heroines in fiction… Those who love
My favorite heroes in real life… The anonymous
My favorite heroines in real life… Mary Magdalene and Joan of Arc
My favorite food and drink… Bread and water
My favorite names… Those of ordinary people

[11] *Revue Illustrée*, December 15 1892.

What I hate the most… Cowardice
Historical persons whom I despise the most… X… et Judas!
The military feat I admire the most… The defense of Numantia
The reform I value the most… None
The gift of nature that I would like to have… Persuasion
How I would like to die… Usefully
My present state of mind… Ready
Faults that make me most indulgent… The crimes of poverty
My motto… Credo! (I believe!)

13 Sugar Strikes and Bullfights

They accused Séverine of causing the death of Max Lebaudy on December 24 1895. Her battle with him had started with the Sugar Strike and continued with the corridas before ending in the scandal that resulted in his death.

Max Lebaudy was the son of a rich industrial sugar producer who had inherited a vast fortune. He was called "The Little Sugar King" and in the words of Ernest Vizetelly[1] "an imbecile son who wandered about the world calling himself Emperor of the Sahara." He was a player, a ladies' man, a vain and idle fop with a passion for horse racing, gambling and girls, but his 27 million F was acquired off the backs of the "casseuses de sucre", the sugar crackers.

From 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. at the factories of Lebaudy, Sommier or Lucas women packed sugar into crates that they then hauled to the scales to weigh. Forty trips and a thousand kilos a day. Exhausting, painful and sometimes deadly work. The women had their stomachs, lungs, fingernails and teeth eaten away by the corrosive dust. For their labor they received 60 centimes per 100 kilos. In September 1892 the sugar producers announced a lowering of the salary by 10 centimes per 100 kilos. Take it or leave it. The workers refused to take it and went on strike. The factories got to work hiring scabs, which were never wanting in those times of poverty and unemployment. Lower wages made it impossible for the workers to live, but the politicians refused to take an interest in the matter and without the privilege of voting, the women were left to fend for themselves.

At the same time, a brand new paper, *Le Journal*, was coming out and its editor, Ferdinand Xau, had asked for Séverine's collaboration to guarantee its success. It was the perfect opportunity. She decided to play the scab. Just being a witness, as she was in the mines, was not enough for her. She wanted to live what she was describing, to feel what the workers felt, to identify with her subject. So, she decided to go down to rue de Flandres, disguise herself as a worker and get hired into the factory. Unfortunately when she got there, the quota was full and they were hiring no more for the day. That did not discourage her, however, and she found another way into the factory life, which she described in her article "The Sugar Crackers."

A couple of years after the sugar strike, Séverine ran up against Max Lebaudy once again. His latest fantasy was bullfighting, which was becoming more and more popular in France despite it being illegal. On his property of Maisons-Laffitte where he already had a private racetrack, he decided to build an arena. Dressed up as a toreador he presided over the death of bulls and horses in his *corrida del muerto*. Now, Séverine had been campaigning against bullfighting for years and here was another opportunity not only to denounce the barbarous "sport", but also to strike out at the "cruel and evil little boy," the "Spanish tripe-seller," as she called him. However, Lebaudy had money and influence but even George Labruyère's attempts to dissuade her went unheeded.

Back in 1890 Séverine's love of animals had led her into a merciless campaign against bullfighting in the arena on rue Pergolèse in Paris, which had been built the year before. Her attacks

[1] Paris and Her People Under the Third Republic, 1919.

against the horrors of bullfighting earned her the malice and rancor of many people, but she never threw down her weapons. As she admitted, "I love the poor first; then animals; and people after." Later that year in 1890 they forbid the killing of bulls during the spectacles. Without the bloodletting the public soon abandoned the bleachers and the arena closed its doors in 1893.

For two years, from 1890-1892, Séverine wrote articles for *Le Rappel* that were almost completely limited to her campaign against bullfighting. But this was not her only fight for animals' right to well-being. Back in 1888 she revolted against Lozé, the Paris prefect, who declared war on stray dogs; she would stop and chide coachmen who abused their horses; she herself adopted animals off the street: Tiote and Mégot, then Sac à Tout coming off Boulevard Montmartre joined Rip to make four dogs to accompany her along with Coco Bleu the parrot and a one-eyed cat. Her ceaseless fight for animal rights was rewarded in 1900 with the Prix Blouet by the Society for the Protection of Animals.

So, the world is like a vast corrida that people get drunk on and they will pay to watch the slaughter even if it is illegal. But no matter how rich and influential you may be, you are not above the law. Or so she thought when she started a violent campaign against the little sugar king who was shirking his military obligations—a little war that grew into one of the great scandals of the day was on. The eccentric wastrel claimed to be ill in order to finagle his way out of mandatory military duty. When he boasted of buying off the doctors, Séverine went on the warpath, reviling his avoidance of the blood tax, which was an insult to all the men dying, justly or not, on the African savannas, in the mountains of Madagascar and in the rice fields of Tonkin. Lebaudy answered by paying off the press, handshakes for some, shaking fists for others; he used all his influence against her and it worked. Instead of congratulating her courage in defying him, they criticized her.

However, as a result of all the clamor, the authorities decided enough was enough and they put him in the military hospital at Amélie-les-Bains in the eastern Pyrenees where soldiers returning from Madagascar were housed. The first thing he did was to finance a velodrome so he could ride his bicycle every day, a special treatment for his special case of tuberculosis, which the doctors at first could not detect. The real sickness came on suddenly, perhaps contracted from a real patient and he died on Christmas Eve 1895. His death, although it could not be put down to military service (more likely just the result of his fast living), turned him into a martyr. Séverine became his executioner. The press unleashed against her, holding her somehow responsible for his premature demise. In spite of all their slander and abuse, her conscience, however, was clear.

On the other hand, Georges Labruyère once again became a thorn in her side. In January 1896 he was arrested for blackmail: they accused him of taking up to 25,000 F to make Séverine lay off her offensive. He claimed that the proposition was made to him, but he refused it knowing perfectly well that not even he could pressure Séverine into doing anything against her will. Eventually he was acquitted for lack of evidence, but was he innocent? The truth would never be known, but this one final doubt, the last vestige of trust broken, spelled the end of their intimate relationship.

In the investigations that followed Lebaudy's death, it was his legal advisor Lionel Werther de Cesti who was found guilty of embezzling from his fortune, of substituting stolen samples of tuberculosis in the hospital and of paying off witnesses to disappear. He was sentenced to one year in prison and given a 500 F fine.

Séverine was cleared of all responsibility in Lebaudy's death, but despite the support of popular colleagues such as Octave Mirbeau her position as a journalist was damaged. She was both

respected and feared, but newspapers had to protect their resources, their funding, which often came through secret funds from the government or the magnates of industry, and she was a threat. She was a fire ship and no one ever knew where she would strike or what she would do next.

The Sugar Crackers

The Sugar Crackers (Notes of a Striker)[2]

To be a striker without having been a worker might, at first sight, seem rather paradoxical. But if I did not work at the factory, even for one day, it's the fault of the owners who did not hire me the day before yesterday.

I wanted to find out, technically, about the origin and goal of this strike; to know through experience rather than through hearsay the bitterness and dreariness of this job whose name has spiced up Paris; to realize, in the end, the vast amount of willpower, endurance and fatigue that a creature has to spend to earn just enough so as not to die—and then begin again the next day!

To go down there as a "lady", even if a friend, with pencil and notebook in hand, a female reporter among male reporters, was to risk, perhaps, finding out less about it than them—in any case, not to be able to do any more than them about it, to sit cooped up in the same circle of evolution, in the same order of ideas.

The task of a journalist is, unfortunately, an official task in such circumstances, which often smacks of sterility, though taking nothing away from its interest. Whatever the rank of the informer in the professional hierarchy, he is known, has to make himself known—hence, inferior. The two opposing parties tell him only what they want to tell him, let him see only what they want him to see.

Whereas the ideal would be to go incognito, anonymous, so much like everyone else that no one would suspect you; so assimilated to the crowd, so close to its heart that you feel it really beating, just by putting your hand on your own chest… a wave blending in with ocean, a breath mingling with the great human respiration.

Regarding questions of work, this seems to me to be especially useful. To describe the life of a worker is not enough—you must live it to really appreciate all the injustice and all the horror. Then you know what you are talking about; you are truly the echo of what you have heard, the reflection of what you have seen; to the marrow of your bones you are infused with pity and revolt!

To be "chic", with the best intentions, with the greatest talent in the world, will never give the impression of sincerity that an uncultured person sometimes can, crudely reproducing what they saw or did.

And there is no need to dedicate years, months or even weeks to this study, to these environs, to this ordeal, as long as it is not a matter of studying the intricacies of the job, of becoming good at earning one's wages—or of indoctrinating, like in Russia, unschooled souls. Our workers know how to think without guides: and the iniquities they suffer are so obvious (and, alas, so dreary) that a few hours are enough for anyone who knows how to watch and listen and record them.

That is what I did. For almost a day, mingling with these poor girls, dressed like them, I wandered around under the eyes of the cops in front of the deserted factory amongst the grim cama-

[2] *Le Journal*, September 28 1892.

raderie of the unusual idleness. I stood with them, I listened to their grievances given free rein, I entered the factories, saw the work of the girls who had submitted—having too many children or too hungry!—and that is why I can tell you today, with full knowledge, what this strike is about and how much it deserves your attention and sympathy.

#

First of all, the word is inappropriate: they should not be called "crackers" but "arrangers" because the job consists in stacking up the sugar in boxes or crates after being cut into different sizes depending on the number. Thus the sugar for coffee is number 50 while the *second*, squared off into cubes, is specially reserved for the Midi. Only the waste, in powder or slivers, is sold by weight and not lined up.

Except this term "cracker" is justified by the fact that the machine they work at is called a sugar-cutting machine, when the loaf comes in whole in order to be chopped up. First it passes through the "sawyer" which cuts it perpendicularly, exactly like a black radish, into more of less thick slices depending on the length of the piece meant for consumption. Then these slices are placed into the "bar cutter" at one end, at the head of the cutting machine, which, as the name indicates, separates each one into eight strips, into eight bars. The "bands", meaning the blades of the bar cutter, are spaced equally at more or less distance depending on the sugar number.

Here the worker comes into action. The "puller" takes the bars out of the machine; the "pusher" arranges them on the part of the sugar cutter between the bar cutter and a kind of jaw or double guillotine, one knife above, another below, which divides the bars into pieces as it goes through. Past all this are the "arrangers."

For, everything here is in motion. A chain rolling over a wheel, like a driving belt, continuously pushes the work from the machine to the women, leaving them not a minute of rest.

In order to understand what the sugar-cutting machine is, you have to imagine a very long table, around one meter [or three feet] wide with parallel grooves, like a music staff for the blind. The sugar passes between these rails—bars above the knives, pieces below—and the six arrangers, in constant motion, incessantly, mechanically as well, take a line, turn around, put it in the crate or box that is behind them on a kind of wooden bench, about-face and start all over again, always, eternally, from seven in the morning to six in the evening, without ever stopping, without ever resting, *without ever sitting down*, except for ten minutes for the snack and one hour for lunch.

Well, they do move. When their box is full, they have to carry it to the scales which is, at Monsieur Sommier's for example, twenty or twenty five meters [or yards] away. They make an average of forty trips a day. Pregnant women and little girls carry up to a thousand kilos [2,200 pounds]. Many of them are hurt; the sturdiest of them lose around two or three days of work every two weeks because of dizzy spells, exhaustion, aching sides, suffering in their maternity or their puberty.

#

I am only speaking here about their exertion because you have to resort to medical books, like I just did, to find out what illnesses are inherent to this gruesome state. They have no more nails and they have no more teeth: the former are worn down to the skin from handling the sugar and the latter are chipped, lost or eroded by the dust that it gives off—this dust that burns their eyes and throats, makes their voices hoarse and causes gastritis and tuberculosis—constant suffering and early death!

What do they earn? They earn 60 centimes per 100 kilos, which means, no matter how strong they are, between 3 fr 25 and 4 francs a day. They came to tell them about two weeks ago: "You'll only get 50 centimes per 100 kilos. Competition is too hard. Take it or leave it."

They left it. They left, preferring to starve to death quickly rather than die slowly. Because this would brought them down to ten sous [50 centimes, half a franc] a day—and do you realize what ten sous a day is for a working household?

They tried a general strike. The workers at the factories of Lebaudy, Lucas and François first followed the movement started at the Sommier refinery. Then they dropped it… went back. On their own the workers at Lucas, both men and women, sacrificed 15 centimes a day to come to the aide of the strikers at Sommier. But there are less than twenty of them—and the strikers are more than a hundred and forty!

Some help came from the right and from the left, sent by the plebian solidarity or the compassion of good folk who were touched, beyond all politics, by so much distress and so much courage. They could hand out thirty sous a day. And families of five, six people, lived on bread and water from it—but didn't give in!

#

I went to meet them, on Monday, at dawn, around 6 am, at the end of rue de Flandre. The day before three delegates had come to me to tell me what was happening. When I told them about my idea to spend a day there, to get hired if possible, they were very enthusiastic, a little skeptical, however, about how to pull it off. Nevertheless, the "secretary", Hélène Milani, a tall blonde girl, like a crane, with a determined look in her eyes, said to me, "See you tomorrow!" But she added, "You'll never be able to do it, Madame," which really stung me. I'm no weakling either and when I have a will to do something my will is strong.

So there I was arriving at one of their houses at the appointed hour. In no time at all I took off my gloves, veil, hat and coat and now bare-headed, my hair pulled back—that devilish hair refusing to stay in place—in a canvas blouse and skirt, a scarf on my shoulders, an apron around my waist and a basket in hand, looking so much like all of them that they went crazy with laughter.

We went down to rue de Flandre and made our way through to the big building of the Sommier refinery to find out if they were hiring. I slipped into the pack of turncoats, at the risk of being "seized" by the strikers whom I came to defend.

The street is full of police, with and without uniforms. I am only afraid of Granger, the député of the arrondissement, who is here with Lhermite from the labor exchange and my colleague Degay from the *Marseillaise*. All three of them came down here because the other day the police were really brutal and in case it happened again Granger's colors would fly. If he recognized me, he might yell something out in surprise, which would be the end of my incognito to come and go at pleasure and talk with my companions.

Gatherings are forbidden. When there are more than three and you do not move, the police come over. And since I am standing in front of the factory gate, scrutinizing every inch of it, staring at the watchman in his pretty blue uniform with metal buttons like an old soldier from the Imperial Guard, with his dreadful white whiskers, who seems rather flattered by my examination, a cop pushes me along gently, "Let's go, gorgeous! Move along! Can't stay here."

I obey and take refuge with many others in "our" office located almost right across from it at 122 in a wine shop that has a sign "Let's go to Charles' place."

I go to Charles' place. We file by the counter where a few workers and a bunch of snitches are drinking up and we gather in the back, in a kind of little hall, lit from above, half ballroom, half tennis court… like hundreds of others! Except, thank heavens, no one is ranting; they are simply discussing, matter-of-factly, what would be best to do in the common interest.

My status as a newcomer does not seem to bother them—one of the delegates, Madame Gasse, answers for me—and I notice again, with inexpressible emotion, that these scorned and exploited people have (especially the women) so much natural kindness, gentleness and resignation. No or few angry words, nothing but melancholy to see how difficult an agreement is and, in spite of everything, the hope that one will be found.

"We weren't asking for anything; just that they give us what was ours… Monsieur Sommier is not mean, he'll want to do it: he's so rich! It's a problem not to work when they don't do it."

In truth, these laborers are here like soulless bodies, even while in their barely healed fingers the hook of bone grabs the wool. On the little table are an inkwell, paper, a wooden box and a registry. From time to time a striker arrives, signs, gets her thirty sous—goes away clutching them in her hands like someone drowning and holding onto a branch. She does not stop, does not talk; she runs… they are waiting for her to eat!

Oh, the poor emaciated faces with anemic lips, almost no pink at all in their pale skin; the poor ringed eyes, the poor creatures!

One, in a corner, has opened her undershirt to breastfeed a little baby whose skin is so wrinkled and waxen that it looks like an old man. And the lean breast appears, a weapon speaking for the whole race that is hungry before it has teeth, that is hungry when it looses them—that is always hungry!

#

One of my guides comes to take me: "Break time! They're going to hire at François, rue Ricquer. Are you coming?"

I get up and follow her.

At François, for the ten-minute rest, the personnel rush out. Most of them are young (the others being dead or retired), many dressed in petticoats and light-colored, floral camisoles, handkerchiefs tied up as headscarves, tips flying in the wind, over their sugar-frosted hair. At first sight it is almost pretty in this bright September sun, like a rising of grisettes[3] in Porcherons[4]. But the illusion vanishes quickly among the gapped smiles, the chapped lips, the narrow shoulders, the sunken throats and all the dry little coughs that echo pretty much everywhere. What looked like color in the cheeks is really just fever. Gradually as the little beads of sweat dry on their temples, the color disappears from their cheeks. Then they turn as pale as faded dolls…

We amble through the courtyard. "Look, there's the Vésinet," my companion tells me. It is a dark basement where machines, human shapes, vaguely stand out.

"What is that?"

"That's where they work. But come upstairs, it's better."

In fact, at the top of a few stairs the room is bright, at least. But it is the same sweltering heat, the same steam, the same sugar dust that chokes and suffocates us. The sugar cutting machines are there and my companion gives me a lesson, showing me how the machine works and what I would have to do.

[3] Young, flirtatious, working-class women, sometimes referring to prostitutes.

[4] In the 9th arrondissement in Paris.

"Except," she tells me, "in the evening your fingers will be pissing blood." And she draws my attention to the women's hands wrapped in rags and strips.

The foreman arrives. My companion talks to him timidly, tells him what we want. Not looking at us, but still very polite, he answers, "I have my people for today. Come back tomorrow at 6 am and we'll hire you."

I put in my pocket the booklet printed for the occasion by my adopted sister and we leave, crossing the courtyard as the workers return. At the entrance a striker who had come to watch the defections yells at me, "Lazy girl, get going!"
Well, that, no!

#

Now I only have to try to get inside Sommier's to get a glimpse of the establishment.

"There's only one way: bring a liter to Barthélemy!"

I would love to bring a liter to Barthélemy, but they still have to explain to me how to do it.

"Here you go. Barthélemy is a tub carrier at the refinery underneath the place where we usually work. The tub carriers never leave; whatever they need is brought from outside until three in the morning. My husband brought him his breakfast, but we can still bring him a liter."

"How can I do it?"
"You go right past the watchman without saying a word. You go straight into the courtyard, go down some stairs and in the cellar are the tub carriers. Then you yell out, 'Hey, Barthélemy!' And you'll see how hard their job is, too, and how hot it is down there."

No sooner said than done. The plan was carried out to the letter. I strolled past the gateman and lickety split stumbled into the basement. At the entrance I got dizzy from the torrid heat. Men in canvas pants, no shirts, their chests and stomachs protected by a kind of leather-worker's apron, file by carrying huge copper containers that they empty, one after another, into the machine with the bread tins. That's molten sugar that they are carrying. You have to see their weary movements when they pour out their load and go back to get another from the metal vats! And those stupid painters who insist on portraying the Danaids when these creatures of flesh and blood right here are giving such a show of art. What a splendor! What a shame!

All around, like in a huge bombshell foundry, the tins are lined up against one another, point downward.

But I dare not yell out, "Hey, Barthélemy!" I ask for him.

"Don't know him," the first answers.

"Hold on," says another. "That's Andouille[5]!"

"Hey, Andouille!" The whole basement yells out together.

A tall, curly-haired young man who looks good-natured, comes out of the depths. "Who wants me?"
"It's your girlfriend bringing you a liter."

"That's not my girlfriend, but I still want my liter."

I hold it out to him, smiling. "It's from Eulalie."

"You tell her thanks a lot. And you, too, miss."

As I leave, I wander a little. I watch the pretty flow of the factory. I calculate what source of wealth lies in these buildings, these machines, this powerful organization of Capital.

[5] Numbskull or Goofy, for example.

And all of a sudden I think of a visit I once made a long time ago to the castle of Vaux-Fouquet[6], that royal residence of a royal superintendent, which is owned today by Monsieur Sommier. I think of the statues in the arbors, the fresh, woodland air, the marvelous shade, all that well-being, all that luxury, those pleasures of Maecenas, and rebuilding such a residence from its ruins.

These poor girls are right. It should be impossible for them to remain hard and implacable when they enjoy such comfort and satisfaction here on earth.

Outside the delegates come up to me. "We just made our last offer to the owner. Even when we split the difference, the two sous, giving 55 centimes, he didn't want to hear it."

A sob.

"What's wrong?"

"He was like ice… he talked to us so nastily!"

"And what was the reason for his refusal?"

"Monsieur Sommier just said that he couldn't do it, that he didn't have the means."

#

Weep, oh nymphs of Vaux, over your master's poverty. It makes many others weep, too, this poverty that gnaws away at wages to lodge it in his palaces and that can do nothing but make a bunch of young children and old mothers and weary women slowly perish in one of our working suburbs.

Blood

Blood[7]

Here is what a bullfight usually is:

Inside the arena walls is staked out with boards around two-meters high an even smaller circle so that a rather wide corridor runs between the normal arena and the edge of the new one, like two little jewel cases in a game of Japanese boxes.

In this corridor are the minor figures of the troupe, the valets of the torii or the toreros, characters who are meant to liven up the spectacle with their hoots and hollering. Here, also, is where the Escamillos[8] take refuge when the animal gets too close. They get a running start, jump first onto the narrow bench that encircles the interior and then take a dive, their feet waggling in the air, into the safe corridor. This somersault is very funny.

The arena is terribly vast, so vast that at the most dramatic moments—when the toreador's pants are about to be torn to shreds, for example—there are always, on the other side, some of his colleagues sitting calmly, chatting away, like on the terrace of a café in Puerta del Sol[9].

First in the arena is the *cuadrilla*: toreros, prima spade, etc., a dozen men very black, very wiry and quite puny-looking. They are smooth-faced, clean-shaven, like actors, but actors who have powdered themselves with coal; their upper bodies are buried under all the accouterments like petticoat accessories; they wear white pants that go down below their knees in the manner of schoolboys. And they wear stockings that are really pink, like the young ladies in the Revues

[6] Vaux-le-Vicomte.

[7] *Le Rappel*, May 14 1890.

[8] From the name of the toreador in Bizet's opera *Carmen*.

[9] In the heart of Madrid.

of tawdry cabarets. These men do not leave the arena from start to finish. They are the line of defense, the infantry.

#

The cavalry is represented by the *caballeros en plaza*, first of all: young men apparently from good families who have devoted their lives, their energy, their future, all the power of their hearts and minds to the destruction of bulls.

The spectacle begins with them. Two of them come in the parade in a gilded coach like Cinderella's pumpkin; then on beautiful horses that they twirl around this way and that before breaking into a sprint. These are the gentlemen who have the honor and joy of spilling the first drops of blood by sinking their banderillas into the animal's neck. The banderillas are very fragile staves decorated with paper, like kite tails, that are topped by an iron tip, about a finger long, very sharp, which are planted straight into the flesh like knife blades.

After them come the *picadores*, dressed like Mexican hacienderos, with their "Forts de la Halle" hats[10] and their iron greaves like King Francis I. They hold strong, very sharp pikes that stick well. When they come into the ring the Spanish public start to have fun. The animal's neck is hacked up; the living flesh is in pain, twitching, swelling, bruised. Blood flows over the rough, quivering skin.

The picadors ride poor, bony nags with no defense except their skin on bones, quivering in fear behind their blindfolds. Their chests are protected from the thrusting horns by an iron plate hanging around their necks like a priest's collar. But their flanks, bellies and crotches are bare.

#

Then there is the bull.

The bull is most often small, the size of a healthy calf. The tips of its horns are rounded off so that it cannot really defend itself and they can torture it at will without running too much risk. When it arrives, it is astonished or rather delighted to be out in the open air, and God knows how hard the whole *cuadrilla* has to strive to make it a little angry.

With the first wound comes surprise, a painful astonishment that they are hurting it for no reason at all. This is often translated into a melancholic bellowing, a call to some unknown stranger. And with many of them this astonishment lasts until the finale along with a persistent desire to flee, which constantly compels it back to the gate of the toril.

When the cows that are responsible for driving it into the arena survive, the unusual joy of deliverance fills its teary eyes—and it follows them as quickly as it can on its weary legs, swinging the banderillas that are stuck in its wounds and leaving behind it, on the sand, a trail of blood.

Behind the gate of the toril, the butchers await its passage with raised clubs…

#

Thus is the usual bullfight and a few sensitive souls, who are, of course, ridiculous!, see an inequality between this unarmed animal and all the armed men.

On Tuesday things went differently and here is what they saw:

A bull, all of a sudden, rushed at a horse and stuck a horn in its belly between its two hind legs. It stood there like that for almost five minutes—digging around… The picador got up quickly after rolling on the ground, but the horse, blindfolded, not knowing where the agonizing torture was coming from, stood motionless, trembling and fainting on its four legs.

[10] Large, wide hats, very much like sombreros, ringed with lead that allowed the "packers" to carry heavy loads on their heads inside Les Halles, the wholesale marketplace in Paris.

Blood squirted a little, then a little more; then it came gushing out.

Suddenly the bull pulled back and the horse dropped in a heap. The horn—rounded off you understand!—had gored its belly, ripped out its guts, which lay next to it, green, blue, yellow, in the ever-flowing purple blood.

The Spaniards up above were laughing so hard there were tears in their eyes. M. de Morenheim, the German ambassador, and Prince Troubetzkoy, who were not exactly children or sissies, got up and left their box while the French audience ran off with cries of horror and a number of woman slumped over and fainted.

So the horse struggled up and got its legs tangled in its entrails, trampling them under its hooves so that half of them remained in its belly while the other half lay twitching in the sand, after which they led it out of the arena *at a trot*.

Well, for a good bullfight, wasn't that a great fight?

#

Is it because people have no bread that they give them games?

I am scared of these games for their sakes—I am especially scared for the others.

The only time I went to the Bullring—assurance given that no blood would be spilled, that it would only be a show of skill and agility—was on a Sunday and the upper bleachers were overflowing. It wrenched my heart—being French and a woman who knew the people well, who lived among them, who knew how horribly drunk their frustrated minds could get on the sight and smell of blood.

Being French I think you have to "stay home", protect the customs that were our fathers', keep intact the patrimony of civilization that they bequeathed to us and that we must not diminish but increase every day for the heritage of our children.

France can carry its arts and industry abroad, all the beneficent rays that spring from its heart and brain. It is the warmth and the light. It abets the intelligent, protects the weak, defends the oppressed. As imperfect as its social organization is, it is still a maternal, tender nation whose fits of anger are reckless, bloodying only its own breast. It has not propagated cruelty throughout the world and though it knows suffering for its duty, it has never preached nor condoned suffering for pleasure.

If a syndicate of high and mighty French men were formed tomorrow to spread French influence beyond its borders, it would build a theater where they could put on our dramatic masterpieces or a palace where they could display our artistic ones; it would establish some charity of lofty assistance for those wounded in war or disinherited by poverty—only the blood of roses would flow, in wide petals, at the feet of beloved artists who would hold in their small hands the laurels of Art or the purse of Charity.

#

I have just written something that in hindsight makes me shiver:

Suffering for pleasure! This is the typical mark of all decadent empires. Rome and Byzantium had their games in the circus—and the Barbarians arrived, trampling the beautiful civilizations, burning the libraries, decapitating the gods, pushing the world back a century into the darkness of chaos.

Suffering for pleasure! This is the most immoral, the most dreadful thing in the universe. When it is condoned—whether it be to amuse the crowd or to distract a black king—man returns to his primitive state, a savage in the caves in the age of cannibals.

From animal pain to human pain is a short, swift leap and we are closer than we think to the King of Dahomey who, after being raised with us, considers his subjects as animals and forces them slowly to their knees just to relieve his boredom.

Suffering for pleasure is forbidden by all nations that have dignity, even among those that condone the cruelest of punishments.

Formerly, at the Barrière du Combat[11], there were battles between dogs and bears here. The bears were muzzled but the dogs were given free rein. It was pretty much a bloody free-for-all; sometimes they threw other animals to the pack: who hasn't read *L'Ane mort et La Femme guillotine* by Jules Janin[12]?

King Louis Philippe banned this vile slaughter.

In England cock-fights, rat-fights and dog-fights have to take place in secret because the queen's government has strictly forbidden them. This is the example the past has given us. This is the example that the country most famous for its brutal fisticuffs and its haughty cold-heartedness has given us.

It is because suffering, truly, cannot be condoned except as an inevitable fatality, a result of a disaster or from the old remnants of barbarism that are left in us. If a few mourn the battlefields over which the idea of patriotism floats, if others, even fewer, regard the hell where modern slaves agonize, the vast majority, more worried about living than thinking, accepts what it believes it cannot prevent.

But it is a long way from this resignation to the joy of seeing a creature suffer, to gather to watch this suffering, while wearing the latest fashions, and to like it the more the victim struggles against the unjust torture.

To say with delight that steel hurts flesh, to quiver with pleasure at quivering pain, to clap your hands because a crime has been committed under a dispassionate sky—but whose justice still sits behind its azure veil, you can be sure!—to yell "Bravo!" because blood has been spilled—is this French, is this feminine?!

Woe unto the people who have lost the divine sentiment of pity!

Above all, woe unto those who have made them lose it!

If in these foreign celebrations there were only spoiled rich boys and their consorts, artists and socialites, the thing would be none the better, but would be less fraught with danger.

But again, look up at those benches where your snobbish eyes are never trained! There is a huge audience of executions, their necks stretched out, with hungry lips, hoping that they will see "some red on the road." There are also some good people there who have come for the first time out of curiosity, who will come back a second time for pleasure, a third time out of savagery—when they will have awakened the abominable human beast within!

You get used to the blood, you tell yourself rightly, and when a red pool is on the ground, who except for experts could say whether it came from a four-legged or two-legged animal.

Of all the men butchers are the ones who stab the quickest because they are accustomed to death and they cut their bread with the same knife that cuts throats.

[11] In the 19th arrondissment of Paris, one of the old gates where they would collect taxes. Here it allowed the bloody spectacles to take place outside the city.

[12] *The Dead Donkey and the Guillotined Woman*, a novel published in 1829.

The idea of putting animal killers in the same basket as those who might kill people is so obvious that in a newspaper on the eve of May 1st—unjustly?—they made the murder and maiming of a hundred and fifty helpless sheep a general cry of alarm in Pantin.

Blood will have blood, I say. The day when the people are used to seeing horses gutted "for entertainment" is the day when they will gut you in your houses "for fun"!

Think about it…

14 The Wicked Laws

In 1892 the world was in the midst of an economic depression and as financial and industrial tycoons continued to wrest profits out of manipulated markets, events such as the failure of the La Banque General des Chemins de Fer et Industrie resulting in the manager's suicide did nothing but aggravate people's frustrations and resentment. Ravachol's crimes were seen by many as just compensation. It was a busy year across the Atlantic as well. While Ravachol was being guillotined in France, America saw the bloody Homestead Steel Strike in Pittsburgh followed by the assassination attempt of Henry Clay Frick, chairman of the Carnegie Steel Company, by Alexander Berkman in retaliation for the murdered steelworkers. The coming years saw both an upsurge in anarchist attacks and an expansion of government repression.

The "companions", as the anarchists called each other, were no longer satisfied with mere threats. Every sentence or execution by the authorities was answered with an explosion. The abuses and perils of the factory prisons were opposed with more and more force. Anarchist terror met bourgeois terror head-on. In November 1893 a young, broke and out-of-work shoemaker named Léon-Jules Léauthier wrote to Sébastien Faure that "I shall not strike an innocent person if I strike the first bourgeois I meet." That first person whom he met and stabbed happened to be the Serbian diplomat Georgevitch. He was spared the death sentence but died in the "dry guillotine" of the penal colony. A month later another anarchist named Auguste Vaillant tossed a bomb into the Chamber of Deputies. The homemade device full of nails scratched a few political heads, but caused more fear than damage. There were no casualties except for him.

Auguste Vaillant was thirty-two years old, unemployed, desperate and bitter. Like so many other workers of his day he was uneducated and when no work was available he was left without any resources whatsoever. The desperate energy that he would rather have expended in work was then aimed at the callous social system that he blamed for his destitution, particularly at the politicians who were also some of the richest men on France.

Although his bomb killed no one and did very little damage, his act was given a swift reply: within forty-eight hours the Chamber voted in favor of a new set of laws known as the Lois Scélérates, the Wicked Laws, targeting anarchists and the anarchist press while beefing up the Paris police force. Prison for anyone participating in any form of propaganda by deed, for anyone inciting people to do so and for anyone approving of such deeds. At the same time the authorities, wanting to keep a close eye on all possible accomplices of the anarchists, revived Napoleon's "Cabinet Noir", whereby they could intercept, open and read people's mail so that even private correspondence was susceptible to reprisals in court. As to be expected, the anarchists were not the only ones to suffer the brutal effects of these policies that prohibited all revolutionary propaganda, anarchist or not, at a time when the government was being discredited by so many sensational scandals.

[1] See 4-Propaganda by Deed.

[2] See 17-19.

Vaillant himself was defended in court by Fernand Labori, who had defended Clément Duval[1] and would become internationally famous for his defense of Dreyfus and Emile Zola[2]. Despite his lawyer's eloquent pleas, the anarchist was given the death penalty. Most of the newspapers supported the disproportionate punishment; only a very few called for leniency. Of course, it was dangerous now to show sympathy for the anarchists under the Wicked Laws, so the press practiced self-censorship or preferred to stay silent. Would Séverine stay silent? Not likely. And she was not in the habit of mixing water with the vitriol of her words. "People of the Press, open your eyes! The peril is growing!" The peril, the true anarchists, she said, were those who slowly killed, every day, the exploited workers without a sound and without scandal and with the support of a repressive government. Anarchist violence was born out of this legal violence, which was consciously ignored by the politicians and public who were demanding the harshest reactions. The ferocity of the Wicked Laws stripped her of any doubts she had had after the attack in the Véry restaurant at the opening of Ravachol's trial. She fought with all her energy to save Auguste Vaillant from the guillotine, but in vain.

Séverine had met Vaillant at *Le Cri* when he was a Marxist and friend of Jules Guesde, who said he had "a good mind." Now that Guesde was an elected deputy of Roubaix, pursuing the hypocritical ambition that Séverine had always suspected in him, he treated him like an imbecile, denying his old comrade and Séverine along with him. When she called upon the hearts of her readers to help Vaillant's wife and daughter, as she herself had sent money to them, Guesde pointed to this as proof that she subsidized anarchy. But Séverine was not defending Vaillant's act per se. She sympathized naturally with all forms of insurrection against injustice but in this particular case she was ardently asking people not to let his daughter, Sidonie, starve to death. She was not alone. A fund was raised for little Sidonie's support, but very quickly an ugly battle started over the girl's future upbringing with the Duchess of Uzés coming forward with an offer of adoption. In the face of all the ridiculous wrangling, however, the prisoner himself finally put an end to the drama by appointing Sébastien Faure, the anarchist writer, as her guardian. In the meantime the ten-year girl wrote a personal plea to the wife of President Carnot, supported by dozens of deputies and senators asking for the poor man's reprieve. President Carnot obstinately refused and Auguste Vaillant was beheaded on February 5 1894, the first person in the 19th century to be executed without actually killing anyone. From then on France slipped into that downward spiral where retaliation for blind repression became more and more violent.

The Death of Vaillant The Death of Vaillant[3]

Monsieur Dupuy or Monsieur Casimir Perier[4]—it little matters which, they're the same!—speaking in the forum of the repressive laws, had said that it was necessary for the "good men" to have their New Year's gifts. He had not spoken of the Carnaval gift. This gift is the power that was bestowed on them. The head of Vaillant, as pale as the face of Pierrot, with a red collar like Polichinelle's boss[5], had been put by him on the platter of the Salome parliament!

[3] Written February 7 1894 included in En Marche 1896.

[4] Former and current President of the Council of Ministers. The latter would become president after Sadi Carnot's assassination.

[5] Characters in Commedia Dell'Arte.

And the Herodiases of the Senate thanked him, congratulated themselves and were glad to be living under a prince who was an enemy of fear, with such an iron fist for anyone thinking of attacking them. The only regret is that we could not "interrogate" the wretch a little: to pound his own nails into his eyes and fingers and make him suffer a lot. For, regicide is calculated by the number of kings—and we have a thousand! Therefore, Vaillant was a thousand times guiltier than any other perpetrator of a capital crime.

Furthermore, the principle of National Sovereignty, although it is not divine right, amounts to the principle of Divinity. Whoever attacks it is guilty of parricide. And they used to burn sacrilegious tongues! No, definitely, they were merciful to this scoundrel by just guillotining him!

But to pardon him… I believe a riot would have broken out under the dome of the Luxembourg Palace and inside the glass skull of the Palais Bourbon[6] if they had snatched the corpse, the hostage, the ransom from the representatives.

If they cared! But remember the words of an honorable father-conscript recorded in *Le Gaulois* on February 3 without a shadow of protest arising: "Well, if President Carnot pardons Vaillant, we won't pardon Congress!"

That's how far they went—to this bargaining, this blackmail, this shameful intimidation!

#

I don't want to believe that such considerations could influence the head of State, to make the scales tilt toward severity… but what will the simple people think, with their naïve souls, whose judgment is formed by instinct alone, far from governmental circles, in the almost anonymous shadow of suffering and labor?

Many of them knew Vaillant, had met him in the workshops or in meetings, that tall, gaunt figure with sunken eyes sparkling feverishly, with his soft speech, frugal gestures and shy demeanor, his reserve and sadness: the looks of a luckless, tragic man.

In the Marxist party, ten years ago now, he had the reputation of a good man, fairly focused, somewhat fanatic. But no one at that time could have guessed what was sprouting in his soul.

He used to lecture to the young anarchists (because in the revolutionary world at that time we were going from anarchy to Marxism, whereas today it is the opposite); he used to preach to them about the dangers of disorder; he used to praise the benefits of "socializing the means of production"; he used to be an example for Guesde—his god!—who said of him: "He's got a good mind." And there was certainly no partisan more active, more enthusiastic, more blindly submissive than he.

Yes, at that time, and later still, with evolution on his mind, Vaillant was an uncompromising Guesdist. He struggled to establish a neighborhood periodical with him; he lost his job for supporting the others' candidacies. And I remember that evening when Monsieurs Guesde, Massard and Deville were dismissed by me from *Le Cri du Peuple* (not that I demanded them to champion Duval[7], but because it seemed monstrous to me that socialists, the fringes, in order to further their system, would push a prisoner under the guillotine's blade), either I am totally wrong or Vaillant was among them when they came that evening to try to intimidate and set their chief up on the new editorial board—collectivist as well, but collectivist-possibilist and therefore enemy!

[6] Seats of the Senate and National Assembly.

[7] See 4-Propaganda By Deed.

Today, all his beloved chiefs have turned away and against him. Some have gone so far as to insinuate that he could be working for the police…

Ordinary people are not fooled. Their opinion about the crime and the criminal is already formed. And it is quite different from what it was at the time of Ravachol![8] The pharmacist's baby who was in danger on rue de Clichy, even though it was not hit, had struck a very different emotional chord than the deputies who were scratched by nails from the bomb in the House on the Corner of the Quay. And Ravachol, especially as seen by sectarians, was brash and cocky. Like the erstwhile Rocambole[9] he appealed to the readers of serials, but he also scared them with his tale of the hermit of Chambles and his attempts at counterfeiting, etc.

Vaillant, on the other hand, they feel sorry for… look at how feelings develop! Everyone whose childhood was lonely, misguided and forsaken can relate to this policeman's son who was abandoned, left on the street, scarcely out of short pants, by his father's iron rule.

Everyone who had a rough adolescence see themselves in the odyssey of this poor man, wandering from town to town in search of bread, rejected by his relatives, more alone in the desert of noisy cities than a traveler lost on the sands of the Sahara!

Everyone who suffers, struggles, is out of work; everyone who earns, who used to earn, six sous an hour; everyone who has been disappointed by their elected officials—there are some, Monsieur President!—has identified with this outcast, this casualty who incarnates the countless evils that the plebs die of!

Everyone who has felt the temptation, at any given moment, harried by the obsession of crime, whose belly is too hungry, whose throat is too thirsty, has looked upon his five crimes with pity: For begging, for pinching from a barrel on a public street, for riding a train without a ticket, for eating sixteen sous worth of food when the hungry man found himself penniless. Even the worst, involved in the misappropriation of a pair of boots with and for a friend, only makes them think, "But it wasn't even to share in the spoils."

So, remember, in the funeral oration, this criminal record that is so full of lessons—which was used in court to blacken a life just as it was pleaded to dishonor a memory.

Think on this, philosophers!

#

From the cradle, without a family or rather without a home, tossed around from one place to the next, almost an orphan, Vaillant was passed on from relative to relative throughout his childhood until finally wearied of this merry-go-round an aunt, trusting to fate (without a full ticket, but with a piece of bread and a bit of sausage), sent him halfway to his native city.

Thus he committed his first crime by continuing without a ticket. He was fifteen. The Est company remanded him to court because he had cheated them out of twenty francs and twenty centimes. And the court inflicted on this boy a fine of sixteen francs on May 27 1876. The sentence was not heavy, but the criminal record had begun!

It continued on April 27 1878 before the judges in Charleville with the allocation of six days in jail for "swindling food." Starving to death he had entered a cabaret and eaten *sixteen sous* worth of bread, soup and cheese. I don't know but maybe he had even offered himself the luxury of a glass or a quarter liter of something to drink.

[8] See 11-Ravachol.

[9] Fictional adventurer created by Ponson de Terrail who started out on the wrong side of the law, later turned to doing good, and became the first literary super-hero.

A few months later, after making a trip from Paris to Marseille on foot, after being treated in a hospital for his bloodied feet, after spending the three mandatory nights in the ward, Vaillant found himself on the street, barely healed, now hungry and cold… and holding out his hand. The Marseille court sentenced him on November 14 1878 to three days in jail *for begging*.

The fourth conviction is the worst. In a factory in Algeria he helped a comrade hide and then take a pair of boots. The judges in Alger sentenced him on April 24 1879 to three months in prison. In captivity he ran a fever; when he was freed he came back to France and dragged his shivering rags from one hospital to another. In the port in Marseille he saw some barrels of wine abandoned, almost as if offered to public indulgence. Furthermore, someone told him that "white wine is good for fevers"—while his burning throat was yearning for something fresh and healthful. At night he took a little pipe, stuck it in and drank… The Marseille court on March 25 1881 gave him a month in jail.

Such was the past of this repeat offender.

Now, if the working class, at least the majority, did not get much out of the defense that he presented (too abstract, too confused, full of technical terms, as uneducated people are wont to do), they did learn his history and talked about it in their "lairs." More than one working-class woman had tears in her eyes when hearing about his childhood; more than one working-class man clenched his fists looking at his kids and thinking of the other father: the policeman!

You should be with them, grandson of the assembly, even if it means displeasing the others, those dead leaves that the wind will blow away!

#

What I would like to know, of course, is the opinion of Commandant Maréchal, the liberal of 1848, the brilliant retired officer, the friend of Hippolyte Carnot, the one who got into the Elysée with the quatrain signed by [Victor] Hugo begging Louis-Philippe to pardon [Armand] Barbès with a beautiful and touching supplication concluding, "You do not want them to say that in 1839 the King of the French showed mercy and in 1894 the President of the Republic was ruthless."

Poor good man, old democrat who remained humanitarian, what disillusionment he must be feeling, what heartache he must be suffering! It is a denial inflicted on his dreams, a life's worth of effort quashed. His heart bleeds but also his belief, his ideal—a worse sorrow among many sorrows. He was, however, prepared for it after asking the widow of his dead comrade, the mother of Sadi Carnot, to present his letter and press his request. An elderly lady, that should be good, carrying her clemency up the steps that separate her from heaven? A letter, a request, a step—the old bourgeois woman refused everything.

And a monarchist newspaper straightaway published these moving lines in response, written long ago by the Duchesse of Orléans to the Countess Lobau. Here they are:

"My good, dear Maréchale's wife, I cannot tell you how happy I am. The king just commuted the death penalty of Barbès to hard labor for life. He performed an act of generosity and grandeur. He saved the life of this man, acting according to his constitutional right, taking over in his Council because the ministers were, for the most part, leaning to the death penalty. The king told them sternly, "No, gentlemen, the hand that shook Barbès' sister's hand yesterday, by vowing to save him, can never sign his death certificate." They will yell a lot and be very afraid, but such an act will never suffer from petty attacks." — Hélène

[10] The executioner.

It is a hard lesson, but I am calm: it will not be understood any more than it has been—now that Deibler[10] has acted. It remains troublesome only to the republicans who spoke in favor of the thing; and a little mercy in the guts of this cruel mother Republic for the most destitute of her children.

Vaillant's head has fallen, but this bloody exclamation point ends nothing, concludes nothing. I hope to Heaven that I am wrong, but I tremble for the ruthless!

15 Bombs, Assassinations and the Trial of the Thirty

A week after Vaillant's execution Emile Henry threw a bomb in the Café Terminus at the Saint Lazare train station on February 12 1894. The attack wounded twenty people and killed one. After being chased down and arrested he admitted to being responsible for a previous explosion on November 8 1892. He had left a bomb in the offices of the Carmaux Mining Company on Avenue de l'Opera as a sign of solidarity with the striking miners, but the device was discovered and taken to the police station on rue des Bons-Enfants where it went off and killed five officers. Emile Henry subsequently hid out in London, a safe haven for many anarchists who were wanted or unwelcome in their home countries. Henry returned to France at the same time as Vaillant struck against society, but the injustice of his trial exacerbated Henry to no end until he, too, struck at the bourgeoisie lounging in a café. Without a wife and kids and in spite of his mother's pleas, there were fewer heartstrings being pulled when he was executed on May 21. Fellow anarchists and revolutionaries, however, were none the less outraged.

In March of this same year 1894 a bomb exploded on rue Saint Jacques wounding two people and killing one. Another explosion on rue de Faubourg Saint-Martin did no harm, but then on March 15 a Belgian by name of Pauwels, friend of Henry got himself killed while blowing up the church of the Madeleine in Paris. On April 4 1894 a bomb exploded in the Foyot restaurant claiming the eye of the poet Laurent Tailhade, who was famous for his saying about Vaillant: "Who cares who the victims are if the gesture is great!" Finally on June 24, Santo Geronimo Caserio stabbed President Sadi Carnot ("Carnot the Killer") because he had refused to pardon Vaillant.

1894 was a pivotal year in the anarchist movement. The repression that followed two years of bomb blasts (which were actually more profitable for selling newspapers than physically harmful to society) disorganized the anarchist groups, dissipated the libertarian press, exiled militant leaders and imprisoned or killed terrorists or people suspected of being such. For those who escaped the crackdown, their liberty was precarious. The government continued to insist, mistakenly, that there was a worldwide anarchist conspiracy. The Wicked Laws were voted in to root out and destroy this organization. Houses and offices were searched, arrests were made and prosecutions multiplied. Newspapers were shut down. Pamphlets and books were seized and their authors sent to prison. But in spite of all the despotic measures, the government failed to stamp out the anarchist movement and if anything it only fueled the discontent of the working classes, even while many socialists condemned propaganda by deed and supported the persecutions.

Now that any criticism of government policies and actions could be viewed as subversive, newspapers had to censor themselves, so that many writers left for London or Brussels to retain their freedom of speech. The liberal press was muzzled and Séverine, like many others, fell victim. Her articles in *L'Eclair* were suppressed and the more mistreatment she witnessed the more vexed she became. Justice was unjust against the anarchists and everyone suffered, just as the police

violence against terrorists had turned against the people in general. But isn't it true that the heresies of yesterday become the common beliefs of today? The anarchist movement, even at its most brutal, finds absolute justification in her heart amidst this autocratic control.

Worse was to come. As anarchist attacks drew public attention to social injustices, so too did the justice system's implacable attitude toward their sympathizers. Despite the fact that the anarchists themselves admitted their failure to organize into a federated party or outright rejected the idea, intellectuals who flirted with the Black Flag were now in the same boat as the workers who espoused revolt. The government's delusion culminated in the famous Trial of the Thirty against those who did not respect the law of silence. Among hundreds of detainees in prison a selection of thirty was made to inculpate with the conspiracy, including Jean Grave, Sébastien Faure, Félix Fénéon, Maximilien Luce and Louis Matha. Journalists, writers and artists stood beside burglars and bandits in the indiscriminate proceedings aimed at quelling any and all opposition to the government and its Wicked Laws. After three months of farcical trial, however, the jury could find no treasonous organization afoot and acquitted all the defendants except for three of the common criminals.

Although seriously discrediting the authorities, the Trial of the Thirty did have the effect of cooling down some of the enthusiasm of certain editors, but this was at the same time that propaganda by deed was hitting an impasse. Although individual actions and illegalism would continue, more and more anarchists turned to the Bourses de Travail or labor councils and syndicalism. General strikes in cooperation with the working classes would be seen as more effective than isolated acts of violence as the century drew to a close.

For the time being the people of France and beyond its borders became more concerned with anti-Semitism than with anarchism. Two strikes against Baron Rothschild, one bomb that exploded injuring his secretary and a second at his banking house on rue Laffite that did not go off, were inspired partly by anarchism and partly by anti-Semitism. The new clash of anti-Semitism that would split France in two reached a climax during the scandalous Dreyfus Affair in which Séverine would become intimately embroiled.

The Unseizable The Unseizable[1]

Oh, how I saw it coming, that whole succession of bigwigs creeping up to the noblest and boldest of us—until the iron claw clamped down on our gasping freedom, on our wounded thought!

And you others see nothing, you pen and pencil-pushers, artists, thinkers, poets, painters, maybe even musicians because who knows what song they will go after tomorrow, what hymn or couplet they will call subversive and harmful to the security of the State?

It is a pity to see this lethargy, this spinelessness, this degrading I-don't-give-a-damnism; and that divisions can persist in such a dangerous situation.

Of course, it is the anarchists they are going after—officially! And many journalists, either to coddle their readers or to keep the peace or even (which is their right) because their opinions are diametrically opposed, deny every point of contact with the pariahs.

But look how the circle is shrinking, how the action is closing in, how little by little the real goal is taking shape and their secret obsession appears.

[1] In En Marche, 1896.

They imprison a bunch of poor devils even though nothing was seized, nothing was found in their homes. And after enduring the search (believe me, a very unpleasant ceremony!), to top it off, they hear the judge impose as harsh a punishment as he wants… not for what they did, since they are cleared, but *for what they think!*

Do you seriously believe that they care much about these people? Being militants, they are always under the thumb of the justice system, which starves them, hounds them, imprisons them, frees them and snatches them back at will. It plays cat and mouse with them without any voice rising up to defend them: some are silenced by hatred, others by indifference… and those who would like to speak out are strangled!

Therefore, what do the powers that be care about this "vile bunch" of which it believes itself master and whose excessive despair seems, so far, only good for strengthening its hold. It imagines that its fist is strong enough and its sword long enough to mow down the field and scatter the wheat and the chaff. Like Tarquin it aims for the head. And the head is the creative people!

#

Now, who are they most of the time?

Its sons—their sons!

It is rare, very rare, that one is born a revolutionary outside the bourgeois environment. You become one.

The people are born and raised for servitude. Physical anemia resulting from too much work, deplorable hygiene, constant deprivation, all this leads to cerebral anemia. Cerebral anemia engenders resignation…

If, by chance, the parents, being elite creatures, have saved their intellectual patrimony from the wreckage, it can only be with amazing effort because of the constant battle at the risk of their livelihood.

A woman, the weaker being less armored with pride, is hit harder—because she is the oft-abused intermediary between men and material life; because being the helpmate of the former she becomes the direct debtor of the latter; because she assumes all the responsibilities even if she does not bear all the burdens; because she faces all the offenses while the male goes off to earn a living or in search of better, easier, less humbled pastures—the woman, I say, succumbs more quickly, bows her head first… if only to weep!

The militant, hypnotized by his dream, gets irritated, calls her a deserter and a bitter argument follows that the speechless children listen to without understanding. The children are naturally inclined to the woman who feeds them and who speaks in their name; they are also naturally inclined to the realities of existence: hot soup and a refreshing nap, being the naïve little animals that they are. And then the Idea—the Idea with a capital I—becomes for them a kind of evil fairy that clears off the plates, steals from the nest egg, plays all sorts of dirty tricks on the kids, makes mama sad and papa angry. It is why he lost his job, why they are cold and hungry, why the landlord asks them to leave, why mean men come and turn everything inside out before taking father away in handcuffs… like a thief!

Sometimes they never see him again. He sails off, at the State's expense, to some penal colony from where they seldom return, from where they never recover! Where, if it happens to be a time when brothers are killing each other, he is killed in some riot, thrown on the pile without them knowing exactly where.

So, the mother, the anguished hen, gathers all her chicks and slaves away alone to feed their hungry beaks. She works herself to death, but by the example of her hardship and devotion

inspires in them the fear of their father's "bad ways". The calm warmth of her tenderness brings them back to life and confidence. Later they want her grandchildren as well to know this sweet affection without having to suffer through the torments.

I repeat, there are few families in which the traditions of resistance, of the fight to the death, of merciless, relentless combat are transmitted intact. In the military (if at all!) they cite a few cases of heredity. In my opinion they are perhaps less an atavism than a heritage: the legacy of reputation that they take pride in or believe must be maintained.

But the great mass of people? If all the sons and daughters of the 30,000 shot dead in the Commune got together on May 28 in front of Père Lachaise, the cemetery would not be big enough to hold them all!

#

Recruitment works in a different way: by spontaneous generation, you might say. So many flowers of retaliation blooming in the window boxes where they never expected to see them!

Whereas the child of poverty, born as I said of intellectual atrophy—because overwork wears down their brains just as it does their clear vision and the palms of the hands—or born of rebels (that is, having suffered from rebellion before being able to understand it and so never far from it)—whereas this child will only be a combatant if society forces him to it, there in the wealthy cribs, sown by who knows what turmoil, sprouts the race of rebels.

At this moment, you see, there is happening exactly the same phenomenon as occurred at the end of the last century. It is popular to call oneself socialist today in the salons of the Third Estate[2] just like a hundred years ago any gentleman with good manners and a fine wit, priding himself on his elegance, had to call himself an encyclopedist in the salons of the aristocracy.

The gods blind those they wish to destroy, said old Euripides… Every class takes turns examining the volcano that is bound to engulf it.

And just like the revolution of 1789 was carried out, or rather stirred up, for the bourgeoisie by the clandestine resistance of the nobility, so too at the forefront of the plebeian revolution, forging the way, are none other than bourgeois offspring.

How did they get there? Who pushed them there? At the breast of what poor woman did they taste tears… and the bitter bile, all the bitter poisons that hollow out the cheeks and pale the skin of these "well-born" children? No one knows. Without knowing why, they have renounced their privileges and prerogatives—strange youths who all seem to have hatched on the night of August 4[3]! Nature appears to have given them a shadow quite different from their gestures and an echo in their ears quite different from their voice. Laughter is answered with a sob and the playful expression on the wall breaks down into a series of sorrowful movements, revealing fatigue and despair.

They saw things very young (visible to their eyes only) and they became grave, imagining as they ate that others were hungry. Then the surrounding contentment, the joie de vivre exploding around them, all this well-being became abominable to them. Whoever did not share their pain they accused of unthinking selfishness. They despised their father, being ungrateful in spite of themselves—and they took off to the lower realms where they felt the duty to act.

The caste that they abandoned did nothing to bring them back or temper their action. It did not understand that these deserters were carrying their array of daring to the poor along with

[2] In traditional social structure, anyone not nobility or clergy.

[3] In 1789 the Constituent Assembly officially abolished the old feudal system.

all their weapons of education, all the strength and the entire arsenal it had given them for an opposite goal. It treated them as enemies at once, from the first disobedience. And the paternal authority (in the legal sense of the term), all by itself, made them more anarchist than all the propaganda put together!

Those who were not of the same blood, the bourgeoisie treated the same, equally harsh, equally irrational, equally preparing its own destruction. Concerning the indifferent whom I mentioned above, for a little thing, a trifle, a nothing, a kid's quarrel with a police officer, it hit so hard that it stopped hitting the mark. It made enemies of the neutral—it created troops out of its sons!

#

And the rage is clearly growing… which seems to be "treason", parricide against the class that these deformed children came from!

That's why they were looking for letters more than for explosives, why they accused the Reclus family, why on the heels of [Jean] Grave's arrest the judges are now worried about [Octave] Mirbeau.

Certainly they don't dare! But look at them licking their chops, leaning over the court counter. How they want it! How they would willingly take a stab at the independent—not even a theoretician. But they have discovered surprising things, a real conspiracy, stitched in black, woven with wickedness… And then again, as always, the form, the "writing" bothers them: they are much more offended by the author of *Le Calvaire* than the editor of *Le Père Peinard***[144]**!

A man who wears gloves and a top hat and has the manners and life of a gentleman. A man who has come up through the ranks and met with success in the right-thinking, proper papers. A man on whom they should be able to rely… but who wrote the preface for Grave's Sociéte mourante et l'Anarchie [1893] and who says (rightfully so) that this book is one of the most beautiful books of the century! That was ten months ago. Since then the volume has sold liberally, under the indulgent eye of the authorities. What does it matter! They have just figured it out. And they seized the book wherever they found it and now Mirbeau is under suspicion!

He is not the only one! I can tell you that they are on the trail of really dreadful revelations.

Those drawings, those abominable—and superb!—drawings in *Le Père Peinard*, sketched out in thick lines like posters and with such powerful tones despite the lack of color, do you know who did them? Some bums, no doubt, bohemians, deadbeats, old scoundrels who drowned their bygone talent in absinthe… or cobblers with no sense of aesthetics?

Yeah, our masters, can you believe it? They are the work of Ibels, Pizarro, Luce and that whole band of brave, young artists, ranked and already acclaimed, who are following in the footsteps of the illustrator of Paris, the master Chéret. And there was no need for Steinlen to sign the inaugural drawing for *Le Chambard* because we all recognize his reverent, tender figures of the starving!

#

So let's seize this! Let us, a generation in full force, we who have a brain and a heart, let us seize the wind that is driving us to the hell of the impoverished! Let's seize our soul—which once, in other bodies, escaped the bite of the shears and the flames of the stake!

We have as much faith as the first Christians, as the Jews in Spain, as the Protestants in Cévennes, and the Chouans of old Vendeé[4]. We believe that the world is poorly made when it allows such or such son of an exploiter to have 3,000 F a day to spend or when it allows the late

[4] A royalist rebellion during the French revolution.

General Maltzeff[5] to own 29 mines and keep 55,000 workers busy… while the people are dying of hunger!

We are not cruel, seeing that even in the face of these contrasts we do not desire as much. Only a fairer distribution of goods.

We are, for the most part, beggars like Job, living off our salary, whom fear or hatred can eliminate tomorrow—not even free! And maybe it is in being akin to the serfs of the workshops and factories that begat, for many of us, this zeal for them.

But our soul is our own! Where the Caesars, Torquemada and his torturers, Louis XIV and his blackguards, the Convention and its guillotine, where they all failed, o pygmy ministers, do you think you will succeed?

Arène[6] asked the other day how it happened that the agitators never came from the herd of the resigned, without realizing that the former were representing the latter.

Well, we others who are not hungry, who are not cold, to whom society has gladly given, not so tamed by the nice little cuddles and nice little smiles, but whom others' suffering grips and disturbs, we, the advocates and witnesses and upholders of human Sorrow intend to stay around, whatever happens, whatever the risk!

Open your law books and your jails, receive your orders, write your verdicts—we are ready! Our thought will stay free and will march forward…

Tired of Living Tired of Living[7]

No, Emile Henry was not crazy. If he were alive, I would not dare say it for fear of crippling or appearing to cripple the steps taken against his will by his grieving mother and devoted friends. But I would also not dare to say the contrary, speaking against my own conviction, supporting their theory—in the name of a dying man's will, unknown to them in all sanctity, but always sacred to me!

Certainly no one understood more than this woman in her passionate desire to save her son, calling upon every pretext, imploring every hope. She would not have been a real mother if she had not acted thus, if she had not worn down the sidewalks of Paris with her shoes and heaven and earth with her pleas!

Therefore, any trace of disapproval is far from my mind, as well as the chance of adding, in any way whatsoever, to her awful despair. What she did, she did well. It was normal, it was maternal… and I, like almost all women, would have taken the same path. Stoicism, following the law of nature and the habit of education, is of all philosophies that which is least fitting to our sex—and mothers are not the ones from whom we should demand it!

But what I told her, gently, at length, when she came knocking at my door as she had knocked at so many others, I can repeat here today lest everything be wasted, lest in the eternity where a soul has returned my words fall uselessly in the emptiness and silence like grains of sand.

#

A woman reader, veiled in anonymity (and to whom I owe thanks not, perhaps, for her mistaken opinion but at least for her concerned trust) had written to Madame Henry saying that I

[5] In Russia, exceeded only by the properties of Elim Demidoff it was said.

[6] Paul Arène (1843-1896), French writer, friend of Octave Mirbeau.

[7] Included in En Marche 1896.

alone could intervene to good effect. All I had to do was to write a column… and afterward the police, the judges, Monsieurs Carnot and Deibler would all lay down their weapons!

Alas, dear reader, if it had been a matter of a professional assassin, a career thief, I grant you… but an anarchist!

I tried, with a heavy heart, to explain to this poor woman sitting there looking at me with the eyes of a doe being slaughtered, those wild, beseeching eyes. I told her the truth: that Henry, by denying all pity before the jury, had made any plea for pity difficult; that by the tacit accord of the press with the repression, not one editor—not a single one!—would accept my article and finally that I did not even have the means of bringing it out somewhere else, which I saw, at the risk of unconscionable damage, as limiting my right to publish my weekly columns.

Oh, the gloomy fifteen minutes that I spent there reeling off these petty excuses before her tears. And how I shivered with disgust at this job I loved so much! There is no shame but there is sometimes grim bitterness in feeling useless and powerless, when a poor old woman dressed for mourning beseeches you… and deludes herself!

#

Well, to console her and to comfort myself, I will affirm what I know to be true: that my prose, a simple token satisfaction for her, a mere sign of interest that I could have given her, would have had no influence, absolutely none, on the decisions taken in advance and that were in a way irrevocable.

So much for the plea for mercy. As for the madness, first of all, they would not have let me invoke it either. Plus, it was a wasted effort, flailing at the air. Either it would have failed—and it was pleading for nothing, prolonging the prisoner's agony, going against his expressed desire. Or it would have succeeded—and Henry, the second he felt himself trapped, would have killed himself.

He *wanted* death. He had said so in court and he had confirmed it by refusing to appeal. He had condemned himself much more than they had condemned him! Sent to the penal colonies or to prison, he would have killed himself—she knew that. Well, why deprive him of what he looked upon as so desirable that he had sacrificed the lives of others, his own honor, his liberty and his very existence?

To take away his responsibility was to deny his free will. To deny his free will was to eradicate the ideal in the name of which he claimed to have acted… A fierce Ideal, but an Ideal nonetheless, in that it had been his motive, his driving force! For the love of it he made fearsome decisions and suffered unspeakable torments. For, as fanatical as a man might be, I can never believe that he strikes his fellowmen, strangers and bystanders, without a struggle, with joy in his heart!

Afterward came the chase, the arrest, the beatings! Then the slow torment of the investigation, the exhibition in court, the sentencing—and from now on his cellmate is the specter of the executioner.

Well then, after long and careful thought, he had risked all this, accepted it and suffered it. The scaffold was his "reward", the foregone and desired conclusion. Even out of tenderness, did we have the right to take that away from him, to send him to the shower, into the hands of nurses. Or to the whip, into the hands of prison guards… leaving to legend the memory of a madman, irresponsible and incoherent?

"That's true!" she said.

She stood, gathered up the letters, the school diplomas, the meager remains, and bid me farewell, fully convinced that I was right… and she left, the incurable mother, the indefatigable mother, to inquire elsewhere about another means of salvation.

#

Today Monsieur Deibler, the grand arbitrator has had the final say: Henry has had "his" death.

Mob justice is satisfied with it. I do not know if society is safer for it. Until now the so-called operation has had the exact same results as those that ignorant doctors have: after carving away, they cut again, then slice off some more without stopping the gangrene that grows and grows—and threatens! I remember a clown, one of the Dare brothers, whose left leg was thus sliced up in the name of science: like a sausage.

The whole question is to know if it is a good form of treatment. All opinions aside, completely aside, is a threatened regime better off taking revenge than taking care of itself, punishing rather than preventing?

#

"Utopia! Utopia!" the politicians scream out.

Utopia? Why? Do you know that in being so categorical, so hostile to any conciliation, so scornful of kindness and fraternity, you are almost proving these desperate men right when they take refuge in crime like the desperate men did in Numantia, in Carthage or in Saragossa on their burning roofs? Every animal that is cornered turns ferocious. If they have no more hope, if every exit is closed, every recourse shut off, how can you be surprised when they give up their humanity to become wild beasts?

Repression? Yes, I know… The authorized officials advise it, demand it. They want to put on the pontoons of the penal colony that little four-sous guillotine that is so shamefully displayed on the mornings of executions in La Roquette and add a copy of the penal code to send across the waves!

They want: "To repress by terror."

But terror of what? Of death? Most of the common murderers today laugh at it and hold their heads high as they march toward it. So, he whom an ideal, good or bad, sustains, pays his debt with no more emotion than a club member paying off a lost bet. It's right, completely natural: they kill themselves or are killed without recriminations.

And who does the killing in such a case usually does not place much value on life. Here the facts speak for themselves. Just look at all the states of Europe and their recent suppression of anarchists—not a single person has asked for a pardon or died cowardly!

The penal colony? Wretched here or wretched there under the whips of the guards or the fists of the foremen, it does not matter much to them—and they make proselytes!

Philosophically I do not think that any intimidation can work against them. To call upon their goodwill? They cannot have any, these beggars living among beggars, their ears so stuffed up with the groans of suffering that the cries of their victims cannot be heard. To soften up a heart petrified by the tears of the common people! Léauthier's letter that was published in *Le Figaro* said much about this. The young man whom all who knew him called gentle (like Ravachol, incidentally) expressed his theory of killing in such a calm and lucid manner that the least clear-headed people had to stop and think about it.

"We will cut off their heads!"

So be it, cut off their heads!

But, again and again, and then? Will you put all the knives and dynamite in the world under lock and key? Will you guillotine or strangle the spirit of revolt forever? You know very well that you will not! Can you deny that the history of these last ten years is enough to prove it? One companion after another without cease: after Ravachol, Léauthier; after Léauthier, Vaillant; after Vaillant, Emile Henry. Capital punishment, though infamous, has become something to aspire to. The attacks are an answer to the severity: the Véry restaurant, les rues des Bons-Enfants, Saint Jacques, Faubourg Saint-Martin, the Madeleine, the Foyot, not to mention the *etcetera* in the country too numerous to count!

And you believe that this is a life for the good men—they are legion—thirsting for peace and tranquility? The anarchists started it, it is true… like rabbits! Why, in the many workshops I could show you and where fifty workers used to keep busy, are there barely three left? Why, from the top to the bottom of the ladder are we no longer self-sufficient? Who aspires to be leader of the people? Who assumes not only the responsibility of good order, but also of the public welfare? What do you want these jobless people to do—when they still have to eat? How do you expect that anger and hunger will not make them wild beasts? Who will stop them?

God? The governments have taken it away from them.

The idea of good and evil? What a pretty story it is. Babeuf, Cadoudal, Orsini, once upon a time executed as criminals, rehabilitated today, they have their henchmen; the surviving leaders of the Commune, deported like bandits less than a quarter of a century ago are basking in easy jobs—and the statue of Barbès stands there with its rifle, that murderous rifle that was the cause of his death sentence.

Set an example? You're not serious, you're joking, you don't give a damn! To have your head cut clean off or to die with an empty belly comes down to the same thing! At least before dying you're fed!

It is difficult to make those who more or less enjoy life to understand that a person deprived of everything does not experience any joy or pleasure. But that is how it is: I say so with terror.

Never was this term spoken in June 1848 at the barricade of Petit-Pont with more relevance: "What's your name?" the rebel chief asked a guy whose dress and bearing intrigued him. And the guy, all the while helping him, said, "Call me Tired of Living."

Another head to roll. And nothing changed for all that! The widow from a distance is nothing but a scarecrow for sparrows; up close nothing but a pedestal, a platform, a Calvary!

Truthfully, I am telling you that the solution is broken down, it is not working! And I will say it again why can't we try something else: a social state that is more humane, more just; concessions to the hungry poor; a less arbitrary distribution of goods—what Jesus the subversive, Jesus the torture victim simply called love of thy neighbor?

16 Bilking Panama and Burning Chivalry

Back in 1880, encouraged by the success of the Suez canal, Ferdinand de Lesseps founded the Panama Canal Company which was destined to link the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, but which was also destined to end in disaster. Underestimating the extent of work coupled with mismanagement put the company on the verge of bankruptcy. After years of difficulty the company suspended payments in December 1888 and three months later was ordered by the court to liquidate its assets.

The great scandal was aggravated by Boulangism [see 9-General Boulanger] and by a crisis at the Comptoir d'Escompte: after making huge speculations on the copper market, the bank's director Eugène Denfert-Rochereau committed suicide and his partner at the Société des Métaux was sent to prison for six months. Faced with the collapse of this financial institution the Bank of France and the Rothschilds stepped in to prevent a full-blown financial panic. But Paris was on edge that year of 1889 when the International Exhibition unveiled the Eiffel Tower rising over a thousand feet and standing as the tallest structure in the world[1]. But all the success the Tower had with the public could not overshadow the damaged reputation of Gustave Eiffel himself who, as engineer of the Panama Canal Company, had to refund 20,000 francs and was sentenced to two years in prison, although like the others he was acquitted.

See, the canal had been stopped and the actual liquidation was postponed in the hope of starting a new company or raising the price of American offers[2]. Agents were commission to raise funds, but most of the money went to buy off politicians. By 1892 bankruptcy was inevitable, thereby causing the ruin of 800,000 investors (many of them single women) and the loss of almost two billion francs. In the wake of the failure, many government officials, ministers and parliament members were accused of taking bribes to give away public funds and conceal the facts in the affair. Jean Jaurès was put in charge of a commission to investigate the case and found 104 legislators implicated in the crimes.

The failure of the Panama Canal Company was one of the major politico-financial scandals of the Third Republic and the largest financial scandal of the 19th century. Banking pirates, corrupt politicians, paid-off journalists and unscrupulous businessmen colluded in cheating people out of billions of francs. Although the concerned parties tried to cover up their crimes in the face of glaring evidence, they were inevitably brought to light for raising money under false pretenses, misappropriation of funds and corruption, tried in court, found guilty… and acquitted!

While Vaillant and Henry were throwing bombs at the very people responsible for the wreckage, another kind of attack was coming from a different quarter. The collapse of the Panama Canal Company stirred up anti-Semite activity as people like Edouard Drumont used his paper *La Libre Parole* to exploit the role of two Jewish speculators in the corruption. Anti-Semitism was

[1] Until the Chrysler Building was constructed in 1930

[2] The Americans eventually took over the project and the Panama Canal opened for business on August 3 1914, along with World War I.

a growing problem (as we saw Séverine's interview with the Pope [12-Pope Leo XIII] attest to) that would culminate in the Dreyfus Affair [see 17-19].

In Fernand Xau's *Le Journal* Séverine followed the Panama trial that was the talk of the town. Unlike her support of the anarchists, there was little controversy in criticizing the perpetrators of this historic fraud. Séverine, however, still managed to attract controversy with her thorny insight. She supported Lesseps, the scapegoat, to a certain degree, because the real culprits never appeared in court. The responsibility lay with the regime itself. Not only the guilty parties, but the whole government and all its cohorts were to blame—from the power mongers to the parasites, the entire system was corrupt.

Of course, Séverine's journalism was not limited to the disgraceful politics of the day. Her on the spot reporting continued as well. As we have seen she was adept at modern journalism, a certain sensationalism, but she always had her principles to accompany her. Back in May 1887 a dreadful fire at the Opéra Comique killed over a hundred people (so many bodies reduced to mere ashes that a precise number was never ascertained) during a performance of *Mignon* by Ambroise Thomas. Séverine went to the still smoking ruins in spite of the interdictions and warnings, but she was not content to stand around and watch from the outside. She wanted to give her readers a detailed description of the disaster not for the sake of sensationalism but for justice: she wanted to expose the responsible parties and make them pay for their crime. Being the only woman among the officials, she managed to get inside, observe the tragedy and conduct her investigation, which exposed the theater management that had locked an emergency exit for fear of people sneaking in. It was not only stupid, it was criminal. After her article the justice system continue to turn a blind eye toward safety regulations in public buildings, but it could no longer claim ignorance.

Now in 1897, as the Panama scandal was rekindled with the arrest of Emile Arton (one of the criminal bankers) in London, another catastrophic fire gripped the public conscience. An annual charity event, le Bazar de la Charité, had been held for more than ten years in different mansions of the Parisian elite. This fateful year, however, a wooden building on rue Jean Goujon was donated for the occasion. The interior was decorated to look like medieval Paris complete with shop signs and painted canvas backdrops. There was also a demonstration of the fascinating new technology by the Lumière brothers: cinematography. On the afternoon of May 4 the motion picture projector, which used ether in the lamp, caught fire and spread quickly. Over a thousand people, mostly from the aristocracy, panicked to escape. Within fifteen minutes the place was consumed and the charred remains of the victims lay in the ashes. Among the dead was the Duchess of Alençon, one of the organizers of the event and the sister of Empress Elisabeth of Austria. Estimates ranged from 115 to 135 casualties, less than ten of them men.

Within thirty minutes after the blaze Séverine was on the scene and stayed there for almost forty hours. As she gazed upon the lifeless bodies of all the women and children she wondered where all the men were. Her interviews with the witnesses revealed a tragic truth. First with her article "What Did The Men Do?" in *L'Echo de Paris* then in articles for *Le Journal* she gave no quarter to the men who had beaten their way through the women to escape. She accused them of cowardice and perfidy and brutality, but went even further. Far from the chivalry that the upper classes boast of in their males here was a tragic expression of the "battle of the sexes" that was being waged against women in the workplace and universities. Her poignant observations made many people stop to think about the real tragedy and consequences of the event.

Be that as it may, after this disaster safety regulations were implemented for emergency exits and the Lumière brothers developed electric lamps for their projectors.

What Did the Men Do? What Did The Men Do?[3]

It is up to us, women, to ask this—and not one of us should fail to do so.

Gyp[4] ended her article on Sunday with this:

The old Marchioness: Well, I say… with the exception of the servants and a few isolated cases, the men were not very elegant. There are very few of them dead or wounded.

Jalon's son: They say there were less than two hundred of them in all at the bazar… that's not very many!

The old Marchioness: Thank goodness there weren't more because then all the women would have been burned!

Folleuil (thoughtful): That's very possible!

The day before yesterday my friend Simone eloquently expressed her surprise and anger in her column here. Me, I have been waiting impatiently for eight days for my turn to speak, and to ask—at last!—the question that so many people were whispering behind the hearses, around the hospital beds and in the salons where certain people were pointed at.

What did the men do? We should rather ask "What did the Messieurs do?" because as far as men, in the Latin sense of the word, we only find them elsewhere… outside, in the street, in overalls or work shirts, dressed for the kitchen or the stables, in uniforms or liveries.

A member of the committee was interviewed by *Le Temps* Tuesday evening and said, "We estimate that there were 1,600 to 1,700 people in the Bazar when the catastrophe occurred. Not so many men, only around fifty, because of the hour."

At first they had said around two hundred. One victim, saved by miracle, whom I had the chance to interview, whose social status compelled her not to lie and demanded scrupulous accuracy, told me, "There were at least a hundred or so Messieurs."

Of the three different figures stated, I prefer, if you would like to know, the latter, as it is an average, apart from the fact that it just might be correct. Let's take this 100 as a working figure and do a very simple, although terribly intriguing, little calculation.

How many of them were among the dead? Three. Two old men, Messieurs Potdevin and Mazure, and the admirable Doctor Feulard who saved his wife, then two nuns and went back into the inferno a third time to look for his child. We can even say five with Doctor Rochet and General Munier, the poor brave soldier who did all his age and strength allowed him to do before dying soon afterwards of his horrible burns.

How many wounded? Lieutenant Jacquin of the 102nd, who was wildly heroic, defying all danger, throwing himself headlong inside and then sprinting back out, saving his two nieces from the blaze, one of their friends and three strangers, the last of whom died in his arms while the flames, battling fiercely for its prey, cruelly licked this young man's legs and face—and finally, crippled as he was, gathering together a dazed group on the wasteland, forty poor women whom he led to safety by breaking through a wall on rue Jean-Goujon!

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[3] *L'Echo de Paris*, May 14 1897.

[4] Sibylle Riqueti de Mirabeau (1849-1932), notorious right-wing writer, nationalist, anti-Dreyfusard, anti-Semite.

It is superb… but that makes one. Two with Baron Reille. Three with Garnier. Four with Dieudonné. Five with Tombio Sanz. Six with Henry Blount. Seven with the Count of Montgermont.

I do not know of any others, but let's round up to ten in case of an oversight since I do not want to upset anyone or seem partial. Of course there was that footman Diligent, but he was not "their people." And this list contains only the peers, friends and relatives of the victims of the disaster.

So, by being generous—and you can see if I have any malice intended here—we get this number: fifteen percent. It is rather small.

#

Now let's see what the women did, most of them being much less hardy, much less "trained" for the feat, much less prepared for danger. Their presence of mind and courage here is legion: where to begin when there are so many?

If you want to talk about composure, there is the girl Froissard—fourteen years old—saving her grandmother and younger cousin. There is Madame de Silva saving her two daughters. And many others—just take your pick.

If you want to talk about bravery there is Mademoiselle Rosine Morado, after getting out safely went back in to look for her mother, found her, brought her out… and was so burned herself, the poor child, that they feared for her life. There is Madame Borne, out of danger, but her, too, going back in to get her mother, Madame Gillet, and after doing so sacrificing her life in this rush of filial love. There is Madame de Saint-Berier, "over and over again" (no other expression could describe it), from the street to the heart of the fire, each time carrying her glorious spoils, a human being snatched from death until in her last trip she came out no more—fallen for good on the field of honor!

If you want to talk about self-sacrifice, there is the Duchess of Alençon who protested to Mademoiselle de L*** who was trying to drag her out, "Not yet, let the guests leave first." There is Mademoiselle de Heredia, I believe, stepping up on the chair to climb to safety and when asked to let a foreigner, a wounded stranger, go first, answered like at a party, "Be my guest, Madame. And you, too, go right ahead." This was said amidst the smoke and flames, between suffocating and burning… There are, too, those noble nuns of Saint Vincent on their knees holding the ladder in place at the life-saving window of the Hotel du Palais, helping one hundred and fifty of the women to escape and refusing to flee themselves until no one else showed up, both of them with their hands and face scorched raw and their robes on fire!

Meanwhile, outside, at the same time as the coachmen, roofers, plumbers, grooms, cops, printers, soldiers and stove-setters, working men and nobodies, came running to the rescue of the French aristocracy, the genealogical tree burning like a log, you could see still more women: Madame Roche-Sautier presiding over the rescue operation performed by her staff, organizing it diligently and intelligently; Madame Bouton, a worker, embracing a poor, crazed man, a living torch, to snuff out the flames; and the Soeurs du Perpétuel Secours climbing up on a wall and holding the ladder for the victims stuck in the wasteland.

That is the record of the women. Odd how it differs from the men.

#

However, the negligence, the carelessness, the abstention, the "omission" as they say in ritual style, is that all there is?

But no!

Let's see first how *Le Matin*, for example, which is not a biased newspaper, stated the facts:

The women were burned like sheep in a pen, huddled up together… As for the men, I would rather not talk about them: they were *beneath contempt*. And yet twenty or so determined, cool-headed men would have been able to prevent the disaster. Most of them ran away and who knows whether they were the ones who trampled over the poor women whom they found there squashed at the exit? Basically, in this dreadful calamity the men had abominably "given up" the women and let them *fend for themselves*. The acts of courage and devotion were carried out by passers-by, people from outside, or even by the servants, some of whom, particularly the footman Diligent, acted heroically. Most of the responsibility of this disaster, therefore, falls upon the men.

One of our colleagues, Henri Pellier, has already pointed this out. Another of our colleagues, Gaston Méry, described it in more detail, laying emphasis on the accusation while speaking of three surviving victims of the male brutality and cowardliness.

Because the men beat their way to the exit. In a group the other day I heard a nun tell, "The messieurs threw me to the ground and trampled me underfoot. They beat the ladies with their fists to get out faster. It was a young girl who saved me."

And they found her on the ground and they told her that among the incriminating evidence were bloodied canes, clotted with hair, with long women's hair…

Well, isn't that nice!

17 The Dreyfus Affair Begins

Toward the end of the century, in spite of the aggressive repression by the Lois Scélérates, Séverine kept busy with her columns for various papers, but her collaborations were certainly not appreciated by many radicals on the left. Even moderate liberals could accuse her of contradiction when she was writing for a monarchist paper like *Le Gaulois* or the fashionable press like *Gil Blas*, even though her principles were never sacrificed. Educated in the Vallès school of journalism she was ready to defend the victims of injustice in whatever venue was available as long as she was given complete freedom in her writing. That was how she ended up contributing to Drumont's anti-Semite paper *Libre Parole*. More than identifying herself as a follower of this of that school of thought or staying cooped up with the right people, more than being a rebel just for the sake of it, she clung to the cause, representing the dispossessed, fighting for the oppressed in any and every field she found. Plus, she had to earn a living. Her husband, Adrien Guebhardt, living in the south of France, did not support her and her lover, Georges de Labruyère, was more often given money than giving.

At the end 1894, while Paris was busy worrying about the anarchist bombs and the assassination of President Carnot, another crime, a seemingly clear-cut treachery slipped into the papers. Captain Alfred Dreyfus, the first Jewish officer to be admitted to the General Staff, was arrested on October 15 for spying on behalf of Germany. The case hinged on a document that had been found in a trash can at the Kaiser's embassy in Paris and that was identified as his handwriting. The trial was swift and inept and on December 22 he was found guilty and sentenced to life imprisonment. Dreyfus, of course, claimed his innocence and through his family found a supporting friend in the journalist Bernard Lazare, but they remained alone and isolated in their appeals. Their tenacity, on the other hand, was unstoppable.

Séverine, like everyone else, did not doubt Dreyfus' guilt, but she did raise her voice against two injustices: once when he was refused a retrial and a second time for the ignoble behavior of the uniforms when they shipped him off to Devil's Island on January 20 1895. See, there were reporters present when an officer reached over a policeman and smacked Dreyfus on the head with his sword. The bleeding, defenseless prisoner staggered on, unaided by anyone. Séverine was indignant and condemned the act in *L'Eclair*, cowardice being one of the things she hated most in the world. But this came as no surprise to the public since it was from "Our Lady with the Tear in Her Eye." Dreyfus' wife, at least, appreciated it and asked to see her as she was trying to rally support to prove his innocence. Séverine never answered the request, but she never regretted it; "there was too much money in their house," too bourgeois for her liking; and besides she still had other fish to fry, other battles to fight. There was Armenia and Cuba and the insurrections in Algeria, not to mention the continuing battle of the disinherited at home in France.

Bernard Lazare and the Dreyfus family, especially his brother Mathieu, did not give up the fight and their determination paid off in more than one way. Firstly, a wave of anti-Semitism swept through France and split the citizens into two camps, the Dreyfusards who supported them and the anti-Dreyfusards, anti-Semites and monarchists who were pitted against them. Sec-

ondly, Lieutenant Colonel Picquart, the new director of the intelligence service, scrutinized the case and became interested in the figure of Major Esterhazy, an officer up to his neck in debts. Another document was found in the German Embassy that matched the handwriting of Dreyfus' condemning evidence but it was obviously written by Esterhazy. If this truth came out it would discredit the army, a few high-ranking officers in particular, and strain the already uneasy relations with Germany. Therefore, Picquart was shipped off to Tunisia and thus military honor was saved. Except that before leaving Picquart confided his secret to the vice president of the Senate Auguste Scheuer-Kestner who assured him that Dreyfus would see his day in court across from Esterhazy. And so he did. Another speedy trial in January 1898 became major news this time and Esterhazy was deemed innocent. France was more divided than ever. The partisans of national security versus the defenders of truth and justice. The trial was clearly not fair, but it took Zola to muster the intellectuals and make it international.

It should be noted that the original Dreyfusards did not blame the army as a whole but rather a small clique of officers. They only wanted a fair and just trial. It was only later when the anti-Semitism and nationalism bloomed into anti-Republicanism and radical right-wing violence that the anti-militarism sprang forth in reprisal.

On January 13 1898 in *L'Aurore* Emile Zola risked his career and published "J'accuse!" addressed to the president of the republic, which would become famous worldwide. The man who often wrote but never acted politically turned vehement and combative. He, too, had first believed in Dreyfus' guilt, but he was disgusted by the hatred he witnessed. And now a travesty of justice was on hand. Anatole France stood beside him and Séverine joined their ranks with many others. Zola was dragged into court for accusing the army generals of anti-Semitism and of deliberately and of knowingly convicting an innocent man. Support poured in from all over the world, from Leo Tolstoy in Russia to Mark Twain in the United States, but the opposition was too strong. There were terrible demonstrations of anti-Semites screaming Death to Jews, Long Live the Homeland, Long Live the Army, Down with Zola! And so on February 23 1898 after a dramatic trial Zola was sentenced to one year in prison and a 3,000 F fine. Perreux, the editor of *L'Aurore* was given the same fine but only four months in prison. Without question and without packing Zola beat a hasty retreat to London.

Séverine was no babe in the woods when it came to the judiciary machine. After her battles for Duval and Vaillant and the rest, she had a long habit of the gavel, robes and wigs and she knew the power that the pen could wield as well as the dangers that could result. When she answered in her turn in an article calling for the truth to come out she was attacked by an armed assailant, barely escaping with her life, disconcerted but not at all discouraged. Her involvement in the affair was not so much in support of the officer himself, but against all the lies and hypocrisy. Guilty or innocent was not the issue, it was the violation of justice that outraged her.

About the Enigma About the enigma[1]

I can talk about it without hate or fear. Without hate because I have no bias—not being sure enough of the facts to stand firmly, no matter what may happen, among the "upholders" of innocence; and too independent, too passionate about truth and too worried about justice to put blind faith, without investigation, without discussion, in the *credo* that they try to impose on us

[1] January 14 1898, included in Vers la lumière 1900.

through terror. Without fear because one good thing about the outrageousness of some ordeals is that it desensitizes and from now on, in the face of insults, I am like Mithradates and poison: I have taken too much; it has no effect!

For, that is where we are. To say what you think, no matter how reasonable and polite, constitutes a danger and exposes you to attack by stone-throwing, mud-slinging hands.

But maybe this very excess of violence is a blunder. Although they have earned the silence of weak and timid souls, it could be believed that stronger, more hardened minds would not so patiently accept such bullying, such an attack on individual rights, that they would not resist the temptation to rise to the challenge, even at the prospect of danger, so absolutely domineering and seductive.

Popularity is not pleasing to lofty minds unless it accompanies some particular act of courage or justice and unless it does so with intuition and passion. When gotten in error and abuse, picked up but not hard won, by feeding and flattering the vulgarity of the crowd—which is not the people—it remains insignificant and rejected by proud, honest people.

An elite? Certainly not. The word is pretentious and the idea ridiculous. But there is the compensation in numbers, that inescapable law that almost always puts right and reason on the side of the minority.

You have to know how to be part of it. You have to want to be part of it, stubbornly, fiercely! Because of the principle that power and force engender, inevitably arbitrary, which cannot be exerted without harming the freedom of others.

Furthermore, this is hardly a reasoned result; it is a matter of temperament. From the first step, in a way, everyone marks out their path and under the sign they were born. You can easily tell the difference between the well behaved and the defiant, between who will be a tyrant and who a rebel.

The present dispute is making the same division: authoritarians versus libertarians. The one side epileptically struggling to muzzle the other.

And Dreyfus is only a pretext for the great battle of ideas.

#

Who cared about it before? His family, of course, and a few fellow Alsatians (remember in *Le Journal* last November that very strange search at Monsieur Ranson's house), a few coreligionists—and according to [Edgar] Demange and Bernard Lazare a few people worried about the irregularities of the trial. Many of them made no definitive conclusion about his innocence. They did not say, "He was unjustly judged." They only said, "He was badly judged," in the legal sense of the term.

These eccentrics, these malicious people thought that the fact that humans assume the prerogative to judge the mind and action of another, to bring it before their assembled fallibility and slap it with some kind of penalty has no other counterweight, no other excuse or surety but the strict observance and exaggerated respect for the method, the formalities.

Now, in this trial all the rules had been broken; this is undeniable. Agaisnt those very rare individuals who had made this troubling observation at that moment they had opposed the issues of national security, the fear of Germany and the interests of state. They were highly esteemed, unquestionable arguments, but used really too offhandedly to be used without rationalization.

Interests of State? But we were in the 23rd year of the Third Republic and the young generation had soaked up and was still warm with the republican teaching. In the schools they had hammered it in that interests of State was a crime of the MONARCHY and the monarchy had

been destroyed for it. They made the kids shiver when they told them about the Templars, the crimes of Louis XI, the brutality of the Inquisition, the savagery of the Duke of Alba, the ruthlessness of Richelieu—and Saint Bartholomew Day and the Dragonnades! They made them cry over La Ballue, the Iron Mask, [Jean Henri] Latude, the murder of the Duke of Enghien, Josephine abandoned, [Michel] Ney and La Bédoyère shot… What were they going to say in the Republic about the interests of State?

Fear of Germany? But it judges its spies without fear of us. It is apparent, fortunately, that they are no keener on war over here than they are over there. Over-zealous patriotism would not be permitted over there: it would be judged dangerous to world peace and swiftly repressed.

National security? But wasn't the last quarter of a century that they have been repairing and preparing, backed by crushing taxes in the billions, good for anything?

Under close scrutiny the three pretexts are nothing but pretexts. And the conviction took root and spread, creating ripples, that "there was something," that an unheard-of blunder, that a pathetic subterfuge had taken place to get or to "formulate" the physical evidence without which the circumstantial evidence would have gone unheeded and the members of the war council, with nothing on which to base their accusations, would have been unable or unwilling to come to a decision.

Innocent, not innocent, who knew. They were only protesting against violating the rules in use with respect to a defendant—whoever he may be!

#

The years rolled by. The Dreyfus family, as was its right as well as its duty, tried everything that might prove the innocence of their brother, husband and father, whom they believed and still believe to be innocent.

For, they felt sorry, justifiably, for the little Esterhazy girls, incriminated for three months, but the same people did not dream for a minute about the Dreyfus children, crushed under their father's disgrace for three years—and no guiltier!

As backward as I might be, I did not know that for national interests we had stepped back into punishing children for the sins of their fathers.

I can talk about these things with ease after my cautious cruelty of not seeing Madame Dreyfus, which I just might do again. There was, there is, too much money in their house. But as a woman, as a mother, I sympathized with her, as I still do, and understood her effort on behalf of her absent husband.

Another, parallel effort had to be made without her knowing: that of Lieutenant Colonel Picquart who as director of the intelligence service for the war office, after coming upon a trail that seemed worth serious consideration, would have betrayed his role, his professional obligations, if he had followed through on it.

Du Paty de Clam[2] has, I think, also slightly overstepped his discretionary powers as investigator concerning the prisoner in his care. Except that the defendant was found guilty. So, it was good. Lieutenant Colonel Picquart's suspect [Esterhazy] was acquitted. So, it was bad. There is no other difference.

Around the same time, Scheurer-Kestner—whose attention had been drawn to the affair by the doubts constantly put forward by his fellow Alsatians—also ordered an investigation to unravel the enigma, if possible.

[2] Who examined the handwriting and declared it evidence enough to have Dreyfus arrested.

By different ways these three men, Mathieu Dreyfus, Lieutenant Colonel Picquart and Senator Scheurer-Kestner ended up at the crossroads where they were bound to meet.

What was at the crossroads?

The note.

#

They told us that the handwriting experts had declared that the note was not written by Esterhazy. I really want to admit that they had made such a declaration, although nothing proves it because it was behind closed doors and they kept us sequestered from this kind of testimony even when it posed no apparent danger to the peacefulness of Europe.

But I must quickly add that if I had I heard them it would not have made me any more trustful of this art that seems to me, whatever field is being treated, full of paradox, inconsistency and deception.

I remember that in toxicology Monsieur Bergeron wrongly got the head of the poor herbalist Moreau; and in the Druaux affair and in the Cauvin affair, in all the most notorious judicial errors, the experts, in stirring up unanimity and doubtlessly too much good faith, testified how the judge urged them: in falsehood.

I also remember the legendary trial in which the "man of science" declared that the document submitted to his expertise was certainly not in the hand of the accused although the marginal notes, with no less certainty, was in his hand. Now, this belonged to the President! It was he who had annotated the dossier!

Therefore, I remain skeptical. But even if, conscientious of the matter being judged, I cannot confirm that the note *is* from Esterhazy, I can say that my conviction, the result not of an impression but of a study, my absolute, invincible, unshakeable conviction—we are free in this, aren't we?—attributes it to him.

A traitor, then? No, not at all. A dear servant, on the other hand, deserving hereafter to be spared and protected. It is only a hypothesis, but let's look more closely at it. I assure you that it is worth the trouble.

Monsieur Dreyfus is in the war office. He "came up" young. He is rich. He is a Jew. Along with this, such as they painted him for us, he bore more of the bad than the good qualities of his race: he is rough, gruff, haughty, ambitious, and maybe scheming. You see, I do not pretty up the picture.

He is envied and loathed. Some sectarianism is mixed up in the competitive environment, in office matters. He is the victim of deadly hatred—of hatred like Montjuïc![3]

Now, there were "leaks" like there still are and will always be! The enemy is suspicious of the enemy and to its ruin desires and hunts for someone to accuse. The suspicion festers. They gather clues and circumstantial evidence… Is Dreyfus guilty, is he reckless, is he innocent? I do not know.

But whether innocent, reckless or guilty, there is no proof to bring him to a court-martial. Which proves that in a sincere belief, for interests of the State, to safeguard the fatherland, to save it from whom they imagined a traitor and whom they could punish, they did not ask any tangible proof *from the officer whose writing resembled his the most?*

A novel? No more than the rest. The closed doors are dangerous because they allow all conjectures.

[3] "Jew Mountain" in Barcelona where five anarchists were executed under antiterrorist laws in 1897 during a

The council of war, in its soul and conscience, passes judgment based on the note. Because it has told us that there is no secret evidence.

Like Monsieur de Cassagnac, furthermore, I reckon that in the single tribunal bringing forth only one document not released to the accused and his defense would suffice to nullify the verdict, being a monstrous derogation.

But Dreyfus goes off the Devil's Island, innocent or guilty—judged like that.

#

What were the three trail seekers, Mathieu Dreyfus, Picquart and Scheurer-Kestner, supposed to think of the note with such a "frightening" resemblance to Esterhazy's writing?

But since they did not considered the same hypothesis, since the starting point was different, they had to conclude that, because there had been treason, the traitor could be none other than the author of the note.

They did think it, at least, especially faced with the facts: the disgrace inflicted on Colonel Picquart who was too eager to find out what they were trying to hide; the attitude of the chiefs who were at first all fired up and then turned completely cold; the obvious protection given to Esterhazy who was free until the end to make his plans; the people attending the second military tribunal, hand-picked from the auxiliary press; the lack of investigation, the closed doors sessions, the obvious fear of the least incident that might bring the scandal to light again!

Does this amount to saying that the judges the other day were biased or under orders? I do not believe so. I do not want to believe so. They judged on what they were given to judge—that is, empty air, a void, nothing, nothing, nothing!

Add to this what is fatal: the spirit of hierarchy and discipline that is inherent to the uniform, to the job of a soldier; the impossibility for these brains molded in leather and steel to admit that their colleagues, their predecessors might have been wrong; the horror of thinking how the military prestige might collapse under the discovery of such an error… and you will understand the blasé fulfillment of an already weighty task and the fear of finding more than had been given.

#

I have only one more thing to say, to repeat rather, since I have already said it.

Before the Esterhazy affair, when people talked to me about the Dreyfus affair, I invariably answered, "They haven't given me any proof of the convicted man's innocence so far, but neither have they given me any proof to the contrary, seeing the way he was judged. I'm not sure…"

Since then—and especially after the public session at Cherche-Midi [prison]—the obvious desire to snuff out, to stifle the debate, the tactics taken, the campaign waged, the uproar organized, the alliance to intimidate or gag whoever permitted himself just to doubt, has determined my inevitable reaction.

Amidst the storm of insults I have just described the matter without insulting anyone. I have spoken, I believe, calmly. And I am not alone in thinking like this. There are a few of us (including the good people whom they are trying to stir up but who remain quiet) who, without being "spies," "traitors," or "for sale," are milling about the enigma and want the truth… and we will have it!

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crackdown on the militant working class.

[4] February 5 1898, included in Vers la lumière 1900.

The Accused The Accused[4]

To feel the continual and irresistible necessity to shout out at the top of your lungs what you think, especially when you are the only one to think it, even at the risk of spoiling the joys of your life, that is what my passion has been. I am all bloody from it, but I love it and if I am worth anything, it is from that and that alone.

Emile Zola, Une campagne, 1882.

The man is in front of me, in his house—this house that they took so much trouble to point out to the raging mad, specifying the address, adding a drawing to the text, describing the grounds and the shortest way to get here and then undoubtedly accomplish their inspired task…

The house is beautiful because it is spacious and furnished with relics. If there is luxury here, it is the luxury of art and therefore it does not shock me since it remains inaccessible to the vulgar and to the "bores," to the mind-starved who have nothing but money.

And then if, little by little, in the commonplace atmosphere, under the patina of the years, everything is harmonized, you really feel that the nest was nonetheless built one twig at a time and that these beautiful or rare things, for the most part ancient, are not a mass legacy that used to surround the very modest cradle where the simple employee of the publisher Hachette was born.

Success came gradually and it was during his travels or after every triumph that he acquired here or there some marvel without any intrinsic value but artistically priceless in the eyes of collectors.

But each of these trinkets has seen centuries and to the detriment of their wholeness has lived through warring and peaceful generations, events just the mention of which leaves us dreamy.

Oh, no, this is not the house of an oaf or a philistine or a churchwarden! And no setting as much as this speaking, living mosaic of a background, attesting to the emptiness of ancestral follies and the survival only of a philosophy superior to the ephemeral deeds of humans, no setting could be more fitting to the ascetic vision that my eyes scrutinize and itemize—in a daze!

#

Ascetic? Zola? Well, yes. Now, don't be too quick to smile or shout out. I knew the early Zola, the struggling, tired man of labor and reflection, who powerfully and weightily plowed his way with heavy steps, massive shoulders and strained kidneys.

I also knew the later Zola, thinner, successful, in his glorious and dangerous period when the militant arms, hanging on the wall, seemed reduced to being just a trophy, when his ardor also seemed numbed and when his thought was in danger of turning bourgeois.

As undeniable a master as he was, I still had some bones of contention with him. Let's not fool ourselves: I am no sycophant, no blind, unconditional admirer. In many of his works there are passages that shock me, being a woman, and about which I would express my opinion much more freely if it was the day to climb up the Capitol. But every time I close one of his books, in reviewing my impressions, my enthusiasm so far surpasses any disappointment that the latter is left an insignificant trifle.

Yes, I did not like Adèle's childbirth in Pot-Bouille [1882]—but what were these ten pages after the three hundred others of admirable satire against the caste in power! Yes, in Germinal [1885] there were, perhaps, some useless observations—but what a plea on behalf of poverty and the poor beasts of the firedamp burden! Yes, in La Terre [1887] also some things repulsed me—but the hail, the harvest, the rain, the hay, all the fumes from the earth, all the steam from the water,

all the winds from the sky, through the power of the word we savored the mirage and really felt it. There is only "Jesus Christ"[5] that I remained adamant about… and saddened by. Even if there really were a man who bore such a name, we should not give it to him and offend so many loving, believing souls, puerile if you want, but in the sense of respect, faith and love!

#

Therefore, I am not blinded by passion or hypnotized by any unbridled, limitless devotion. I am the master of my judgment; I discuss; I appreciate—no fetishism fetters the exercise of my free will and the spirit of inquiry that is constantly awake in me.

And you should believe me when I say that this new Zola whose facial expressions I watched, whose tone of voice I listened to, revealed himself and asserted himself such as I had never known him before.

Oh, there is nothing prophetic about his beard and no frenzy shakes his body. He is not violent and he is not hateful. Whoever has described him with such rude profanities has lied. On the contrary, he is simplicity and serenity itself. He did what he believed was his duty… and he therefore has what is always present with such certitude: peace of mind. And without solemnity—with smiling, indulgent friendliness, barely tinged with melancholy.

But his big, clear, golden brown eyes behind the pince-nez radiate the inner flame of his conviction. And his deep, harmonious voice, determined and discreet, is stamped with irresistible persuasion.

While he speaks, sitting calmly, envisioning all the personal responsibilities of his act and ready to suffer everything, an amusing detail strikes me in this unraveler of enigmas: his nose!

It is not nice and pretty. It is not ugly either. Anyway, it is not stubby or ridiculous. There is just a cleft at the end like in the Braque Saint Germain, those hunting dogs of superior race. "A sign of cynicism!" certain idiots I know would shout out. But I do not have the time to think about them. I am listening to, now eagerly interested in the beginning of the adventure: how Zola the triumphant, acclaimed, rich and peaceful, decided to jump in… headfirst.

It did not come from hearing the nightingale sing—but almost!

One evening he was visiting another person's house when someone came in who had attended Dreyfus' degradation that morning. The story was told by the eyewitness in such rich detail and such visional bitterness, maybe also with such satisfaction, that the writer's spirit rose up against it. A gust of pity, like a gust of incense, infused his soul. "A man alone, *even guilty*, against all those men, abandoned to spitting and hissing!"

But since the verdict seemed right, given without hatred or fear, in absolute certitude, it could only have been a fleeting impression. Zola thought no more about it, or not much, for three years. Chance had to fall upon him in the form of Scheurer-Kestner and other people whose names I forget, *concerning proof* and evidence, for his conviction to be settled, inflexible and invincible.

He and some others faced with insults and defiance became madly obsessed with bringing out this evidence and giving the proof—and these people were treated like Judas, like spies and traitors, corrupted. They knew self-sacrifice, haughty courage, the ultimate patriotism, of not yielding to temptation, of not justifying themselves at the expense of the very people who were insulting them. Among the latter were some who knew the truth and who gambled on the dilemma to shut their opponents up. Either stay quiet, tolerate the outrage, bear through the ordeal until

[5] The name of a character in La Terre.

the end and maintain your stoical virtue, or answer to it and become beggars, try to win at such a price!

Ah, how I as a wife and mother would like them to stay quiet!

#

Now Zola is about to appear before the court: acquitted or convicted he will continue his way toward a goal from which nothing can turn him away. He knows everything that is said and everything that is plotted, what meetings have been set up and what individuals have been posted. Not he but Labori built up the caseload of threats. And for the first time in court, seeing that he has been in no previous trial, he will meet Madame Dreyfus and Mathieu Dreyfus whom he has never seen. No one has interceded for him, on his behalf, and almost everyone involved is French of the old breed and Christian of the old school.

But what does all this matter? No embarrassing truth is accepted—and that is how the falsehoods that the gullible abuse are created today.

And whereas no one is begging foreigners "to get mixed up in their business," I who have seen the international protests in favor of the Canadian Riel, the Russian Zasulich, the Cossack Atchinof, the Spaniards of Montjuïc[6], etc, etc., I am thinking of what intellectual Europe thinks about him whom only a part of France—oh, a very small part!—does not know. Tolstoy, for Russia, supports him; the Dutch Domela Nieuwenhuis wrote to him, "The accusation that you suffer in the name of violated justice marks you out as a great person"; the Dane Bjornson wrote to him, "How much I envy you today! How much I would like to be in your place so I could do service to homeland and to humanity like you are doing"; the Englishman Christie Murray applauds him; the American Mark Twain said in the *New York Herald*, "I am filled with a deep and boundless respect and admiration for him"; the Italian Carducci, the Victor Hugo of the Peninsula, wrote his name at the top of an address bearing six thousand signatures; the women of Hungary "to the immortal apostle of truth" wrote that his letter to France "found a powerful echo in the hearts of all civilized people."

Here there are some people demanding the exile of Aristides or the dungeon of Torquato Tasso for him!

Far from bringing them to resipiscence[7], this luminous levee exasperates them. They have forgotten those famous verses of a patriot who was once a minister but who nevertheless wrote:

There are no more seas or steps or rivers
That limit the heritage of humanity:
The limits of the mind are the sole frontiers,
The world, lighting up, rises to unity.
My homeland is there where France beams,
Wherever its genius bedazzles man!
I am a fellow citizen of everyone who deems
"The truth, that is my homeland!"

Thus concluded de Lamartine. Thus can we conclude today. Escorting the Accused, the greatest minds of the civilized world will appear in court. Let them be judged!

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[6] Louis Riel (1844-1885), a founder of Manitoba and leader of the native Métis people who was executed for treason in 1885; Vera Zasulich (1849-1919), Marxist writer and revolutionary who had shot a Russian colonel; Nikolai Atchinof (1856-?) led a Greek orthodox expedition into French territories around Egypt and defied the authorities; Anarchist supporters were executed at the Montjuïc fortress in Barcelona in 1897.

[7] Recalling them to their senses.

18 La Frondeuse

Marguerite Durand, the brilliant actress of the Comdédie Française, had quit everything to marry Georges Laguerre in 1888. Séverine had met her in the conspiratorial atmosphere of her salon during the heyday of General Boulanger[1]. A young, blonde beauty Durand enjoyed her social life and was a strong supporter of Boulanger, but she was intelligent and critical and no blind zealot. Although nine years her senior, Séverine hit it off with her right away, finding in her not only a friend but a surrogate younger sister. They saw each other often, going to dinner and the theater, Séverine's continuing passion and Marguerite's former milieu. She and Sarah Bernhardt would become Séverine's two best, livelong friends. However, Marguerite's marriage to Laguerre was incompatible and they separated in 1891 (eventually divorcing in 1895), forcing her to earn a living. Like Séverine she turned to journalism.

Writing for *Le Figaro*, Durand was sent to an International Feminist Congress in 1896 to write a nice little satirical piece. She went there indifferent, ready to have fun. She came away transformed, ready to take up arms. She refused to write the article for *Le Figaro* and dedicated the rest of her life to fighting for women's rights, for which she would become a sort of muse. Her ambition was to found a feminist newspaper. Not just feminist in its editorial line, but really feminist: written, directed, administered, printed, everything run exclusively by women. And not just a paper for women, but a paper for everyone, like any other, covering politics, economics, culture and society. Such a thing was unprecedented in history. Not even in the United States or England, the hotbeds of feminism, had such a thing been accomplished, but by the autumn of 1897 she had found the money. And the name: *La Fronde*, i.e. Revolt.

One of the first people Marguerite Durand approached to collaborate with her was, of course, Séverine. The paper just could not appear without her. Séverine was hesitant, knowing *La Fronde* could not pay her going rates, and reluctant about the political stance and editorial control because she was entering the battle for Dreyfus and already facing antagonism. First of all Durand assured her the paper was pro-Dreyfus, but of course the money was another thing. She was paying all the women the same rates as men, the female typographers received the same wages as unionized males—the only man in the building was the old janitor—so, yes, she would have to take a pay cut. But she, like all the writers, would enjoy complete editorial freedom because the paper belonged to no organization and cared only for quality. They negotiated hard, but not too long, and Séverine joined the team. The first edition hit the streets on December 9 1897, barely a year and a half after it's quixotic conception at the feminist congress.

Séverine's articles appeared on the front page under the rubric "Notes d'une frondeuse" (Notes of a Rebel), the same title as the collection of articles about the Dreyfus Affair that she would publish in 1900. It was a haven for her, a refuge where she could write with humor or venom or outrage without censorship. After Zola's trial, as the weeks rolled by, the camp of dreyfusards had grown, but their anti-Semite, nationalist adversaries had also strengthened their ranks and

[1] See 9-General Boulanger.

the battle was fiercely fought in public, in private and in the papers. Anti-Semitism had impregnated all levels of society, especially the different schools of socialists who argued bitterly among themselves as to which side to take. For others it was purely a matter of patriotism, of love of country, which quickly turned into a feeling of hatred for foreigners. Most anarchists sat on the sidelines and watched, waiting, their patriotism being defined by Sébastien Faure: a chemical product containing 40 grams of love and 60 grams of hate.

Séverine covered the case rigorously after the parody of the Esterhazy trial in 1898 where he was acquitted despite glaring evidence against him. Doubts about Dreyfus' innocence had vanished and a retrial seemed assured. But Séverine soon faced a different battle in her life. She was forty-four years old in the spring of 1899 when she started suffering from fatigue. She thought it was a result of the good fight after years of combat had battered her health, but the doctor told her it was more serious, something in the ovaries or uterus that she would rather not think about but that would need a hysterectomy immediately. She was bedridden with her mother at her side, but she continued writing up to the last minute because she needed the money but more importantly because she needed to forget her fear… of pain, of suffering and especially of death. On March 16 1899, she went under the knife.

The operation lasted a few hours and when she woke up Sarah Bernhardt and Marguerite Durand were there for her. When she asked how she looked they stammered. Finally they brought her a mirror and she stared blankly into it—her golden hair had turned totally white. "I prefer to be a young old woman than an old young woman," she said with good grace. But she had little time to recuperate before jumping back into the fire.

La Fronde was a paper for all women no matter what their religion or race, but it was ostensibly pro-Dreyfus. On the other hand the big press along with the government was almost completely anti-dreyfusard and their arms were long and powerful. With the commercially-condemning dreyfusard slant came a lawsuit for illegally employing women: the typesetters night work was an infraction of the protectionist laws of 1892. And the subversive paper was banned from girls' schools and factories where women were working. Money dried up and the ship sank. In October 1903 *La Fronde* closed its doors, but not before playing its role and setting a historic standard for feminists around the world.

Actions of Grace Actions of grace[2]

The day after my operation, while those around me were desperately worried, I motioned to them. They came running. Did I want to grumble about the pain, demand some relief, tell them my last wish? Or was it just an unconscious movement in the coma I seemed to have fallen into? The anxious ears approached my lips and heard me murmur this with reference to *Le Matin* two days before, "Has Esterhazy kept talking?"

For, although I owed much to God first of all for allowing the miracle, to [Dr.] Pozzi for accomplishing it, to [Georges de La] Bruyère for watching over it, to the good President of the Republic who, as a get-well present, wanted to spare a man's life; to the press who was so kind to me; to the public and to friends, known and unknown, who transformed my room into a garden every day and showered me with so many and such touching proofs of tenderness, I also owe something to the Affair.

[2] "Notes of a Rebel," *La Fronde*, April 11 1899.

Thinking of it constantly, at all times, almost unto death's door, gave me a unique power of resistance, an energy of incomparable reaction.

At one moment while I felt like I was dying, that I was really reaching the farther shore, some ugly faces like Japanese masks grimaced through my memory and I thought I saw some nasty paws rubbing together in satisfaction. The idea of the joy of the Bores stopped me clean in my tracks… and I turned back.

I did well. It was stupid to leave before reading about the investigation in *Le Figaro*. The first issue came to me with the first cutlet and when the curtains were finally opened the sun, broad daylight, flooded the room with light!

Ah, a nice surprise and a wonderful cordial!

"Séverine is better," *Le Rire* said with Cappiello's delightful caricature in which the animals and I are so happy to see each other again.

But if Séverine was better, morally as well as physically, she owed it, partly at least, to the morning love song of the Barber of Seville[3]—shaving the others til they bleed!

It shook off my sleepiness, awoke my combative instinct and gave me the furious desire to put my reveries into words. I owed to it the loss of blessed prostrations, beastly neutrality and hopeful annihilation.

But I have a little contempt for it.

And here I am again in the fight, dear readers, because I am fed up with this, I miss you, I miss *La Fronde*, I miss the battle—like those wounded who leave the hospital tents to go back to the battlefield, not accepting that the fight can be won without them!

In the Tempest In the Tempest[4] August 6 1899

A departure like you've never seen, in this tumultuous chaos of people, things, the elements under an apocalyptic sky ablaze, everything streaked with howling thunderbolts!

Cries of freedom greeted the returning wind; cries of terror, galloping away; cries of rage in the station; in the heart of Brittany, a nameless confusion of beasts and vehicles and people: the battle to move forward, to get there!

Then, for seven hours on this real Walpurgis night, the train speeding through the clouds, a landscape of flames, the horizon straddled by zigzags, furious gales shaking, twisting, bending the ragged trees.

At last the rising day, Brittany gray and black, austere and flat, low houses, stunted trees, closed faces.

The pale dawn, gloomily, regretfully, whitens the sky…

And a vision persists, will remain with me forevermore. In the back window of the concourse—a picture of Sinai, dazzling, blinding, amongst the clamor of the terrorized city and the roar of the troubled sky—the silhouette of a man stands out, stands up, an inscrutable face full of strength and intelligence that the lightning flashes turn blue: it is Bernard Lazare[5], the torchbearer leaving for Rennes to finish the work that he alone, three years ago now, had started.

[3] I.e. Figaro.

[4] On the eve of the final trial of Dreyfus in Rennes. Included in Vers La Lumière, 1900.

[5] (b.1865 – d.1903) He championed the innocence of Dreyfus from the start.

19 End of Dreyfus Affair

The dreyfusards paid dearly for their commitment to the cause. Their names were smeared, their reputations darkened and their careers suffered in the venture. Even if at first most, like Séverine, were not convinced of Dreyfus' innocence and were only outraged by the farcical trial, as time went on, evidence came out and it appeared almost certain that a real travesty of justice had transpired. Nevertheless, it took almost two years after Zola's "J'Accuse" for a new trial to be granted. In the interim the investigation continued and it was discovered that the second document that had been produced to prove Dreyfus' guilt was a forgery by Major Henry at the urging the General Staff. After his arrest and confession Major Henry committed suicide. Mathieu Dreyfus's appeal to the Military Court was transferred to the Supreme Court for review. The court of appeals annulled the 1894 trial and pulled Dreyfus off Devil's Island to lock him up in Rennes for a new trial. It took place in August and September 1899.

Five months after her surgery Séverine was ready to go but *La Fronde* did not have the funds to send her to Rennes, so she paid her own way. On Sunday August 5 the Parisians were leaving for vacation at the train station, but Séverine was off to battle. In Rennes she found a new family. Bernard Lazare was there, carrying the torch he had lit more than three years earlier. Anatole France, Georges Clemnceau, Fernand Labori the attorney and Jean Jaurès among many others. Jaurès had understood very quickly that besides an excuse to foment anti-Semitism the affair was being used to undermine relations between France and Germany. Both of these issues would spill over into the 20th century.

In Rennes she stayed at Trois Marches where the dreyfusards gathered every evening around a big table to relax. Séverine the libertarian and pacifist fighting for a bourgeois officer of the French army met a group of socialists and anarchists who understood and accepted this contradiction. Some remained for the entire trial, others like Octave Mirbeau or Elisée Reclus only passed through. They all had different political inclinations but were not sectarian. They were not there to proselytize or impose their dogma but to seek justice and the truth. The atmosphere was serious but surprisingly cheerful, maybe because they were sure that Dreyfus would be acquitted. For the first time in her life Séverine felt comfortable in a group and she began to understand the real value of collective action.

But the anti-dreyfusards were present as well. At one point a mob of a thousand students led by three priests attacked a hotel were many dreyfusards were staying. Although a lot of property was damaged, no one was seriously injured. There was no police investigation. On August 14, a week after the trial began, Dreyfus' lawyer Fernand Labori, who had defended Zola after Clément Duval and Augsut Vaillant, was shot while leaving the house where he stayed with his wife and two daughters. Fortunately the wound was not fatal, but the shooter ran away. Everyone knew that the incident had been instigated back in Paris by Edouard Drumont the anti-Semite and Henri Rochefort, that ex-communard, ex-penal colonist, who had once confronted Napoleon III but had now turned nationalist, anti-Semite and misogynist. The trial continued with the second lawyer, Edgar Demange.

For more than a month, the witnesses came forth and the evidence was presented to the military tribunal. After five years in hell, Alfred Dreyfus awaited his acquittal before overwhelming proof. On September 10 1899 the soldiers were out in force, ready for a riot on one side or another of the street. After less than two hours of deliberation, a verdict was reached. 5 to 2 majority. Guilty as charged. But with extenuating circumstances, so only ten years in prison, thus saved from the penal colony. Military prejudice had triumphed again, but they were far from Paris, so there were no riots, only gaping mouths and stunned stares in watery eyes at the absurdity of the ruling.

Nine days later on September 19 President Emile Loubet pardoned Dreyfus for political reasons but he was not deemed innocent, so it changed nothing on the greater scale of things. Dreyfus almost refused the offer, but his desire to be free and return to his family was too great. His exoneration would wait six more years until 1905 to happen. After years of battle the Affair had left its mark on everyone, especially Séverine. In 1900 she published her collection of articles on Dreyfus, Vers le lumière [Towards the Light], starting with "Une Lache" [A Coward], January 24 1895, and ending with "Notre Oeuvre" [Our Work], September 14 1899. Almost five years of effort for nothing.

In fact Séverine did gain a great deal in the Dreyfus Affair, despite the crushing disappointment of the outcome. She had come out of her solitude when she left Rennes with a group of friends and colleagues who had stood side by side on the front lines and sat together in back rooms. She saw how strength in numbers, in union, was potent and valuable, which she could use in her causes, especially as World War I approached. The Affair also, perhaps, raised her up to a different, higher level of journalism as she became aware of the more universally profound repercussions of the power of the press.

After the Affair Séverine was anything but idle, but being an ex-dreyfusard she was blacklisted and had to take any opportunity that arose. The result was a scattering of varied articles with no real focus. She was adrift and unsettled, but not beaten. Very soon a new career would open up to her in what she had once shunned like the plague: Public Speaking.

Our Work Our work[1]

Heartache, yes, we can feel some—for the homeland and for humanity!

That our France could be so debased by the very ones who claim to defend it, that such wickedness of soul is possible and becomes visible like rotten meat rising to the surface of water, yes, such things were done to make us sick and sad.

But these sentiments are a luxury in battle: we could not dwell on them or become soft. That our senses were offended, that the collective dignity suffered was not very important to continuing the effort or to the uninterrupted current of energy that must bind tomorrow to today.

The true sentiment of the situation, the pride necessary for reviving the muscles, our support and reassurance will be drawn from the examination of what we gained—in spite of such obstacles!

[1] *La Fronde*, September 14 1899, in Vers le lumière 1900.

A man was in the penal colony, locked up under illegal conditions after having been judged illegally. He fell victim to Lebon, to Deniel[2], to immurement, to eternal silence, to double shackles, to crucifying lies, alone, all alone, as dead as a corpse in the grave!

He was never supposed to see France again nor his fellow countrymen nor his family! His wife was a widow, his children orphans: all the social powers, joined together, had crossed out his name. He was stricken forever from among the living.

Bernard Lazare lit the first torch from which other flames afterwards lit up. We were a handful of pioneers in the darkness and the light became a target for stoning us. We experienced all the calumnies, all the outrages, all the proscriptions! The strongest held up the weaker: we did not abandon the wounded on the road and no one ever ran away. Thus, slowly, we advanced.

After that, Destiny joined our ranks. What we should have served, served us, instead, in a powerful way. At critical times miracles came. The enemies were pointed out and knocked down like by an invisible finger. Even the apparent failures were changed into victories, without fanfare but with considerable impact.

From twenty we became a hundred, then a thousand… and from then on at every public demonstration, at every new fact, the number of partisans of Truth grew. The reflection from its mirror gained ground and invaded, like the light of dawn, the hitherto dark corners of the still darkened consciences.

We pulled the man out of the penal colony. Our will raised Lazarus from the dead. Do you remember that we defied that this would never happen without a general revolution? It only took four customs officers and a few policemen to keep within decent limits not the furious but the curious crowd.

Did we deny that the caste or chapel spirit could have influenced his conviction? The event revealed [General] Mercier trying to repeat the secret communication blow of 1894 with the judges in 1899. We could see the generals joined together to try to save one of their own at the expense of the innocent man, preferring the impunity of Esterhazy to the confession of the initial error that covered up so many crimes afterwards!

Dreyfus was saved physically—expecting better—and will not return to Devil's Island nor suffer again, of course, the torture of degradation. Such is the material conquest.

The moral conquest is huge. In open court, in the cold, cruel light of day, when it was the people's turn to judge, they could appraise some of their leaders, gauge their special mentality, survey their immoderate tongues and childish tricks and realize how these sea snails could led them into the promised slaughter…

This evolution is worth two revolutions because it was not bloody and it liberated minds.

The Defenders The Defenders[3]

There was just held in Paris a kind of International Congress where the rights of women were eloquently and energetically defended by women. Some of the participants wanted to ask me why I, usually so full of fight and in the front lines, systematically stayed outside, seeming to distance myself from such interesting demonstrations.

[2] André Lebon, Minister of the Colonies and Oscar Deniel, The Governor of Guiana and Director of its prisons.

[3] L'Éclair, May 20, 1892. Séverine's early refusal to speak in public and her distrust of certain aspects of the feminist cause.

The fact is true—or rather the appearance of the fact. But I guarantee, it is not for lack of solidarity, which would be bad, not out of disdain, which would be extremely ludicrous toward women of rare value and real talent such as were sitting in that assembly, nor through a hostility that is unlikely for my sex with respect to anyone who fights in its favor. Moreover, in this context, I expressed my respect and echoed no protest, no complaint, no feminine prayer.

So, my distance comes not from desertion or from antipathy. It has at heart a bunch of basic instincts that I cannot get rid of and which, I admit, I do not want to get rid of. I admire the speakers and applaud their generous heart… but I have no desire to imitate them.

I think that I know how, as much as they do—perhaps I am wrong—to pursue an argument and embellish a speech. But my physical being is too shy to show it off. I can offer my words but not my voice; my energy but not my gestures; my thoughts but not my look.

Although I have never spoken in public, I did not always think like this. When I was younger, very young, less knowledgeable about human infamy, I was less pervaded by this fear—I was about to say this modesty. Illusions at that age make you confident and ignorant!

But now, the actress hiding behind make-up, recognized as a fiction, speaking words written by another for another and separated by the audience by a bright curtain of footlights, seems to me to reveal less of herself, even if she bares her arms and shoulders, than the conference speaker or the ranter in a gown or a skirt. The former is an instrument who sings thanks to a musician and thrills thanks to a poet; the other is herself, i.e. a woman, nothing but a woman who with her feeble voice and child-like hands throws herself to the curiosity and hostility of the public, like a Christian in the past was thrown to the lions.

I salute those who have this spunk—I admit that I do not. It is a leftover from an old-fashioned upbringing, a relic of outmoded prejudices. It is what they want, but my entire femininity revolts against the idea of climbing onto the rostrum; and I hardly think that one can ever get over these scruples. To conquer them there needs to be—which fate does not like—such tragic events that no one can foresee them: a country in flames or a street on fire! Then, Isaiah's burning coal[4] falls like lightning onto the crowd! And if the lips of women are set ablaze, like inspired prophetesses they have to repeat the word that the Invisible dictates, to revive the bold, to give hope to the weak and courage to the strong!

In that case yes, but only in that case. With the madness of heroism, the vertigo of devotion as a motive and an excuse!

But this an opinion, or rather an impression, that is totally personal. And, I'm repeating on purpose—for, I would be sorry if they saw the shadow of malice in the expression of a strictly personal feeling—this confession implies no kind of blame on those who consider or feel differently. Their preeminence—aside from the hoarseness—even seems obvious to me: they are better armed, taste the physical joy of combat, and having been in difficulties, they have the right before anyone else to be held in favor… in honor!

However, let's be clear. There is firewood and there is firewood. Just so there are defenders and there are defenders. A few, a very few stand out and we should be grateful to our masculine colleagues for having introduced them—even those who are the least aware—with undeniable tact.

Except for the obligatory jokes, the usual, somewhat worn-out wisecracks that the subject entails—for, every good reporter would rather swallow his penholder than not take part in this

[4] L'Éclair, May 20, 1892. Séverine's early refusal to speak in public and her distrust of certain aspects of the

good old pastime—we have in general joked a lot less (notice this) about the meeting of women who have come from all over the world to discuss the sinful situation of their sex and the ways to improve it.

So we do not find ourselves among eccentrics whose name, for Paris, is a synonym of disorder and has a dodgy reputation. The flashy girls and the whip-girls, the league members and the wags, the "offensive" ladies, with their hair too short and their tongues too long, all the Mademoiselles de Maupin[5] of the socialist republic—heaven protect the socialist republic from their compromising allies—were noticeable there only by their absence; or if a few of them had slipped in, they were out of their element, destroyed by the ambient honesty and reason.

Besides, what figure would they cut among the elite: Maria Deraisme [1828-1894], eloquent, learned and unapologetic; Clémence Royer [1830-1902], doctor and philosopher in the old way; Léonie Rouzade [1839-1916], with her lively, energetic, acclaimed voice; Louise Koppe [1846-1891], the admirable founder of the Maison Maternelle of Belleville[6] where so many young children have been saved; Madame [Marie de Vienne] Léon Bequet [1854-1913], also an apostle, president of the shelters for pregnant women; Madame [Eugenie] Potonié-Pierre [1844-1898], so good to people and so good to animals that she is known all over Montmartre as much for her actions as her principles; Madame Popelin [1846-1913], the distinguished lawyer, Doctor of Law if you like; Madame Blanche Edwards [1858-1941], an academic among academics, a doctor and the daughter of the late-lamented master; Madame [Marie] de Morsier [1844-1896] and Mademoiselle de Komar and Madame Maria Martin [1839-1910] and delegates from Europe, America and even Australia, each bringing her own dose of integrity and renowned prestige to the work of redemption.

They did not, I affirm, discuss wearing pants or other nonsense like that. There was even very little talk of political rights and if it could not be helped, while defending the weaker sex, only slightly abusing the stronger sex, the matter was carried out simply, discreetly, without ridicule and in good taste. It was a sign of strength, you know, this alarming moderation. And right away the discussion, far from getting sidetracked, from soaring off into pointless skies, plunged into the heart of social ills, into the heart of the feminine hell. They talked about the women's access to liberal careers; about the equality of the sexes from the point of view of scientific and artistic studies; about their solidarity in reforms; about the role of a mother, sister and wife with respect to peace, both internal and international; about the protection owed by law to vulnerable beings; about the situation of pregnant women in business and workshops; about the research of paternity; about prostitution; etc., etc. The agenda was very practical, very useful and very daring in its conclusions; and it was followed point by point.

It was beautiful and praiseworthy work.

Only, this uncommon benevolence of the masculine to the feminine, as justified as it may be, says nothing to me. I feel like there is something treacherous there and it is not without anxiety that I criticize the wish that has been expressed about the "eligibility of woman". There, I follow my intuition, is the secret cause, unconscious maybe, of this unexpected urbanity.

As long as man believed universal suffrage was a good thing, he wanted it for himself alone, he did not pull away from his egoism, he did not loosen his notch; considering the woman as an

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feminist cause.

[5] Isaiah 6:6-7

[6] I.e., who dress like men.

adversary, bearing his teeth like a dog fighting over a bone, battling with her using irony, insult, need and slander!

Today, sated, he sees that the bone is down to the marrow, that the worm is in the fruit, rotten apple to the core. And, being generous, he invites us to bite into it—it is Adam's revenge! Yesterday we were the competition; today we are the way!

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Are we going to be caught in this trap? Aren't we going to follow the holy task of legitimate reclamations, of just defense, or will vanity, ambition, love of trifles ruin everything for us as it has done for them? After the male puppets of the parliamentary regime, will we have their twins in petticoats: Madame Counsellor, Madame Deputy, Madame Senator? On the pretext of sharing, oh Sisters who fight for progress, are you going to taste the drop of sour wine that sits at the bottom of their glass and revel in their leftovers? Bon appétit, in that case!

Eat, but I prefer

Your black bread, Freedom![7]

[7] Victor Hugo

20 On the Road

While in Rennes, Séverine was asked for reports on the Dreyfus Trial from *Le Petit Bleu* in Brussels. From this correspondence she created a reputation for herself in Belgium where the public was passionate about the case. When the affair was finally closed, they invited her to give three conferences in Brussels in October 1899. Her horror of speaking in public would have once compelled her to deny them straightaway, but she was no longer young and vulnerable, what with her white hair and all. And there were more pressing matters that took center stage (so to speak): Conference touring was a job and she needed the money.

So, at forty-four years old, Séverine made her stage debut. To prepare for her trip who better to ask for advice than her close friend, the legendary actress Sarah Bernhardt, who told her everything from what she should wear to how to hold herself on stage and project her voice. At the Alhambra Theater Séverine wore a long, flowing black dress with bare arms. When she started speaking her fear disappeared as if by magic. Her gestures came naturally, as did the great applause when she finished. The second night at the Maison du Peuple, she appeared more militant in a simple black dress with long sleeves. Like her clothes, her voice was direct and austere and the audience responded enthusiastically. Then at the Salle Marugg to a select audience, she wore green velvet with a high collar and long white gloves. Her three talks were so successful that they invited her back in a month to talk about the uprising of Boers against the English Empire in South Africa. This time, however, was a little too much after her major surgery in the spring and all the emotional drama in Rennes—she fainted on stage. A disappointment but no discouragement. When writing you can make mistakes, cross out, correct and rewrite, start from scratch if necessary, but such luxuries are not afforded when speaking. Séverine had finally accepted this and learned quickly how to control it.

For years to come she made long, uninterrupted trips, shuttled from one hotel room, from one hall or theater to the next. Brussels, Nantes, Geneva, Annecy, Nîmes, Berne, Lausanne. Jules Vallès, anarchism, war, vivisection, pacifist literature, women's rights, classical theater. She was well paid and in her costume of a black dress her childhood dream of becoming an actress had, in a way, come true. But incessant travel is hard on life and over the next twenty-nine years that remained to her life, her body suffered for it. Her body but not her passion. Along with her conferences she continued writing articles for various papers and broadening her activism on behalf of the poor and oppressed, especially children. With Jules Vallès she had tried to start a League of Children's Rights, but it never took shape. As an early advocate, a forerunner and herald, she never gave up the fight against child abuse, whether as beasts of burden in factories or as slaves of the street or trapped in violent homes. Was this a contradiction coming from a mother who gave up her own two sons to be reared by other family members? Well, even if we might accuse her of selfishness, at least she was innocent of neglect or abuse. In fact, as she grew older, along with other of her principles that refined and evolved with age, she learned to appreciate her young grandchildren, even before they could "hold an intelligent conversation."

Another subject Séverine took on was feminism, as always in her own inimitable way. During the Universal Exposition of 1900 Marguerite Durand organized the 5th Feminist Congress from September 5-8 and insisted that she take part. The subject Séverine chose: Peace—and women's primary role in it. Also in 1900 on December 1 France opened the Bar to women and after a long battle, against fierce opposition first Olga Petit and then Jeanne Chauvin became the first female lawyers, the latter becoming the first to plead before the court in 1907. Meanwhile, Alice Guy was directing films for Gaumont and defining the young cinema. In 1901 the Conseil national des femmes françaises (National Council of French Women) was formed to promote new rights under the flag of laicity and democratization of the nation. Marie Curie shared the Nobel Prize in physics in 1903 (and in chemistry in 1911). Also in 1903 within months of the first Prix Goncourt, France's premier literary prize, being awarded to John Antoine Nau, a contra-prize, the Prix Femina was organized in protest against the all-male jury. Séverine was invited to preside over the all-female jury, but refused. The seat was taken by Anna de Noailles instead.

At a time when women seemed to be making headway in all fields and forging paths for emancipation, they needed pioneers and Séverine stood in the front ranks, a bridge between two epochs. Where she formerly hated Astie de Valsayre and her ostentatious wrangling over women's right to wear pants in order to fight duels and ride bicycles, she could now see Jeanne Chauvin's struggle to enter a profession as the future of woman.

One battle, however, was still being lost. The right to vote. In 1903 the parliament once again postponed the vote for women. The idea that Séverine had long opposed, she now accepted along with all the other suffragists across Europe, not by sacrificing her distrust of parliaments, but by recognizing the need to battle on all fronts. In the past she had preached electoral abstention along with the anarchist journals like Emile Pouget's *Le Père Peinard* that presented as candidates only dead communards who had been shot. Refusing to vote was a radical break from the democratic tradition, but the parliamentary system, she insisted, was a lure to allow a minority in power to live off the sweat and blood of the majority. Whether the candidates were republican or socialist, male or female, the results would be the same. As soon as someone was elected into office they were corrupted and poisoned by the disease of government. But now, after years of individual work and especially after the united battle she participated in for Dreyfus, Séverine realized that a new step was necessary to achieve her goals. She was ready to join a movement.

Although it would take until World War II to pass the law recognizing women's right to work without asking permission of her husband, anarchist women had already found economic independence to a certain extent. In their own often marriageless relationships as companions, either in "les milieux libres" (like communes) or in the cities, they were free and equal, not slaves to their husbands' will and whim. If feminism meant struggling for the right to vote and aspiring to be judges, cops and soldiers, then anarchists were not feminists. Universal suffrage was seen as an invention of the masters to distract the slaves and focus their discontent into harmless byways. The anarchists' goal was the destruction of the State, not like socialists its infiltration and possession. Séverine appreciated this ideology, but was always more practical and willing to compromise when she saw an immediate relief for the oppressed. Thus after Dreyfus she saw suffrage as a practical means to reach a necessary end.

As a visionary feminist, however, more than the right to vote she spoke out for women's right to get an education, divorce and abortions and equality in the workplace. In *La Fronde* her polemical articles had only increased her popularity and when she finally conquered her stage fright and began speaking in public she became a leader. But she would remain "a woman"

above all else. She loved her long curly locks and frilly dresses too much to cut her hair short like when she was a child or to start wearing pants and she could pay homage to men when they earned it while castigating them when they deserved. But the heart of the women's movement was in universal suffrage and as World War I approached Séverine walked at their head, literally. Unfortunately in vain, as we shall see.

Solidarity and Charity Solidarity and Charity[1]

Ladies and Gentlemen,

If I pay tribute to the work done today, it is because it seems to me this kind of temporary work is extremely necessary between the past and the future; it is because solidarity is a beautiful word, a new word that has the good fortune to scare no one, at least for the moment; it is because solidarity is the chosen intermediary between charity and justice. (Applause)

Charity—I don't mean to slander it but it seems to me that it is not something that has vanished or gone out-of-date but it is an historical expression. It had its great beauty, its heroic times at the start of our era, not to go all the way back to Antiquity where it was held in honor and practiced by the philosophers before the coming of religions, at the start of these new religions when the persuaded people, the persecuted and hunted people—Oh, those were the good times! How fortunate the persecuted to whom the future belonged!—when those people went into the catacombs and the arenas they did not have the same idea of charity as we do today. Duty was duty. It was the poor brother. They shared what they had in the name of a distant and beautiful ideal.

It was fraternity being practiced: You are my brother, let's share.

Since then, charity has curiously transformed and all religious charity has its flaws: it is the principle by which we practice charity for what it gives back. We practice charity to get to heaven. Whether it be a Catholic, Protestant, Islamic, Buddhist or any other heaven, all religions say the same thing: Do good to receive a reward. And what a reward: an eternity of pleasure and happiness!

Logical minds tell themselves: This charity is really just usury.

It is usury. You give this (a little) to get that (a lot).

It is not charity. It is a business; a speculation on the miseries of the poor world but it is not charity. (Repeated applause)

Charity, I say, is a very beautiful thing when we understand in it not only the giving of the object, which is really a very small thing, but the giving of oneself.

I saw charity practiced by two people who were on opposite poles of belief: one was Cardinal Manning, bishop of London, a man, oh yes, truly of heroic times, who in his ecclesiastical garb went with John Burns, the Irish agitator, during the dock strike to speak with the workers in the bars to learn about their needs, their misery, their suffering. He was truly fraternal, a Christian in the best sense of the word.

The other, who for me was a person of admirable dedication and self-sacrifice, was Louise Michel who could not get a place here today (Applause) and to whom I have to apologize for speaking where she could not.

[1] Speech made on November 8 1903 at Beauvais during a conference organized by the Association Solidarité Familiale et Allaitement Maternel.

You see in her only one thing: the legend. Behind this legend, behind this bogeyman there is the most tender, the most fervent, the most dedicated heart you can imagine. She, yes, understood charity like it should be understood. She never had anything for herself; she gave herself by giving what she had; she refused to press charges against the man who shot her, saying that he was misled. There are the sick and the unstable who appear guilty but are not. Just so the penal colonies and scaffolds are made for the unstable. (Repeated applause)

Everything moves on and now this word charity is replaced by solidarity.

It is a very good name you took because it implies the feeling of justice. It walks hand in hand with it.

"You're weaker than I, lean on me! You have nothing, let's share! Why are you ashamed of your poverty?"

That's what those who have nothing should keep in mind: poverty is no more degrading than it is criminal. To have no money is not a loss of pride; it is a circumstance of life and the poor are always equal to the rich. (Enthusiastic applause)

In our present society, which is, let's say it, so savage and barbarous, where money plays a shameful role, we see all too often how the rich push away the poor, but in your solidarity you simply settle the issue: by going to look for those who are suffering. That's what must be done: going to look for them.

And I won't say, "Help one another." But I will repeat the old saying, "Love one another."

We can replace many things, but we can never replace this saying.

Love one another, meaning share with those who have nothing, give a little of yourselves, give a little of your heart.

Oh, you who enjoy this privilege, admirable and rare as it is to give, know your obligations and your happiness because to give brings pleasure, a joy that can be won by work and effort, I don't deny, but do you know if some bad luck, some illness might not keep you from success and if you might some day be in the situation of these poor folk. (Applause)

Thus, you members of the Solidarité are one step ahead of tomorrow's action, you are ahead of your time, you are reaching justice.

It is a beautiful thing to be the precursors of what will be just tomorrow when the State will finally do what it should. Your initiative makes the first move and I who do not believe that governments lead people but that the feelings of the people push governments to do what they should, I find that you are doing something very great here, very beautiful and very generous. (Applause)

So far as children are concerned you recognize their rights.

Up to recent times, up to thirty years ago, we were not very concerned with them. We are very proud of our scientific progress and we consider ourselves very advanced. And yet fifty years ago children still fell under the old Roman law: they belonged to their fathers; they were his property, his cattle. We condemned excessive abuses but children belonged to their fathers. Unfortunately, no matter what has been done, in a lot of areas we still think a father holds all rights over his child. This is false.

A child is a gift given by nature.

You have brought it to life; you are its debtors. In exchange for this lousy gift you owe it as much happiness as possible and at the very least everything that can guarantee it good health and standing.

Parents are the debtors of children.

When we stray from this principle we see that this poor little creature, thrown into life in spite of himself, asking only to stay where he was, who might bear the terrible defects from an unsuspected atavism, which might date back generations, this poor kid who is going to run all risks and face all dangers has the right to protection, to tenderness, to justice from his parents while waiting for society to do what it should.

This is for children, but society puts a heavy debt on this future man.

We don't see the obligations that the State has toward adults; it will fulfill them later. It will learn to see that every being, just by being born, has the right to the bare necessities. The adult has to earn the extras, but from the fact that he was brought into this world he has the right to live and he, too, is society's creditor.

The man to whom it is often said, "You're fit, earn your living," and who answers, "Sure, but I've got no work,"—we have to give him bread.

No one can say of his brother, "He's not rich but he doesn't work." The man who is here on earth has the right to eat; the extras he can work for. (Applause)

While waiting for this time to come, give to those who have not. Enter into this still young solidarity that has a grand future ahead.

This will be a badge of honor for Beauvais and a shining example for the other cities in France.

What I admire is that this organization bears no complicated statutes or board of directors. There is only a good will committee.

I would make a special appeal to women. Under the pretext of working on those wretched little horrors that they later inflict on their friends, those things that are generally in bad taste (and that those who receive them have to hold onto because they are keepsakes), instead of those frivolous luxuries, do simple things.

A slightly faded dress, clothes that you could make acceptable, honorably, use your taste, your elegance to give joy to others with these things. The needle is light for fingers doing good.

Spend your evenings thinking about the women who have nothing. These things you have to work on, give them away, you will know joy and you are the ones who will be grateful.

You will know the treasure of thankful eyes, of seeing creatures now and again wild become calm because they feel that a kind heart has approached them.

Do good. Not to have (as Hugo said, who is also a great figure but already historical) *The almighty prayer of a beggar***[173]**, but to see the hateful eye grow tender, to feel in this woman's embrace as she hugs and thanks you the purest joy and greatest treasure that a human being can know. (Prolonged applause and cheering)

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On finishing Madame Séverine received the compliments of the committee members and of Dr. Baudon who said this: "I thank the audience and Mr. Bienvenu-Martin, our distinguished president, for his powerful, instructive speech, and Dr. Savoire who gave us a wonderful lesson on childcare and morality." And he added, "As for Madame Séverine, what can I say? With all your heart you applauded her heart speaking. That's the best reward for her and for us."

On leaving the meeting a collection was made. It was fruitful because everyone wanted to participate in this work of fraternity and love that the committee members want to carry out with all their energy and all their heart.

[2] In Séverine: Vie et combats d'une frondeuse, Evelyne Le Garree, L"Archipel, 2009.

The Child Martyrs The Child Martyrs[2]

"The child has been, until now, more abused than an animal, more miserable than a beast." Jules Vallès, Le Réveil, February 6, 1882.

At the beginning of the year 1882—that was 22 years ago, almost a quarter of a century—Vallès, whose disciple I was honored to be for the sincere conviction that he maintained, willfully, in financial difficulties and on the fringes of glory, for the exalted honesty of his conscience that matched his actions to his words, which in him equaled talent, this Vallès, I say, the designated protector of all the little Vingtras[3] run away from their brutal parents, set off to found the League of Children's Rights.

The memberships flowed in. The first was from my friend Jean Bernard who was then a young lawyer in the court of appeals. In his letter he said, "I do not want to consider whether your project is legal, it is humanitarian and just—that's enough for me."

But it was not reason enough for others who were emotional but not rebellious. They wanted to do something philanthropic but without violating the Roman tradition subsisting in our law, without affecting the authority of the *pater familias*. In spite of everything, a little of Brutus' soul survived in these good people. Hence the failure of the enterprise, the impossibility of doing anything to create stability out of a jumble of such diverse elements. Didn't someone dare, at the third meeting, to propose the precondition of asking the Préfecture de Police for authorization, while another, as urgent as he was practical, wanted them to guarantee the reception of the endowment that made up the social fund!

Since then, the Child Rescue Society (10** Rue de Richelieu) has been founded. It does a great service, but has never for a minute had the idea of registering among its honorary members the name of the writer whose work and initiative paved the way for them.

But he was not counting on gratitude. He found his reward in his own efforts, the accomplishment of a duty that he laid out for himself, of a task that he accepted in the dreadful days of his youth—under his mother's whip and his father's stick!

Counting on the crowd to storm this other Bastille, he wrote, "I myself had the honor of throwing the first board across the pit to make the bridge and launch the attack. If they demolish the law someday, it is because, like Maillart[4] on July 14, I will have incited men of action and women of heart. But the push to overthrow the iniquity will have been given by everyone."

"Everyone", that is to say that public opinion is involved, in fact… but only lackadaisically. But in twenty-five years, for the serious cases, only some parental restrictions have been made. And that's it.

No forceful action, no great intervention has happened for the torture victims of the nursery. They have not striven to foresee or transform the mentality of parents toward their offspring *who are not their property*, or to call forth the specter of responsibilities, the guarantee for the victims.

The public sentiment is content to whine and complain every time a "petit Grégoire"[5] is found; they cry, they pity, they scream out in horror at the details of the torture; the neighbors (who did nothing and told no one) send wreaths; the neighborhood goes into mourning; the Parisian

[3] Jacques Vingtras was the main character in Vallès trilogy: L'Enfant (1879), Le Bachelier (1881) and L'Insurgé (1886)

[4] Stanislas-Marie Maillard (17-63-1794), revolutionary who participated in the taking of the Bastille on July 14 1789.

[5] From the song by Théodore Botrel in 1898.

smart set of the serial novels follow the funeral—where the authorities are represented—and the press pours out a stream of denial.

Then one fact after another: something else to touch the heartstrings turns up.

And the old Law is still standing, incomplete, primitive, obsolete, fierce toward the weak and mild toward the strong.

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So, after this they are surprised to see us in heated discussion about the present state of the law and about our customs, the question of repopulation conceivable only on the day when all those who are already born are in need of nothing; when the search for paternity will be allowed; and the maternity out of marriage will no longer be a synonym for dishonor and illegality; when, finally, the children unfortunately born outside that natural maternal instinct will be protected against the bad luck of their birth, shielded from the results of the mistake.

Doesn't the daily record support this argument? I was talking the other day about how there are too many litters that are refused a kennel. Well, then, in the mail yesterday I received a letter from a teacher in Paris. She told me about the case of a family with five kids. The rent was paid, four kids are in school and the last one is just a two-month old baby—and yet they were evicted. "Too many children", the landlord said. And since the father is sick and the mother (selling fruits and vegetables out of a basket) has to earn a living for seven people and since nobody has agreed to take the clan, the poor woman sees no other choice but to tether her offspring behind her and take the plunge together. This will make a great piece of news. The funeral will be magnificent; big-hearted society will take in the crippled—and it will treat as subversive those, like me, who shake their fists!

Just as tact means being astonished and touched and nothing more by the discovery of Rue Rameau. Hey, it can't be, another child martyr? Isn't it over yet? Isn't the list finished? Do there have to be mean, stubborn people?

Well, yes, but if the man is an alcoholic, if the man is crazy, what recourse does a victim have? Here the butcher is not the father, it is the benefactor. His godfather, on the recommendation of the brothers of the Christian schools of Saint Fraimbault, has entrusted him to the orphanage in Guérin—and Guérin has made this twelve-year old creature into a "beast of burden"!

Why would this be disturbing? It happens all the time, I'll say again, these dramas in which they destroy the life, health and mind of fragile beings.

I am, you know, from the school of action. More than theories, as noble as they may be, more than advocates, as eloquent as they may be, I appreciate the bold sobriety of an event. It says more in its concrete form than all rhetoric. It is nothing short of an irrefutable lesson, a proof that abolishes contrary arguments. It is the mirror of a time without the varnish of appearances, without the make-up of civilization.

And do you want a clear demonstration?

I won't go back ages and ages, even though I have before me a file containing ten years of child martyrdom.

Let's take one, if you want, just from this past year, just from the most memorable cases—and that they deigned to think so, as well as the secondary incidents, for those who have remained unknown, for those portray the neglected torments as scandals brought to light.

It is little Gaspard, a 27-month old baby who headed the parade in 1903. It was "accomplished" for his New Year's present—and certainly, given the blows received and the food refused, his excellent mother could not have given him a better gift!

Two days later at La Chapelle-Thouarault, they discovered a 17-year old girl, whose mother had kept her locked up almost since birth. The poor child was in such a [bad] state that they had to cut off her toes, which were infected with gangrene; and later it was considered necessary to cut off both of her legs.

February 16 at La Flèche they discovered, in a bag of dirty laundry, something that was wailing. It was the little girl of the couple N… She was 15 years old but seemed like five. They had never given her more than or two sous worth of milk a day. The light of day shone through her skeleton.

March 2 at Rethel, there were two more little girls, two poor "lasses", ten and six-years old. The younger girl was dead, weighing 25 pounds, her hipbones poking through her skin. The older girl had half an inch of louse in her hair. Panting breathlessly she told how her stepmother—very nice to her own four bambinos—made them sleep almost naked on dry leaves among their own excrement. Once, they went an entire week without eating and without drinking even water. When they were thirsty, they drank their urine.

April 2 in the 11th Court they tried a drunkard woman, the wife of D… Her three children, her three victims, were called to enumerate the abuses they suffered: knife wounds, hot irons, etc. Three years in prison—one year per head! It would not have been so steep if her plight were not so wild and depressing, maybe some alcoholic atavism, some morbid heredity.

In June it was little Eugène F, four years old, whose father and brother (not much older than him) both punished worse than the other. The police had been informed, but there was "not enough proof". It was finally given in the body of the crime, that is the body of the child swimming in his own blood.

In July, August, September, October, you only had to bend down to pick up the news to add to this already too long list.

In November there is little Albert P., two years old, who had to be taken away from his parents and brought to the emergency in Trousseau. His older brother was pampered, spoiled and loved, but according to the report of Dr. Heick he was "covered in wounds and bruises." It was his mother who took it out on him.

The same month in Nice they tried the parents of little Anna. One month and three months in prison: what a bargain!

Finally in December in Troyes they dug up the young Lucien C. He had been buried for two and half years—and the corpse spoke through all its festered lesions.

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There you go—a very incomplete record of the year. It says a lot about our social state and proves once again how right Vallès was when he asked the Third Republic to finally recognize and proclaim the Rights of Children!

21 Plundering Politics and Robbing Banks

"I'm a feminist and I'll remain a feminist until I die, even though I don't like women such as they are any more than I like people such as they are. The mentality of slaves disgusts me."

–Madeleine Pelletier

Women's suffrage seemed to be making progress in France when Ferdinand Buisson proposed to give the women the right to vote in municipal elections. As restrictive as this proposal was, at least it was step forward. 291 deputies agreed. But the Senate, the vigilant guardians of tradition, remained unanimously hostile.

Le Journal started a campaign for the "vote blanc": Don't vote for any particular candidate, just say "I want to vote". To kick off this campaign Séverine is the first they ask because she is a matriarch (at 59 years old). Despite her past reservations because of her anti-parliamentary stand, she is not afraid to evolve. As long as women remain dependent on men and defenseless against all economic exploitation, nothing would ever change.

More than 500,000 women came out and said "yes" on May 5 1914 against 114 "no". And now what? Wait patiently for the kind deputies to make it official for the next elections in 1918? Not enough. They must continue to press on.

On July 5 1914 6,000 women took to the streets of Paris for the first time in French history. Arm in arm, Marguerite Durand and Séverine led the march to the Institut de France and the statue of Condorcet[1] about whom Séverine gives a speech. Unfortunately they did not count on the madness of men. Less than a month later World War I broke out and shattered their hopes in trenches and massacres. Women would face continual refusals by the Senate for 30 more years before getting the right to vote in 1944.

Along with women, labor was also continuing its struggle for rights, unsuccessfully for the most part. On May 1 1906 the CGT called for a general strike in demand for an eight-hour workday for all industrial workers. It would be the biggest strike, the first general strike in France but only 200,000 workers responded. The government under Prime Minister Clemenceau (and his so-called "Radical Party") responded in force, declared a state of emergency, arrested the CGT leaders and put Paris under siege—60,000 troops were out patrolling the streets. The violent repression triumphed and the strikers returned to work. Despite the wealth being advanced, working conditions continued to decline and more and more workers were pushed in desperate or even criminal activities.

It seemed that for everyone but the working class this was an era of hope, as they sang on the sinking Titanic in 1912. And it was all being recorded on celluloid as some of the earliest *cinema-vérité.* Airplanes were flying across the English Channel; Jack Johnson became the first black Heavy Weight Champion of the World; the first neon light was introduced in Paris; and the first electric start was installed in an automobile. And then another automobile invention in France: the getaway car.

[1] Marquis de Condorcet (1743-94), leader in the French Revolution and advocate of women's rights, the abolition

The Bonnot Gang threw France into terror and confusion for half a year, a whole period of heroic folly and violent crimes. It started on December 21 1911 when they robbed a bank in Chantilly and escaped in a stolen car, shooting a guard in the process. On January 2 1912 they broke into a house and killed the wealthy owner and his maid during the robbery. The gang continued their spree, their stolen cars outspeeding the police who were on horseback or bicycles. They seemed to be everywhere at once. Four different sightings in the country at the same hour on the same day.

By March a number of their supporters were arrested and their identities were known: Octave Garnier, the founder, Raymond Callemin, René Valet and Jules Bonnot, the driver who gave the name to the gang.

Soon their close accomplices were arrested: André Soudy, Edouard Carouy and then Callemin himself in April. By the end of the month almost 30 accomplices and supporters were in custody. On April 28 Bonnot was cornered in a building in the suburb Choisy-le-Roi. 500 policemen besieged the place before blowing it up with dynamite and shooting Bonnot—he died the next morning. On May 14 it was the turn of Garnier and Valet in the suburb Nogent-sur-Marne. Over 1,000 police and soldiers fought for hours while hundreds of onlookers picnicked during the siege. Again the authorities blew the place up. Garnier died in the explosion but Valet shot it out to death.

The trial started in February 1913. Despite all kinds of contradictory evidence and obvious lies, many of the actors were given harsh sentences: Eugène Dieudonné, Marius Metge and Carouy life sentences for example. Victor Serge five years in solitary confinement for conspiracy. Raymond Callemin, Antoine Monnier and André Soudy were guillotined on April 21 1913.

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The real fear of this gang came from the fact that they called themselves anarchists and made no apologies for it. The newspapers would talk about their audacious bank robbery and shooting a guard but not about the banker who embezzled hundreds of times more money than they stole. These "Auto Bandits", as they were called, were not your typical criminals. They wrote poetry, talked philosophy and science and sent mocking letters to the police. But they were anarchists and for decades anarchy alone was criminal to the public and the state. The Illegalists, however, were not mere criminals out to make money and they were not intellectual anarchists only spreading propaganda—they believed in direct action and the immediate need of revolution.

Toiling away for rich employers and completely losing their dignity before getting fired and ending up begging or stealing to avoid starvation—this is what the working class lived. Disenchanted with the defeats of labor strikes and rebelling against this system made the Bonnot Gang working class heroes and the best-known anarchists in France. But most anarchists were still relying on non-violent or syndicalist actions and turned against illegalism. Séverine also had a hard time swallowing their anarchist claims. She wondered whether their individualism was not just a cover for egoism and self-interest. Still she intervened to save some of the accused like Rirette Maitrejean and Antoine Gauzy, minor players in the drama.

Most importantly, perhaps, she refused to reveal the names of informants. Confidentiality was the "honor of the profession." At a time when spies flooded the streets in hope of collecting the reward money, editors were receiving all kinds of letters and information (some of it planted by the police) about the whereabouts of the gang. Authorities were more than willing to do whatever

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of slavery, religious tolerance, etc.

it took to stamp out the least remnant of anarchism. Refusing to be a snitch was a rebellious act in itself.

In the final count, the bandits had killed 9 people and wounded 10. The police killed 9 of them (the tenth committed suicide before they could kill him) and imprisoned dozens more. Now everything was back to normal.

In hindsight the "outrages" of these bandits (probably more the threat to private property than to actual life) do not seem to deserve the panic that struck the bourgeoisie, especially in the countdown to the historic slaughter of World War I.

The Cause of Women The Cause of Women[2]

I could have written The Cause of "Feminism" but I did not want to because this suffix, however acceptable, however fashionable today, seems to me just another "ism" among all the others, a link in the chain of all those trials, ordeals and schools of thought that the old world is finally being freed of.

Let them understand me well. And if possible, whether by carelessness or malice, let them not make me say something other than what I want to say in all honesty—and in total freedom.

It is not because I am not "progressive enough" that I don't get more involved with the present feminist action; it is because I am "too much" of one; it is because the desires of the agitators have long been left behind in my dream on the grand path to the future. When (being reserved for the sole usage of men) universal suffrage, eligibility, the electorate, all the old parliamentary mechanism arouses in me nothing but mocking astonishment, a rather aggressive aversion, I do not really see what miracle would change my view *of the same things* if applied differently.

Everything crumbles along these lines. Respect remains far if it speeds off at the same pace it started. Trust stumbles after it in hot pursuit. To be a deputy today—though no particular advantage for the individual elevates it—is to be a zero… a zero always doubtful, often harmful. The authority comes more from seniority than from any intrinsic value. The member of the lower Chamber is generally a municipal councilor who has not had any scandals just like the member of the higher Chamber is a deputy who has not faced any obstacles. It is a career, pretty well paid, that starts at a public meeting and ends up in a presidential speech: "My dear public, it is with deep regret that we have learned… distinguished competence… a heartfelt loss… consolation for his family… everyone grieves… the country and the Republic."

So be it! The old men approve, from tip to chin, bobbing their heads, especially sad about what is to come. And this makes one less of them—and one more!

The very rich might escape suspicion of greed, but who is safe from plotting, from wicked ambition, from the need for domination to which everything is sacrificed? Are there more than ten, are there even ten of these elected from the people who burn with ardent faith, prepared for humility, for sacrifice, the denial of all personal gain, for the health of all and the common interest?

Honest men? Certainly, there are some, in the strict and limited sense of the word. But just as faith that does not act is not sincere faith, so honesty that is content "to be" is not a virtue—it is a habit!

#

[2] L'Echo de Paris, February 15 1895.

It is, then, into this that women want to enter? Under the tree of knowledge Eve, when it is her turn, takes back half the apple from Adam… Except that the apple Adam is holding is rotten, gnawed to the core by parasites, stained and poisonous.

I have no taste for these tea parties. And if sharing now is necessary—out of selfishness and man's ferocity—let's at least pick a new, healthy and delicious fruit from the branch.

That's why I am not with the women politicians. That's why, with all my heart, with all my strength, I am with sensible, intelligent, practical people who strive to improve *economically* the lot of women, to emancipate them from their present condition—menial, unfair and degrading.

It was very wrong for Jules Bois, in his last article, to reproach me for not getting involved "in this heroic battle". The sentiment is commendable but the allegation is off the mark. A newcomer, not seeing me in his ranks, he concluded that I was abstaining. The truth is that I have been in the heart of the battle for a long time, long enough that the reinforcements no longer see me!

Oh, in my way I hasten to add: in isolation, independence, not wanting to just change the yoke. But wherever one of my sisters cried out for help, a "victim of her sex", a single mother alone to bear the sin, an abandoned or battered wife, an employee in a shop or in the administration subject to inhuman regulations, a worker in the same job but paid less than a male counterpart *because she's a woman*, even a prostitute suffering shame and hunger, I have highlighted the grievances and taken up arms against the causes of these evils, bringing to light the injustice of our destiny.

What do you want? I believe in the school of actions and that they are the seeds of theories. So much the better if the harvest grows for others; and if others reap it; and if others enjoy the fruit! But don't come and accuse me of indifference or laziness when I was a worker in the early season, doing my job without expecting any pay.

In seven years of journalism I can count more than 200 articles, almost four volumes, on the condition of women. Is that nothing?

#

Ah, I have joked about the women politicians? Yes indeed—fervently! But again that depends on which. Hubertine Auclert, Paule Minck, Madame Potonié-Pierre have always seemed to me courageous and devoted. But how could I take seriously "attack dogs" who, with touching persistence, criticized me daily because after a controversy I wasn't on the (textual) field or because I went to see the Pope?

These women are laughable… and I laughed! Whereas Madame Schmall and Madame Cheliga-Loevy make me think, interest me, really impassion me by their logic and their constant effort. Scornful, fearful even of the eccentricity that puts off the simple and frightens the timid, not dressing themselves up like clowns, keeping their feminine and maternal grace that the work benefits from, they do good and useful work.

Personally I am aware of collaborating in it, with my pen—and with my example.

Example does not mean model here. I use the word in the sense of proof, in a very technical and modest meaning. It only means that by diligent work and invincible perseverance I managed to make the public admit, through the world of the press (hardly open to feminine competition nonetheless), that a woman could practice this tough profession of journalist, make a place for herself and live honorably.

Alas, many a young brain underneath little blonde curls, behind brown headbands, has been a little soured by an exaggerated success. But still, thanks to this precedent, when a little, trembling

woman shows up in an editing room with her article tied with a ribbon, they do not judge her collaboration as ridiculous or impossible.

Of this, I swear, I am very proud and figure that I have earned the daily blue-stockingism[3]. It is one less prejudice—and there are so many to destroy!

That's why those of my sex who, without going against the tender, merciful role that nature assigned us, want to conquer the right to live beyond servitude and degradation have always and will always be able to count on me.

As for the Bradamantes[4] with their pipes… where are they going?

Rirette Rirette[5]

A nice name, isn't it? A name right out of another time when the coquettes still wore bonnets, when windmills still had blades and when it was, nonetheless, the bonnets that flew over the windmills. And is it a real name or a nickname given in a good mood during the spring because of that smile that brightens her face?

I thought that was enough because I do not know her. I have never had the chance to meet her, nor any of her friends. I only know her by her pictures, snapshots taken by chance. A sweet, mischievous face, lively eyes, like a little girl—but a girl who is a relative of Gavroche[6], a girl who, after playing well and laughing, loving the sun, drinking cheap wine under the arbor, sighing over slow waltzes, smelling violets at four sous with more enthusiasm than others do a rose at one gold louis, she would die carefree and beautiful… heroically!

Is she from Paris, my neck of the woods? Is she a runaway bourgeoisie or an adventurous worker from a distant province? I know nothing at all. Paris took her, that's all I know. It fashioned her in its way, gave her its native girls' zest, their alert grace, that lip turned rosy from Montmorency cherries or Robinson strawberries. There is also the taste for mystery, romance, the unexpected and for risk…

Too much, alas, poor Rirette! Did I tell you that Rirette was in prison? She laughed when they arrested her; laughed in the courts of justice, at the onlookers, the reporters, the photographers; laughed at the light, the free air, the broad daylight! I also did not tell you that Rirette was 22 years old—and with two little girls who were taken away from her.

This alone is serious because this girl loves her girls tenderly and passionately. And yet she condemned herself to never see them again. She accepted being deprived of their arms around her neck, their little mouths on her cheek, their affectionate words that are like hugs. This young mother has cut herself off from her children instead of giving to Justice the little service they demand of her: become an informant.

This was the price, given the levity of the charges weighing on her, whereby she could have doubtlessly obtained her provisional freedom, maybe even an acquittal. The law, for those who bow to it, has a lot of indulgence…

Being serious, this time, she said no. And she repeated it at every attempt, worsening her fate in perfect knowledge of the cause, accepting all charges that her irritating silence brought on.

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[3] Satirical term for intelligent, learned women.

[4] Famous female knight in legends about Charlemagne.

[5] *Gil Blas*, August 11 1912.

[6] A street urchin in Victor Hugo's novel Les Miserables.

I mentioned Gavroche… maybe we should speak of Bara[7].

#

What did she do? She did not kill or steal or burn or explode. She was not one of those interesting society women whose guilt or non-guilt is the talk of the town, the subject of controversies and conversations. She is also not a heroine of love: she has harmed no man or woman out of passion.

Her case is less serious and more complex—and therefore more dangerous.

Since her friend has progressive opinions, they reproach her for some suspicious acquaintances. Isn't that it? Whoever lives in a rather wide and busy circle, should they have to answer for everyone they meet, greet, shake hands with or with whom they happened to be a guest in the same place—which is the case?

Especially when we are talking about the office of a newspaper, a more crowded place than anywhere else in the world! Rirette (I remind you she is 22 years old) was working for a newspaper that was foolhardy enough to rent the space in her name.

"Now, during the search we found two little revolvers in the office of this newspaper and it was established that these guns had been stolen. Possession of stolen property."

"I'm not a thief!" Rirette shouted indignation. "I didn't even know that these weapons were stolen."

"That's possible," the judge replied. "But you must have known who had put them there. You were the tenant, legally, and therefore responsible… There could very well be a way to mitigate your responsibility and reduce the charges against you. The thief had no fear of compromising you by dumping stolen goods in a place rented in your name. He had no scruples toward you… why would you have any toward him? Give us a name!"

Rirette looked at the judge, the bailiff, the green walls within which so many unfortunate, so many innocent and guilty had argued. She thought of her little girls, of freedom, of her comrades who remained faithful and whom it would be nice to see walking around the streets of Paris.

The judge waited, thought she was hesitating while she was, in fact, dreaming.

"Come on," an encouraging voice said.

"No," Rirette shook her head and her face that had turned pale after so many months in jail. "To denounce someone is a dirty trick! Keep me, condemn me, send me to prison or wherever you want! I won't do it!"

She was put back in the paddy wagon and back behind bars in that great black house at the end of rue Faubourg Saint-Denis. And if, when the lights are turned out, Rirette is no longer Rirette, if she breaks down and cries, if she calls out to her children, stretches out her arms in the night, nobody will imagine, nobody will know. At dawn she is Rirette like she was the night before, brave and cheerful. If a sparrow alit behind the bars it could chirp, "How are you, little sister?"

#

In these times when character is becoming rare, it is interesting to me to show this wisp of a woman rebelling against becoming an informant. So many men (and good ones at that!) turn themselves willingly into informants.

Oh, I forgot! The newspaper is called "L'Anarchie" and Rirette is officially Mme [Mrs] Maitrejean. But these details take nothing away, isn't it true, from the reality of the facts or the self-sacrifice of the denial.

[7] Joseph Bara (1779-1793), young boy who died fighting for the French Revolution.

22 Horrors of War

In February 1905 Séverine published an article in *Je Sais Tout* entitled "The Horrors of War" in which she meticulously enumerates the deaths produced by the ensemble of wars in the 19th century. In France and abroad it totaled 15 million casualties during the "century of progress", more than 400 a day. The battle of Mukden alone (the largest battle fought before World War I) cost 42,000 Japanese lives and 50,000 Russians that would weigh in at 8 million kilos of human meat, including the bones.

Séverine was a pacifist from day one. Over the past ten years her speaking engagements had brought her to many pacifist conferences where her convictions defended the young conscientious objectors and criticized the "Sacred Union." More than just stupid, war was absurd. How else could the assassination of an exotic archduke in a distant country unleash the infernal machine? Could anything stem the tide of coming war?

Jean Jaurès, the Socialist leader, was also fiercely antimilitaristic and tried to bring a peaceful, diplomatic end to the Franco-German hostilities. Still stinging from the defeat in the Franco-Prussian War, many French were unwilling to back down as the nationalists beat the drums of war. Jaurès declared that in case of war he would call for a general strike. Could such a dangerous opposition be allowed to continue? No, they killed him on July 31 1914, the very day that he had declared, "If the mobilization is made, I'll be assassinated." Shot in the back through the window of the brasserie Croissant. That bullet marked the end of all hopes for a peaceful solution and silenced the countless voices that had risen up against the danger. On 3 August the war began. The next day they held the funeral for Jaurès, Séverine sat in the front row before giving her speech. If this man had lived could he have changed the course of history?

Raoul Villain, the nationalist assassin of Jean Jaurès was acquitted on 29 March 1919—an injustice as bleak and blatant as the murder of Sacco and Vanzetti in the United States.

Ordinary life in the country stopped. Social activity disappeared, including in the intellectual spheres where all kinds of voices used to shout out against social injustice. The factories went from making satin and lace to making bombs, bayonets and bullets. In 1914 there were 15,000 women working in the factories. By 1918 there were 1,500,000. Séverine wondered if they and all their counterparts in Germany could end the war by just folding their arms and refusing to work. But could they really do that when they had to feed their children as the men (4 million of them) were shipped off to the slaughter?

All revolutionary papers were suppressed at the outbreak of the war and those that remained were censored by the government. Meticulous civil servants armed with scissors haunted the editorial offices dissecting the copy being composed and cutting into it right there. Many words here and there and often entire paragraphs, anything suspicious or dangerous was expunged, especially if it invoked the enemy Germany, as did the horse-drawn carriage called a berlin. The "blanks" that invaded the papers became almost as meaningful as the words. Reading the news became a puzzle game trying to find the missing pieces.

Most journalists submitted without too much of a fight. But Séverine refused to become a spokeswoman for an institutional lie and support the official lunacy. As her bosses rejected her pacifism and refused to print anything subversive, they required her to talk about harmless subjects far from war. On the other hand, she started meeting secretly with others who opposed the war. Professors, lawyers, journalists, in strictly private meetings, embarked on a forbidden adventure almost as exciting as the Padlewski affair[1], trying to bring the bloody slaughter to an end. At 60 years old she began to find her old pugnacity. The stronger the enemy, the more fiercely she fought. And wasn't she always known as the mother of lost causes.

Some pacifists refused to be silenced or stay in the wings. Hélène Brion was a teacher in Pantin. Militant socialist, feminist, pacifist, she was charged under the law of August 5 1914 for "propaganda destined to favor the enemy and to exercise a harmful influence on the morale of the army." Likewise, she had expressed "defeatism" by diffusing three socialist brochures. Séverine had only met her once at the anniversary of the Commune in 1912 but appreciated her speech. She was asked to act as witness for the accused alongside Marguerite Durand. She accepted and transformed into a defense lawyer. The verdict was three years of prison and revocation of her post as teacher. For being a pacifist.

Séverine was still wearing the black mourning clothes for the death of her mother in 1913 and will continue to wear them for the millions of dead.

Workers did not stay silent either. In May 1917 the seamstresses went on strike demanding the English workweek and a salary increase for cost of living. On May 18 there were 10,000 of them on the streets, chanting while marching toward the union house. The next days they were joined by all kinds of manufacturing workers. By the end of the month the Parisian strikers numbered more than 35,000 and all their demands were met despite the serious, responsible people saying it was not the appropriate time.

When the war finally came to an end in November 1918, there were nine million dead on the battlefield, 1.5 million for France alone. Repopulation became more crucial than ever, so they gave the women working in factories a bonus for babies: 200 F for a boy and 100 F for a girl. Why the difference? Obviously, Séverine said, it's for the next war. And with her usual insight she watched the people stretching out their docile necks, ready for the knife.

She had always refused to be elected for prizes, like the Legion of Honor, several times. But on one instance she accepted a nomination. In 1919 her candidature was presented for the Nobel Peace Prize. The jury preferred the American President Woodrow Wilson, a much more diplomatic choice.

Prayer to the Nameless Prayer to the Nameless[2]

In your devastated temple, before your forbidden altar, here I am bending my knees in homage, O Divine!, stretching out my hands to call for help, O Venerable!, lifting up my heart as an offering, my whole being filled with ardent fervor, throbbing with ultimate hope, O Protector!

The barbarians passed by here—all the barbarians! They made your mutilated image disappear, snatched away your symbols, pillaged what recalled your influence, your good deeds… and our

[1] See 10-Soldiers and Spies

[2] *Journal du Peuple*, 1 January 1917, a homage to peace.

pious worship. The sacred wood was snatched away by the maddened horde, the sacred birds, with their throats' cut, sang their final languid song with a death rattle.

And your name was banned, Eternal! It could never again be pronounced except in a whisper between scattered servants, your believers reduced to silence—all those who would keep invincible faith in the secret of their soul. But every voice that tried to whisper it was stifled. Whoever tried to follow your path was despised, struck down with anathema… you became the "enemy", O Charitable!

A few, however, ventured this far. These flowers that time has dried were brought by women; these slabs of broken text bear witness to the perseverance of some writers; these inscriptions on the walls, clumsy and naïve, say that simple people, at the height of suffering, could not be denied by you, O Comforter!

The marble was broken, the walls cracked under the pounding arms, the doors smashed in and through the fissured dome the waters of heaven fell… And you never looked so majestic and desirable as in this degradation, this distress, this poverty. They gave you, Goddess, the appeal of ostracism, the irresistible allure that persecution bestows. The last flame has not yet burned on your altar. The shadows daring to come to you down hard roads are no longer so stealthy. The mystery of the night is no longer crossed by secret passages. Antigone[3] raises her veil in the nascent dawn to disobey men—and obey the gods!

#

Listen, Serenity, to the hymn of a heart that gives its most precious days to you, its blazing summers, its autumns full of splendor. Because it costs dearly to serve you, it allows me to proudly claim my title to disgrace.

I have celebrated you the best I could. And it seems to me today that my words were poor, my efforts frail, my praises weak—seeing that we did not save you, O So Precious! It is only now that we can know what you are, what you are worth, what you represent for mortals in the play of their destinies.

Nothing is without you! The stones of Decalion[4] would not change into humans. The touch of your bare feet made the ground sprout in abundance, prosperity and joy…

Wherever you go, the harvest grows, turns golden, remains whole, without a stalk twisted and without a seed lost… the sacred bread!

Wherever you smile, the vines bend under the weight of grapes, amber colored, scarlet colored, where the daily drops are caught—wine, the comfort of man!

Wherever you sing, the bowers dare to mate, from port to starboard shaking their rosy freight.

Wherever you reign, there is the song of hammers, productive activity, art flourishing, thought soaring, the good fight for the coming of better times, the struggle for truth, the march toward more justice!

They did not know you, Immortal, in that they knew you without understanding, they lived under your reed scepter without appreciating its lightness, without admiring enough your true face, magnanimous and magnificent.

They know now… They know that you are the flavor of fruits, the scent of flowers, the taste of wheat, the bloom of roses, the gold of the sun and the gentleness of night—since nothing of all this would exist without you.

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[3] Daughter of Oedipus who defied Creon, ruler of Thebes, to bury her brother Polynices.

[4] Son of Prometheus who repopulated the Earth with his wife Pyrrha after a great flood by throwing stones

You carry in yourself all the good: the calm of sleep, the security of love, the solidity of home. Outside of you is nothing but insecurity, absence, grief, ruin and death…

#

And you are beautiful, oh so beautiful, more than words can say, so white, so pure, so full of gentleness. In you are summed up the mother, sister, spouse, daughter, seeing that by your very presence you ensure the happiness of all tenderness. The smallest, the most innocent sense that your aegis covers them; toward you the baby bird stretches out its beak—it doesn't see it is under your wings—and the little lamb rubs against your linen robe.

O Goddess, thanks to you the barn is full and the stable stocked, the attic overflows and the cellar is packed. You who take pleasure in marriage bells and baptisms. Divinity of farmers, artisans, lovers and mothers, for those who work, those who love, may you be favorable.

It won't last forever, your dark exile… They hear, far off in the distant, like a soft, silky flight. Even the stones of the half-destroyed temple are moving and vibrating. Here I am standing—all ears… Is it you who are approaching me? Will you come down soon from the heavenly depths to appear, luminous, to all those who are waiting for you and hoping for you, O Liberator!

Bourgeois Morality Bourgeois Morality[5]

We asked our great friend Séverine to give us her opinion on this expired morality whose moral disorder resulting from the war has gone bankrupt and is nothing but dead weight on the new generation.

It existed… in a world that hardly resembled this one and that I think remains one of its last witnesses.

The Third Estate, that middle class that lays claim to ancient virtues when men appeared honest and women modest, but that inevitably perverted the "Enrich yourselves!" of Guizot[6]—this morality around the end of the Second Empire seemed to be reserved only for the petite bourgeoisie, on the border of the people.

It was fighting against the three defects that long slavery had bequeathed it: ignorance, personal carelessness and drunkenness. Bad conditions to create a morality for its own use or to accept the strict and puritan one of its neighbor.

But time passed. The petite bourgeoisie was in turn won over by corruption, contaminated by love of money, the taste for consumption and the desire to be seen. And what you could have called the bourgeoisie morality, the kind of lay gospel in which the soul-searching of a good part of the country was summed up, disappeared completely.

A Fourth Order had risen up—or better, all of them, once divided into three and whom the wonderful addition of the people unwedged, were split into two halves. Nobility and bourgeoisie melted into a single bloc with almost identical instincts and aspirations: the one a zealotry for the Church and the other declared hostile to it but both agreed to support the military, the protector of traditions, sacristies and safes!

Class struggle. On the other side of the barricade, grouped together, the forces of the past united for the common defense. Over here the people: a people knowing how to read, to write

behind his shoulder to form people.

[5] *Clarté*, 3 December 1921.

[6] François Guizot (1787-1874), who tried to restrict voting rights to men with property and thus others should

and more obsessed with learning; trained in sports to care for their physical dignity; only rarely offering that spectacle of drunkenness.

What could the poor, former, petty, tidy, nitpicking bourgeoisie morality do among these formidable adversaries? They stuck to the new one, the one coming from the head like a decomposing fish; the one dropped by the decadent aristocracy in the salons of the bankers, the suppliers of the State, the grand merchants, and then little by little spread out into the more modest world of civil servants, departmental officials and retailers to end up winning over the extreme limits of the Third Estate.

Worship of force! Religion of money! Idolatry of rules and regulations as protectors of property!

Faith? Rarely. If, of all the listeners of the mass or the regulars at confession, they needed to trim away the "faithful" who only went out of habit, decorum, the desire not to be different from their peers, worry over relationships or business, fear of public opinion, or even (in the small towns without theaters) the need for distraction, the irresistible desire to show off a new dress or hat à la Paris, if they needed to clear the holy place of all these, there would not be very many people left!

The priests are well aware of this; there are even some who admit it. But the Church, which is clever, also knows that appearance is one of the foundations of reality, that duty creates the system, that number is power—which it is very careful not to exaggerate. It is enough that the building is full and the heads bowed. War has done a great deal for it as it recruits from the grieving.

No, the bourgeois morality today is founded on no ideal.

Furthermore, so that we're not fooled, God is on the decline, despite all precedents. Otherwise they would never have dared, *three months before the war*, in April 1914 (a miracle with double vision!) to change in the Catechism of the diocese of Paris the text of the 5th commandment, to transform the simple and formal decree, "Thou shall not kill, [for no reason nor deliberately]", into a tangled, conditional instruction, ["Thou shall not kill, without right nor deliberately"], where (already!) the defense of the homeland is anticipated. Otherwise, as well, they would not have dared—even with the bishops' authorization—to force the servants of the "God of Peace" into denying their Master and his doctrine.

Not one refused, by the way. It was among the Protestants, you must know, that "conscientious objectors" rose up—and the judges who yielded.

For the Christ suspected of defeatism, embarrassed by the Gospel (which, by the way, was copiously censored many times) they substituted a lay idol, warlike, renovated, amplified, safe for the old men behind the lines, like Ugolino devouring his children or Moloch demanding fresh meat from the young prey[7]: The Homeland!

#

Was it, therefore, this that the bourgeois morality could rest on from now on?

No more than on the ancient divinity. Because "a religion for the people is necessary" they had established this one, put under the Arc-de-Triomphe the remains of an unknown soldier, perhaps a German, perhaps a deserter, suddenly invested (by chance) with all virtues whereas perhaps

"enrich themselves" to climb the social ladder.

[7] Ugolino is placed by Dante in the lowest hell reserved for betrayers (Canto XXIII); Moloch, a god demanding the sacrifice of children.

he had all vices. And it made of this X, with the cooperation of a dependent press, the object of a "new worship". But besides the dead, what had been the attitude of those who represent their class—seeing that their class does not obligate them to decency?

Two works are surprisingly suggestive here: the Souvenirs de Guerre, the daily writings of the painter Jacques Blanche, caustic, lively, wholly curious; and Bonnet Rose of Georges Michel who, after Epoque Tango, likewise defines the attitude of part of the ruling class. What if we add to this reading the Chercheurs d'or of Pierre Hassye, Rois de Babel of Maurice Verne, and some significant court reports from these last few years—we are completely edified.

I am not judging by generalities. That would be stupid and risk being unjust. But given that only scandals impossible to cover up come to light, by the sheer number of those that do surface we can imagine how many remain in the dark.

When these people weren't guzzling booze or fox-trotting on the mass grave of Hartmannwillerskopf[8] or elsewhere, they were carving their pound of Shylock's flesh off the flank of the Homeland; they were trading and selling indifferently with each other, with the ally, with the neutral and with the enemy!

Well… if neither God nor Homeland, what framework does this bourgeois morality have?

Honesty? The system D[9] has dominated maybe even more behind the scenes than out front. Under the flag of the sacred Union, they devoured each other, taking whatever they could. Whoever sold anything dreamt only of exploiting the customer down to the bone, down to the guts! One person's hunger made another's fat!

Modesty? Let's forget about certain establishments where "love thy neighbor" is quite exaggerated. Likewise let's forget about that kind of hysteria during tragic times that wants to live hard and fast. Let's stay out of all that. But in the second year, in the secret dances where "honest ladies" would nonetheless go, they had never been so scantily dressed. And the "patriotic" balls that followed were, yes, great scandals. On the street, necklines go down to the waist, skirts are over the knees and blouses (being see-through) leave nothing to the imagination.

Family? There have never been as many divorces. And for good reason! To the point that the most legitimate children cannot recognize their parents. And the parents no more so—and the public even less!

Again, what virtues remain in this shipwreck? What branch can this bourgeois morality grab onto, being that it wasn't worth much before 1914 and is worth absolutely nothing today?

That there are good families among the bourgeoisie is certain. They mind their manners thanks to an unsoiled heredity, to traditions that good fortune has allowed them to preserve and transmit faithfully. But each, in a way, represents an individual faction, has its special Code that, except for intermarriages (which are most often disastrous for the future of the species), outside influence is bound to dissolve.

In other words, there is no common directive. If any is declared, a secret commentary annuls its effect right away.

They say to a child, "Do not kill!" but right after, "Make War!" They insist he respect the property of others, but they indoctrinate him, for example, to hate the idiots who don't manage to "get by", to speculate on the naivety, imprudence or needs of their neighbor. They exhort him

[8] In the Vosges in Alsace where there is a monument of WWI.

[9] I.e. typical attitude meaning fend for yourself.

to be good but they teach him that the first law of employers is to pay the workers as little as possible and earn triple or quadruple on their labor, fatigue and suffering.

As for the girls, it's very simple. Given the reduction in the males, the race to a husband has never been so cruel. Well, the mothers, respectable in their own eyes, losing any sense of dignity, dress up their children as seductive as they can and tolerate, when they are not pushing them to it, the little ploys to thwart the competition and assure the "good match".

These girls, moreover, are very shrewd and maybe this is not a bad thing. Their new eyes are quickly made to see through the norms whose greed and lack of principles the world tries to cover up. It doesn't matter! All manhunts are the same no matter the ritual. And I sometimes felt more uncomfortable in a "proper" salon among the conspiratorial smiles than I would have been on the stage of the Folies-Bergère[10]. She who is looking to get a dinner seems more innocent to me than she who, well born and well raised, under her family's protection, plays pretty much the same game to get her dream car!

Is it any better in less high society? Let's see. Crafts or more precisely manual labor has fallen into disfavor. Based on the novels and films and according to the tales of a few exceptional adventurers, the parents can no longer count on anything but secretarial work to make a future for their daughters, to give them access to a higher world where the kings of the moment marry shepherd girls. On which hand? … They did not think about it enough and maybe, in the end, they didn't dare to ask themselves too much. Life is so hard!

#

The true morality will come from the new world being created in some far-off limbo and will develop through usage and will be valued by what the individual values.

Nothing good can come today from a society that is breaking apart and that is contaminated with the stench of rot and decay. It is up to the people to free themselves from a past burdened with prejudice, superstition, expectation, faith in miracles, deep dark sleep and too short dreams. We can only help it along as best we can, with all our energy and all our courage.

For, already we know that this morality will be just and beautiful, founded on the equality of the sexes, fraternity of peoples, respect of conscience and love of that Justice which is divinity without cathedrals, without altars, without priest and sacrifices—it is the highest human ideal!

[10] Famous for exotic dancing and nude women. It would later feature the celebrated Josephine Baker.

23 Bolsheviks and Bullies

In October 1917 hope for social justice was once again kindled by the distant revolution in Russia, which revived in Séverine a passion that she thought had died out forever. She was swept away "like a dry leaf".

Like many others in different camps she saw the revolution that she had dreamed of: a revolution without government, guided by those councils of workers, farmers and soldiers in a direct democracy electing representatives who could be revoked at any time. In reality it was only a temporary façade. As soon as the Bolsheviks arrived and took control of the movement, nothing remained of the Revolution except the name.

Between 1917-1920, however, the anarchists supported the Russian Revolution or at the very least stayed quiet. But the resistance to anarchists by the growing dictatorship was already visible. The 1st Congrès de l'Union Anarchiste in November 1920 appaluded the Russian Revolution. The second Congrès a year later in Villeurbanne, unanimously condemned the dictatorship of the proletariat. After the crushing defeat of the Kronstadt revolt in March 1921 and the violent reaction to Makhno's insurrection in August it is easy to see why.

At first Séverine, too, adhered to the cause. In January 1921 the newspapers announced the solidarity of Anatole France, Henri Barbusse and Séverine to the newly formed French Communist Party. After all these years of fierce individualism, at 65 years old she was joined to a party, in the majority, and back in the fight. She was brought out as the grandmother for the good cause, an icon, assumed to be more passive and forgiving at her age. They wanted her to stay quiet and play along but they had forgotten who she was. Against their wishes, for example, she was the star witness in the trial of Souvarine and Loriot, fierce critics of Stalin.

The final straw for her came when the soviet leaders demanded the French Party get rid of intellectuals who belonged to bourgeois organizations like the Freemasons or the League of Human Rights. They were to renounce publicly or be banned from the Party. Well, Séverine had helped found the League of Human Rights back in 1898 during the Dreyfus Affair and would never give up her membership. Before the deadline came up she sent back her card—all illusions about Soviet Russia were lost.

Russia had adopted all the mechanisms of the State that were anathema to libertarian ideals: army, police, centralized administration, etc. Thus, Séverine, along with most anarchists and the disenchanted socialists, became anti-Bolshevik, anti-Stalin and eventually anti-Hitler, a tyrant as abominable as the Russian.

The anarchist movement itself was on the rise after 1918, perhaps more in numbers than in action. The revolutionary magnetism of the years 1880 to 1910 had faded, but rather than die an idle death, it transformed (as it does today) and its influence endured. But the image of the anarchist as a bomb-throwing, chaos-spewing nihilist persisted (as it does today) and they became easy scapegoats for the powers that be.

A tragic example: Sacco and Vanzetti, two Italian anarchist sent to the electric chair for a crime they did not commit. There's no need to retell their story that has become part of international

history; the accusation of murder in 1920 in Massachusetts, the speedy conviction, the appeals, false evidence, dozens of witnesses in their defense, the confession of the real criminal, etc. For seven years the case dragged on before the death sentence was finally set for August 23 1927.

Their innocence was obvious and protests were held in every major city in America and throughout the world. John Dos Passos, Dorothy Parker, Albert Einstein, HG Wells, George Bernard Shaw and others all spoke out for them. In Japan, Australia, South America and Europe they protested this travesty of justice. In their cells Sacco and Vanzetti were on hunger strike.

In France they held a meeting on July 24 1927 at the Cirque de Paris. 20,000 people squeezed in, 10,000 gathered outside. The organizers called on Séverine to preside over this unified demand for pardon from the American government. For a long time she had left Paris to reside in her home in Pierrefonds, but this cause brought her back into the fray, once again. If at 72 years old she could still serve for something, it would all be worth it.

After the meeting at the Cirque de Paris Séverine stayed in Paris. On July 26 she and Marguerite Durand were invited to lunch at the Maison des Jounalistes, the first time such an "honor" was accorded to women of the press. But the anarchist victims of American injustice were center stage.

To the global protests and calls for lenience America turned a deaf ear and sent the two innocents to the electric chair. Violent confrontation with the police broke out that night in Paris, 100 people wounded and 200 arrested. Séverine regretted this outburst of violence because it was too late—there was nobody to save.

In their final statements the two men tried to console and give hope to the countless men and women who had and would always devote their lives to the cause of freedom and justice: "The last moment belongs to us—that agony will be our triumph."

They Wanted It They Wanted It[1]

We said to them:

"Watch out. Can't you see where you're headed? We live in a Republic and you forget too much, you who pretend to be its steadfast defenders! What business does Marianne[2] have with the autocrat, the Emperor-Pope, the most absolute, perfectly despotic regime in Europe[3]? What aberration moves you to link this living symbol with the dying, with the wayward corpse that exploits you?

"There are strings on this puppet. Who is pulling them? Who needs our money, not to build roads, bridges and tunnels, not to improve the railways, not to enlarge the public transport system into the wide-open areas, rich in soil but poor in prospects, and not, finally, to extend the empire's prosperity throughout its territory, but instead to finance the crown's whims, the grand dukes' orgies, the courtesans' luxuries and Rasputin's demands! You will regret your trust and cry for your savings because the support is illusory and bankruptcy is certain."

[1] L'Humanité, April 24 1922.

[2] Symbol of the French Republic representing liberty.

[3] Referring to Russia. The Franco-Russian Alliance was formed in the late 19th century to oppose Germany and further their economic and imperialist interests.

Wasted words! Begging for more and high interest, the people clutch their nest eggs and rush into slavery, kissing the boots of the tsar and footprints of Alexandra Feodorovna[4]. Ooh, ooh, it's an Empress!

Already you were looking askance at us, mumbling snide remarks. At best if you did not accuse us of being paid by Pitt and bankrolled by England. Because it was England at the time that was the enemy and between the two shores neither side wasted any opportunity to be nasty. Joan of Arc and Napoleon were back in style; you went wild for Michel Strogoff [by Jules Verne], old Krüger, the little queen of Holland [Wilhelmina] and the heroes of Fashoda[5].

My friends Stead, Moschelès and others got beat up at the Guildhall in London while fighting for world peace against English imperialism, so glorified by Rudyard Kipling. The same with us in Paris, pretty much everywhere.

Both they and us were preaching in the wilderness. The spirit of conquest over there, the spirit of revenge here, and even more so the spirit of profit made the crowds deaf, closed off to everything that did not flatter their monomania or their greed.

Betrayed by the Court of Russia, long before the lack of arms, munitions, supplies and the desertion of their troops had forced the Soviet leaders to sign the Brest-Litovsk peace treaty[6], now able to see the misappropriation of funds used for everything but what they were allocated for and finally knowing—it's about time!—all about the "steamroller", the French public, especially the supporters of the fine Russians, let loose their criticism, complaints and recriminations.

And the same press for whom the issue of loans was an inexhaustible godsend, who never had enough good things to say about the Franco-Russian Alliance, are trying to cover up the splendid results of its intervention by blaming others for what it and those who used it as a docile tool did.

Blaming us, of course! We who were warning them, predicting the fraud, bankruptcy and collapse!

#

We told them:

"There's still time, despite the harm already done. Europe is badly wounded but it can still get better. The bleeding can be stopped. Everything is compromised; nothing is lost. Consider the continual offers of peace. Reason can also sometimes have a say in the matter. Passion has never been a good form of government. Whether you want it or not there exists an economic solidarity between nations, even temporary enemies. You do not triumph over nothingness, a chaos where nothing remains but the winner. This nation you so noisily clamor for, have pity on it, not only for its sacrifices but in its resources, its necessary relations with the rest of the world. Don't reduce it to a skeletal state to reduce the others to deprivation. Don't try to make it into the tallest headstone in the graveyard. Have mercy on the survivors!"

They answered us frantically, waving their fists and foaming at the mouth, "To the bitter end! To the bitter end!"

#

We told them:

[4] Granddaughter of Queen Victoria, wife of Nicolas II, last ruler of the Russian Empire. She was put to death by the Soviets in 1918.

[5] References to anti-revolution or anti-English affairs.

[6] In 1918 that ended Russian engagement in WWI.

"It's a bad and reckless action. You who clamor for it so frantically are denying four years of official assertions of the "right of people to manage themselves". The personal affairs of Russia have nothing to do with you: leave them alone; worry about bandaging our own wounds, clearing away our own rubble; it will be much smarter. Our coffers are empty. The little that remains to us ought to be devoted to relieving the great misery that resulted from the conflict. Save the public funds, keep them for real suffering; give a roof to the poor in devastated regions, bread to the Austrian and Russian children who are innocent and beyond reproach.

And finally, listen to the great words of Terence about human solidarity[7], hear the more recent cry of Paul Jouve: "You are all men!" No more money, no more soldiers for the venture! Think of the future. You are doing everything you can to throw Russia into the arms of Germany…"

Our masters replied with the picture of Man-with-knife-between-teeth, which made us French the laughingstock of the world because it influenced the direction of our domestic policy. They answered us by sponsoring, one after another—and with such determination!—the expeditions of Denikin, Yudenich, Koltchak, Wrangrel[8], all the gang leaders who attacked and sacked poor Russia. Millions followed upon millions into the money pit of hatred. The press, feeling fine about the great Russian emigration, dumped cartloads of filth on the sister Republic.

Through the genius of Lenin and his companions, through an effort only comparable to that of France in 1792, Russia, despite the losses from hunger and typhus, has survived and remains free. It is useless and vain to try to massacre and enslave it.

And it is allied with Germany. So, don't pretend to be surprised, you leaders! It was to be expected, a foregone conclusion, you did everything you could to bring it about! You are the only ones responsible, with your unusual alliance, your fierce protraction of the war, your mad hatred for the Russian Republic that asked you for nothing but brotherhood.

What have you done with the public funds? What have you done with our army? What have you done with our future?

The Broken Mirror The Broken Mirror[9]

Felix Pyat, who was a great stylist and remarkably learned, loved to tell the Hindu fable that I am going to relate.

Truth, who is a goddess, but who is also a woman, started feeling that staying in the depths of her well was getting a little tedious. Therefore, she decided to go back up to the surface and get back in touch with humans. Maybe they were better after so many centuries when their excesses and depravity had forced her to seek refuge underground? Besides, her curiosity was piqued… everything must have changed a lot? The fashions were obviously not important to her, seeing her traditional suit, but their hearts and minds, their customs and relationships? And what might they think of her after all this time for them to get used to her absence?

She took the risk… When she came over the edge, children greeted her by throwing stones; women heaped insults on her because of her garb, or lack thereof; the village watchman ran up to protest; the priest mumbled exorcisms, slammed the door in her face; the schoolmaster got

[7] Homo sum: humani nihil a me alienum puto (I am human: I consider nothing human alien to me — Heauton Timorumenos, Act 1, scene 1).

[8] Reactionary generals commanding the White Army against the Bolshevik Red Army.

[9] Le Cri des peuples, Issue no.1, May 1928.

scared and made all the kids face the wall when she showed up; the men at arms threw an old coat over her and brought her to the city. The judges found her guilty of public indecency and the people jeered her. She faced all sorts of misery and insult, saw lies victorious everywhere and sincerity gagged.

Then she went back to her hole. But before going back down, in anger at the thrashing she had got, she threw her mirror on the ground and broke it.

Her loyal followers patiently gathered up the pieces, then tried to put them together again, to rebuild the symbol. But they never managed to succeed; it is still missing one piece.

Since that time, nobody can boast of possessing the whole truth. Each of us has only a bigger or smaller piece of it, sometimes a few pieces, but disconnected…

#

Thus the *Cri du Peuple* of the past, serving one truth, had to become the *Cri des Peuples* of today by multiplying.

The world was grand in 1871, when in the midst of the tempest Jules Vallès launched what he called a "neighborhood firebrand". Every nation considered its people special, very distinctive, above all devoted to national industries. They fraternized when the soldiers of the [National] Convention brought up new ideas; they fraternized at a distance in 1830 and 1848; but the insurrection of 1871 produced no echoes except in the still stammering Second International. Even after the Empire was overthrown, we bore the charge, in Europe's eyes, of having declared war and remaining combative. As witness, before the Investigative Commission on the causes of the movement, [Adolphe] Thiers' statement calling it an "explosion of patriotism".

Every people was full of nationalism.

Now, given that science has reduced space, the world is small. The air has been conquered, the globe is no longer enough for man's ambitions as they start to dream of other planets that they will try to reach tomorrow. Although the three great races separated by skin color remain so because of climates, their inner subdivisions, despite the rivalries, conflicts and wars, are breaking down every day. Nations are tending to be no more than provinces. Tomorrow let Europe be threatened by the Yellow Peril or the Black Peril and you will see not an alliance but a total, absolute union.

#

That does it for the big picture. But in the heart of each of the provinces remains a portion of the native or annexed people, caged in obligation and submission, for whom, just like international solidarity is forbidden, so too is it prohibited to stay attached to their origins and traditions, all the more dear the farther they are separated so harshly. They are without a voice just like they are without rights. They are nothing but a piece broken off from the destroyed unity they belong to.

In 1871 the effort could be limited to only one nation. Today all the points of the globe are rising up in protest and calling for justice. The enslaved minorities, national or conquered, have to make a sound; they have to make their demands heard, to express their suffering and hopes.

The treaties of 1918-19 have resolved nothing. They have only shifted the injustice, increased the confusion and the pretexts for conflict. We will not refer to the mirror. We will never know what secret negotiations led to certain break-ups and trickery. But we can study the fractures, gather up the fragmentary truths and try to get those who have been frustrated cynically to know at least some relief in expressing their grievances.

The people cry out with chains around their ankles and chains around their wrists. The rumble is rising from deep in the fortresses, the prisons, from around the gallows and scaffolds. My poor old *Cri du people*, you would not be up to the task; there are too many! Here now is your descendent picking up the sack and the staff to travel the wide world and on the way, with the shards of the mirror, to collect the groans of the oppressed.

24 Fascism and Finale

Several reasons contributed to the weakening of the anarchist movement after WWI: the fact that some anarchists, like Kropotkine, Jean Grave and Charles Malato rallied to the cause of war; also the libertarian soviets of the Russian Revolution turning into centralist authoritarians; so too the defeat of the Spanish Revolution first by the communists and then by Franco; and perhaps its inability to organize effectively. But anarchism was not dead. As the older anarchists were dying off, younger ones took up the banner. Names and faces changed but the spirit remained the same and the call to action kept ringing out.

Séverine also continued to mobilize public opinion for noble causes. "What I hate most in the world is injustice!" Always more libertarian than socialist, she cared less for theories and subtle arguments than for action and real change. She always defended the man or woman, innocent or guilty, standing alone before the all-powerful justice system of the State, which earned her a reputation for defending those whose cause she did not necessarily espouse.

As a Pioneer of anti-racism, she called out "to free the white race from the irons of prejudice" while she denounced fascism and its "fanatic horde" when it first raised its ugly head in the 1920s. As post-war Europe was finding prosperity again and trying to forget the trauma of its latest slaughter, a surge of violence rose up out of the buried trenches. Séverine rose up against them: In Spain Primo de Rivera; in Bavaria "that little" Hitler; and in Italy one man incarnated it—Mussolini.

One recurrent theme of her final writings was the threat that Mussolini and fascism presented to Europe and the world. She would not live through the war he ushered in but she felt it coming and urged people to prevent it.

In 1903 in Médan she spoke long and movingly on the first anniversary of Zola's death. Two years later 120,000 people came to the Gare de Lyon to meet the coffin of Louise Michel, dead in Marseille while giving conferences at 85 years old. Séverine was asked to give a speech at the cemetery. As public speaking had once become one of her talents and sources of income, so too did giving eulogies. She was promoted to the rank of professional mourner.

In her seventies Séverine continued to write, giving articles to provincial papers and weekly columns in Paris dailies that asked her to contribute to their first issue, acting like a godmother, as Vallès had said she was of the *Cri* so long ago. Her last article was sent from her bed on February 16 to *La Volonté*, only two months before her death.

She died on April 24 1929 in Pierrefonds. The final words of her rebel life, spoken to her friend Georges Pioch, were "You have to work and you always have to tell the truth".

She was buried in Pierrefonds on April 27, her 74th birthday. The day was chosen because it was a Saturday and workers could come. A special train was reserved from Paris to the small town in the Oise.

In the background, more than 2,000 followed her remains to the sound of Chopin's "Marche Funebre".

In the foreground the long-lamenting song of a beggar drags on.

Curtains down. Fade to black.

Go away, Outcasts!

Go away, outcasts![1]

Who said this? France? You wouldn't really want to! The old crone who said what is the foulest part of hatred, what is the least noble issue of servility is no more France than the fury in black shirts shaking their fists at us and spitting insults from the other side of the Alps is Italy!

Look here: the two harpies are the same. The one has achieved in the domain of terror what the other dreams and thinks about, what it might commit tomorrow if there were not spirited energy and physical bodies between its action and freedom. The one perpetuates, the other approves. The fascist is soaked in blood up to its elbows; the reactionary (who preserves the memory of the 30,000 casualties of 1871[2]) still has only its fist stained with the generous purple that spurted out of the skull of Jaurès[3]—but it threatens, it hopes, it aspires!

These witches are the visible faces of the past who are struggling to come back to life in the present. They are not—let's shout out loud in honor of the provinces of Europe where we were born!—either chivalrous France or magnificent Italy. They had, they have other faces. Their people (who sometimes argue and fight but who are often allied together) have demonstrated, in the past, elegance and courtesy. Will we only be here, then, to miss those long lost days?

I don't think so. There is a mirage on the banks of the Tiber. The Italian language is so intoxicating that the people frequently get drunk on words. Their sun is so hot that thoughts fly happily beyond the limits of the possible, borrowing its wings from illusions. A man fitting the national profile, full of passionate speech and imagery, jumps on the platform, speaks down to people, takes a gamble; the king gives in and a boisterous minority rushes onto the stage. The "march" to Rome is made on railroads, don't forget. Who paid for the seats? That's the mystery of the aperitif. The "Apero" sponsored the "Impero". All-powerful alcohol incites people to dictatorial aspirations in every country. Using a famous poster it seems to be innocent Nicolas coming with a sack full of bottles—it might, depending on the circumstances, just as well be Josephine Baker carrying bananas or Napoleon with laurels.

Laurels are so far lacking for Mr. Mussolini. His brow is heavy with greed, his speech bursting with metaphors… but his feet are clay. Especially since he relies on a horde that is known to surrender itself to its violent instincts (with the bridle round their necks) and is eager to enlarge its field of operations. Out of the entire population of Italy how many members of fascism are registered? The great, passive masses, manipulated only up to a certain point, being nice when the going's good but vicious when things go wrong, this mass is an essentially inconsistent and shifting base.

Severe, silenced by force, but the mind imprinted with ghastly memories, the heart swollen with bitterness, the Italian people, the true ones, who don't get sucked in by the speeches or blinded by all the flash, think about things and mark their time… They are fed up with war and they weigh the dictatorship in their strong hands. They are our brothers like they always have

[1] *Le Cri des peuples*, December 10 1928.

[2] From the Paris Commune

[3] Jean Jaurès, pacifist socialist murdered on the eve of WWI.

been—and its in the face of these outcasts where we will find traces of our common ancestry, a family resemblance that will always bind Italy to France—whatever the madmen do.

Even though the club wants to turn into a scepter, it can do nothing—the tombs of Jaurès and Matteotti[4] earn our equal respect and affection.

#

And now concerning the sentence of Di Modugno[5] fascism is making a stink and our government, completely uninvolved with the verdict of the jury, figures it is the opportunity to bear witness to who's side its on. Because the enemy is no longer clericalism like in the times of Gambetta nor Germany like during the war. Since Albert Sarraut declared it in a movement that was more spirited than sensible—communism is the enemy!

Only that? It doesn't seem so. A glance at Europe is enough to show that under this broad label, the fascism in all the States is also targeting socialists, radicals and progressive republicans. It's considered and called all communism militant and a bother to the "rackets" of the masters.

Even being pacifist (unless it's very official) with filed down teeth and gnawed fingernails, not to mention the harmless character natural to such an opinion, is suspicious. Especially if it's "whining". No preachers! They cannot govern peacefully except at this price.

So, they hunt them down everywhere with a particular system. Where oppression is pretty strong they kill them, secretly, or else in a small group. Mercy means only deporting them, like the wife and young child of Di Modugno, in a place chosen so that they won't be living off the state for too long. They tyrannize the others in such a way that they risk everything, death, the loss of civil rights, confiscation of goods, to reach a more hospitable land.

It was France once, beautiful France with arms wide open to receive all the outcasts, all the hunted, all the "survivors". It had taken over the generous tradition of Holland and Switzerland during the revocation of the Edict of Nantes; of England and Germany during the Revolution; of Belgium, the Swiss and the British again after the Commune (Hugo was expelled to Brussels only because of a letter to the defeated).

So in the time of the Encyclopedists it welcomed philosophers and writers who were not prophets in their own country; after 1830 and 1848 for the Greek, Hungarian, Italian and Polish refugees it became the asylum for all the victims of tsarism. My childhood saw the end of this era (who didn't have a refugee either after the attack by Orsini or Berezowski[6]). All of subversive France was vibrating with the perhaps impolite but very human cry of Floquet as Tsar Alexander II passed by: "Long live Poland, Sir!" My youth was a regular visitor to the nihilists on the left bank, often grouped together around Lavrov and old Considerant.

Since the map of Europe has been cut up by haphazard scissors, they are coming here from all points of the globe. But especially from Italy after fascism clamped down there. They flee vandalism, looting, the burning of their houses, being thrown out windows, summary executions, organized shootings, pseudo-conspiracies, hostage taking, all the exploits that the Golden Book of Fascio prides itself on.

Many of them have white hair, belong to the working or intellectual elite. Welcome, Latin brothers. We'll squeeze a little tighter to make room for you in the home, in the stable, with the books…

[4] Giacomo Matteotti, Italian socialist murdered by fascists in 1924.

[5] Sergio Di Modugno, an anti-fascist who assassinated Count Carlo Nardini, vice consul of Italian Consulate in Paris in September 1927, sentenced to only two years in prison.

[6] Assassination attempts on Napoleon III in 1858 and on Tsar Alexander II in 1867.

But Mussolini is grumbling because a French jury showed some indulgence to a husband whose wife they are holding, to a father whose child they are holding, to a citizen chased from his homeland. The supporters of Il Duce are hissing at France like its other members in Venice after the hostilities hissed at our military envoy Marshal Fayolle after tearing off and throwing in the canal the insignia of the consulate of France. There was no question of Di Modugno at that time or of strengthening our institutions in a strict sense.

Bad French woman that I am, I want desperately for France not to be dishonored!

Fear of Death Fear of Death[7]

I pity the living. I don't pity the dead—those who, as Luther well said, are finally at rest.

But why does this rest frighten so many people? Why, just at the thought of this end, maybe far in the future, do they feel the back of their necks grow cold and the blood in their veins freeze?

I will never understand this.

Life seems to me to be a storehouse entrusted to our honor and uprightness. We are forbidden to embezzle from it and we should go to the grave with the entire stock like those ancients whose toll for eternity we still find in their skeletal hands or on their mummified lips.

Fear of death? But it is because you made a mess of your life!

I think it is so simple, this idea of doing good all the time, constantly, unceasingly, as if the Great Ghoul was right about to sweep you up and lay you in the cold ground—lining the final resting place with a rim of clay and rocking to sleep, the final sleep, to the tolling of bells.

Yes, doing good: that is the cure for fear of death. And by "doing good" I do not mean living in that state of grace that is so hard to reach and so fragile to keep, which the Church speaks of. That is reserved for elect souls. Me, I am talking about what is accessible to common mortals, to the indifferent crowd that, not having seen the light, has lost the way to heaven.

And I hope there are some paths crossing it where they can find the way again.

#

Every human being has inside a little voice that speaks very loudly at times of horrible doubt; a little light that makes the heart and brain see clearly… as full as they are sometimes with dangers and darkness. This is the conscience.

You only have to listen to it speak, reflect the inner light to act as well as you should. It never hesitates, is never wrong because it preaches self-denial, self-sacrifice and love of others…

Whoever has a conscience has a guide. As for the unfortunate people who do not have one, it is not their fault and they deserve our pity. Mother Nature stamped them with irresponsibility when badly forming their thinking organs. Or being raised by parents who are irresponsible themselves or who are conscious criminals deformed the child's intellect, making a monster of its soul.

There were Gwynplaine[8] makers in England who sculpted in children's flesh shocking faces—there are some among us too, except they respect the face and their gruesome work is carried out on the heart and brain of the little creature who is the fruit of their loins. When he escapes them he can no longer tell the difference between good and bad, just like those poor birds who need only a neck wound to destroy their sense of direction.

[7] Signed Renée, *Le Gaulois*, January 11 1890.

[8] From Victor Hugo's L'Homme qui rit; his mouth is deformed into a perpetual grin.

So, go and ask a child who has been mutilated like this to have a conscience! Who can blame him for not saving his? Who would dare throw the first stone?

His bad luck gives him rights—our good luck gives us duties.

And the first of all is to repair the injustices committed by chance, each of us as much as we can.

Following our conscience is fine, but this leads only to justice—and it is not enough. We must also listen to our hearts, open wide our arms to the miseries of this world, suffer with joy in the good, in the pride, in the flesh, in order for the humble to suffer a little less, to contribute its share in Israel's redemption.

Practice justice, practice fraternity—you will see if you are scared of death!

#

It is frightening only for those who are left behind, who weep holding a hand whose tenderness seems to fade away with the ever colder embrace.

Alas! Who of us has not felt this awful wrenching of separation? Who of us has not looked for the shiver of awakening on the face asleep forever?

Through tears we eagerly watch over the indecipherable enigma and our mouths stick furiously to the forehead whose icy touch throws us back? It is like we came to kiss some stone statue lying on a tomb, hands crossed and eyes closed, like we see in the back of old abbeys.

And the fingers, those wax fingers, transparent and bloodless like a mother's who has just given birth, how many times in one hour do we not see them go limp or contract with subtle movements? A play of shadows! The mirage of a tenderness that does not want to retreat before ugly reality!

The next day the men in black come. They follow, swaying the wagon, while the wreaths twitch around them on the pavement as if the heart of the deceased was arousing them with its beats.

A stone falls down… the friends drag you away, going back to an empty home—then nothing.

If… the soul! The invisible and sovereign soul that has cast off its rags buried underground, that soars off far from the stench of the charnel house and that comes back swiftly to its loves like a faithful dove to its nest.

It is here, near the survivors, in the impalpable air around us, and in the hours of distress or desperation we feel that we are not alone.

The poor intelligence that we are so proud of has not yet pierced the mystery of worlds. A whole part of creation remains illegible to us and centuries will pass, perhaps, before we have babbled the first word about it.

But they lie if they claim that we die entirely! You must never have loved another being, never have caught their final breath, never have wept over a grave, never have felt *that silent voice* of the beloved soul pointing out your duty or soothing your troubles to have uttered such a blasphemy!

Too bad for those who say this sincerely, but how illogical, then, to fear the tranquility of nothingness! Fear of death and the negation of the soul—how can they be compatible?

In truth, I tell you, there is only one way not to fear Death: it is to prepare yourself for it justly, to think about it with a smile and to go down with your hands full of good deeds…

Séverine, Caroline Rémy de Guebhard, Michael Shreve
Rebel in a Black Dress
The Life and Writings of Séverine

Retrieved on January 19, 2020 from https://rebelinablackdress.wordpress.com
The Life and Writings of Séverine, Caroline Rémy de Guebhard (April 17 1855 – April 24 1929), French Journalist, Activist, Anarchist. The numbered chapters are the biography written by Michael Shreve with the corresponding sections translations of Séverine writings related to the biographical text.