

had seen before then); and with the house the town, from morning to night and in all weathers, the Square, where they sent me before lunch, the streets where I went on errands, the paths we took if the weather was fine. And as in that game in which the Japanese amuse themselves by filling a porcelain bowl with water and steeping in it little pieces of paper until then undifferentiated which, the moment they are immersed in it, stretch and bend, take color and distinctive shape, turn into flowers, houses, human figures, firm and recognizable, so now all the flowers in our garden and in M. Swann's park, and the water lilies on the Vivonne, and the good people of the village and their little dwellings and the church and all of Combray and its surroundings, all of this, acquiring form and solidity, emerged, town and gardens alike, from my cup of tea.

COMBRAY, FROM A DISTANCE, for ten leagues¹ around, seen from the railway when we arrived there the last week before Easter, was no more than a church summing up the town, representing it, speaking of it and for it into the distance, and, when one approached, holding close around its high dark cloak, in the middle of a field, against the wind, like a shepherdess her sheep, the woolly gray backs of the gathered houses, which a vestige of medieval ramparts girdled here and there with a line as perfectly circular as a small town in a primitive painting. To live in, Combray was a little dreary, like its streets, whose houses, built of the blackish stones of the countryside, fronted by outside steps, capped with gables that cast shadows down before them, were so dark that once the daylight began to fade one had to draw back the curtains in the "formal rooms"; streets with the solemn names of saints (of whom many were connected to the history of the earliest seigneurs of Combray): the rue Saint-Hilaire, the rue Saint-Jacques, in which my aunt's house stood, the rue Sainte-Hildegarde, along which her railings ran, and the rue du Saint-Esprit, onto which opened the little side gate of her garden; and these streets of Combray exist in a part of my memory so withdrawn, painted in colors so different from those that now coat the world for me, that in truth all of them, and also the church that rose above them on the square, appear to me even more unreal than the projections of the magic lantern; and that at certain moments, it

seems to me that to be able to cross the rue Saint-Hilaire again, to be able to take a room in the rue de l'Oiseau—at the old Hôtellerie de l'Oiseau Flesché, from whose basement windows rose a smell of cooking that now and then still rises in me as intermittently and as warmly—would be to enter into contact with the Beyond in a manner more marvelously supernatural than making the acquaintance of Golo or chatting with Geneviève de Brabant.

My grandfather's cousin—my great-aunt—in whose house we lived, was the mother of that Aunt Léonie who, after the death of her husband, my uncle Octave, no longer wished to leave, first Combray, then within Combray her house, then her bedroom, then her bed and no longer “came down,” always lying in an uncertain state of grief, physical debility, illness, obsession, and piety. Her own rooms looked out on the rue Saint-Jacques, which ended much farther away in the Grand-Pré (as opposed to the Petit-Pré, a green in the middle of the town where three streets met), and which, smooth and gray, with the three high steps of sandstone before almost every door, seemed like a narrow passage hewn by a cutter of Gothic images from the same stone out of which he would have sculpted a crèche or a calvary. My aunt effectively confined her life to two adjoining rooms, staying in one of them in the afternoon while the other was aired. These were the sorts of provincial rooms which—just as in certain countries entire tracts of air or ocean are illuminated or perfumed by myriad protozoa that we cannot see—enchant us with the thousand smells given off by the virtues, by wisdom, by habits, a whole secret life, invisible, superabundant, and moral, which the atmosphere holds in suspension; smells still natural, certainly, and colored by the weather like those of the neighboring countryside, but already homey, human and enclosed, an exquisite, ingenious, and limpid jelly of all the fruits of the year that have left the orchard for the cupboard; seasonal, but movable and domestic, correcting the piquancy of the hoarfrost with the sweetness of warm bread, as lazy and punctual as a village clock, roving and orderly, heedless and foresightful, linen smells, morning smells, pious smells, happy with a peace that brings only an increase of anxiety and with a prosiness that serves as a great

reservoir of poetry for one who passes through it without having lived in it. The air was saturated with the finest flower of a silence so nourishing, so succulent, that I could move through it only with a sort of greed, especially on those first still cold mornings of Easter week when I tasted it more keenly because I had only just arrived in Combray: before I went in to say good morning to my aunt, they made me wait for a moment, in the first room where the sun, still wintry, had come to warm itself before the fire, already lit between the two bricks and coating the whole room with an odor of soot, having the same effect as one of those great rustic open hearths, or one of those mantels in country houses, beneath which one sits hoping that outdoors there will be an onset of rain, snow, even some diluvian catastrophe so as to add to the comfort of reclusion the poetry of hibernation; I would take a few steps from the prayer stool to the armchairs of stamped velvet always covered with a crocheted antimacassar; and as the fire baked like a dough the appetizing smells with which the air of the room was all curdled and which had already been kneaded and made to “rise” by the damp and sunny coolness of the morning, it flaked them, gilded them, puckered them, puffed them, transforming them into an invisible, palpable country pastry, an immense “turnover” in which, having barely tasted the crisper, more delicate, more highly regarded but also drier aromas of the cupboard, the chest of drawers, the floral wallpaper, I would always come back with an unavowed covetousness to ensnare myself in the central, sticky, stale, indigestible, and fruity smell of the flowered coverlet.

In the next room, I would hear my aunt talking all alone in an undertone. She always talked rather softly because she thought there was something broken and floating in her head that she would have displaced by speaking too loudly, but she never remained for long, even alone, without saying something, because she believed it was beneficial to her throat and that if she prevented the blood from stopping there, she would reduce the frequency of the fits of breathlessness and the spasms from which she suffered; besides, in the absolute inertia in which she lived, she attributed to the least of her sensations an extraordinary importance; she endowed them with a mobility that made

it difficult for her to keep them to herself, and lacking a confidant to whom she could communicate them, she announced them to herself, in a perpetual monologue that was her only form of activity. Unfortunately, having acquired the habit of thinking out loud, she did not always take care to see that there was no one in the next room, and I often heard her saying to herself: "I must be sure to remember that I did not sleep" (for never sleeping was her great claim, and the language we all used deferred to it and was marked by it: in the morning Françoise did not come to "wake" her, but "entered" her room; when my aunt wanted to take a nap during the day, we said she wanted to "reflect" or "rest"; and when she happened to forget herself, while chatting, so far as to say: "what woke me up" or "I dreamed that," she would blush and correct herself instantly).

After a moment I would go in and kiss her; Françoise would be steeping her tea; or, if my aunt was feeling agitated, she would ask instead for her infusion and I would be the one entrusted with pouring from the pharmacy bag onto a plate the quantity of lime blossom which then had to be put into the boiling water. The drying of the stems had curved them into a whimsical trelliswork in whose interlacings the pale flowers opened, as if a painter had arranged them, posing them in the most ornamental way. The leaves, having lost or changed their aspect, looked like the most disparate things, a fly's transparent wing, the white back of a label, a rose petal, but these things had been heaped up, crushed, or woven as in the construction of a nest. A thousand small useless details—the charming prodigality of the pharmacist—that would have been eliminated in an artificial preparation gave me, like a book in which one is amazed to encounter the name of a person one knows, the pleasure of realizing that these were actually stems of real lime blossoms, like those I saw in the avenue de la Gare, altered precisely because they were not duplicates but themselves, and because they had aged. And since here, each new characteristic was only the metamorphosis of an old characteristic, in some little gray balls I recognized the green buds that had not come to their term; but especially the pink luster, lunar and soft, that made the flowers stand out amid the fragile forest of stems where they were

suspended like little gold roses—a sign, like the glow on a wall that still reveals the location of a fresco that has worn away, of the difference between the parts of the tree that had been "in color" and those that had not—showed me that these petals were in fact the same ones that, before filling the pharmacy bag with flowers, had embalmed the spring evenings. That candle-pink flame was their color still, but half doused and drowsing in the diminished life that was theirs now, and that is a sort of twilight of flowers. Soon my aunt would be able to dip into the boiling infusion, of which she savored the taste of dead leaf or faded flower, a small madeleine, a piece of which she would hold out to me when it had sufficiently softened.

On one side of her bed was a large yellow chest of drawers of lemon wood and a table that was akin to both a dispensary and a high altar, on which, below a small statue of the Virgin and a bottle of Vichy-Célestins, could be found her missals and her medical prescriptions, everything needed for following from her bed both the services and her regimen, for not missing the hour either of her pepsin or of Vespers. On the other side, her bed lay by the window, she had the street there before her eyes and on it from morning to night, to divert her melancholy, like the Persian princes, would read the daily but immemorial chronicle of Combray, which she would afterward comment upon with Françoise.

I would not have been with my aunt five minutes before she would send me away for fear that I would tire her. She would hold out to my lips her sad, pale, dull forehead, on which, at this morning hour, she had not yet arranged her false hair, and where the bones showed through like the points of a crown of thorns or the beads of a rosary, and she would say to me: "Now, my poor child, off you go, get ready for Mass; and if you see Françoise downstairs, tell her not to stay too long amusing herself with all of you, she should come up soon to see if I need anything."

Françoise, who had been in her service for years and did not suspect at that time that one day she would enter exclusively into ours, did in fact neglect my aunt a little during the months when we were there. There had been a time, in my childhood, before we went to

Combray, when my aunt Léonie still spent the winters in Paris with her mother, when Françoise was such a stranger to me that on the first of January, before entering my great-aunt's, my mother would put a five-franc coin in my hand and say to me: "Take great care not to give it to the wrong person. Wait until you hear me say, 'Good morning, Françoise'; at the same time, I'll touch you lightly on the arm." Hardly had we arrived in my aunt's dim hall than we would see in the shadows, under the flutes of a dazzling bonnet as stiff and fragile as if it were made of spun sugar, the concentric ripples of an anticipatory smile of gratitude. It was Françoise, standing motionless in the frame of the little door of the corridor like the statue of a saint in its niche. When we were a little used to this chapel darkness, we could distinguish on her face the disinterested love of humanity, the fond respect for the upper classes excited in the best regions of her heart by the hope of a New Year's gift. Mama would pinch my arm violently and say in a loud voice: "Good morning, Françoise." At this signal, my fingers would open and I would release the coin, which found a bashful but outstretched hand to receive it. But ever since we had begun going to Combray I knew no one better than Françoise, we were her favorites, she had for us, at least during the first years, not only as much regard as for my aunt, but also a keener liking, because we added, to the prestige of being part of the family (she had, for the invisible bonds formed between the members of a family by the circulation of the same blood, as much respect as a Greek tragedian), the charm of not being her usual masters. And so with what joy would she welcome us, commiserate with us that we did not yet have finer weather, the day of our arrival, just before Easter, when there was often an icy wind, while Mama would ask her for news of her daughter and her nephews, whether her grandson was a pretty child, what they were planning to make of him, whether he was going to be like his grandmother.

And when there was no one else there, Mama, knowing that Françoise still mourned her parents, who had died years ago, would talk to her about them gently, ask her for a thousand details about what sort of life they had led.

She had guessed that Françoise did not like her son-in-law and that he spoiled the pleasure she took in being with her daughter, with whom she could not chat as freely when he was there. And so, when Françoise went to see them, a few leagues from Combray, Mama would say to her, smiling: "Isn't it so, Françoise, if Julien is obliged to be away and you have Marguerite all to yourself all day long, you'll be sorry, but you'll make the best of it?" And Françoise would say, laughing: "Madame knows everything; Madame is worse than those X rays" (she said X with an affected difficulty and a smile to poke fun at herself, an ignorant woman, for using that erudite term) "that they brought in for Mme. Octave and that see what you have in your heart," and disappeared, embarrassed that someone was paying attention to her, perhaps so that we would not see her cry; Mama was the first person who gave her that sweet sensation, the feeling that her life as a countrywoman, her joys, her sorrows could be of some interest, could be a reason for pleasure or sadness in someone other than herself. My aunt was resigned to managing with less help from her during our stay, knowing how much my mother appreciated the service of this maid who was so intelligent and active, who was as handsome at five o'clock in the morning in her kitchen, under a bonnet whose dazzling rigid flutes appeared to be made of porcelain, as she was when going to High Mass; who did everything well, working like a horse, whether she was in good health or not, but without a fuss, as though it were nothing, the only one of my aunt's maids who, when Mama asked for hot water or black coffee, brought them really boiling; she was one of those servants who, in a household, are at the same time those most immediately displeasing to a stranger, perhaps because they do not bother to win him over and are not attentive to him, knowing very well they have no need of him, that one would stop seeing him rather than dismiss them; and who are, on the other hand, those most valued by masters who have tested their real capacities, and do not care about the superficial charm, the servile chatter that makes a favorable impression on a visitor, but that often cloaks an ineducable incompetence.

When Françoise, having seen that my parents had everything they

needed, went back for the first time to give my aunt her pepsin and ask what she would like to have for lunch, it was quite rare that she was not already required to offer an opinion or provide explanations about some event of importance:

"Françoise, imagine, Mme. Goupil went past more than a quarter of an hour late going to fetch her sister; if she lingers along the way it wouldn't surprise me at all if she were to arrive after the Elevation."

"Well, there wouldn't be anything astonishing in that," answered Françoise.

"Françoise, if you had come five minutes earlier you would have seen Mme. Imbert go past carrying some asparagus twice as fat as Mère Callot's; now try to find out from her maid where she got them. You have been serving us asparagus in every sauce this year; you of all people might have found some like those for our travelers."

"It wouldn't be surprising if they came from M. le Curé's," said Françoise.

"Ah! Do you expect me to believe that, my poor Françoise?" answered my aunt, shrugging her shoulders. "From M. le Curé's! You know very well he grows only wretched, spindly little asparagus. I tell you these were as fat as a woman's arm. Not your arm, of course, but one like mine, poor thing, which has got so much thinner again this year."

"Françoise, didn't you hear those chimes that nearly split my head open?"

"No, Madame Octave."

"Ah, my poor girl, you must have a solid head, you can thank the Good Lord for that. It was Maguelone coming to get Dr. Piperaud. He came back out with her right away and they turned down the rue de l'Oiseau. Some child must be ill."

"Oh my, dear God," sighed Françoise, who could not hear of a misfortune occurring to a stranger, even in a distant part of the world, without beginning to lament.

"Françoise, now who were they ringing the passing bell for? Oh, dear God, it must have been for Mme. Rousseau. I'm blessed if I hadn't forgotten that she passed away the other night. Oh, it's time

for the Good Lord to call me home, I don't know what I've done with my head since my poor Octave died. But I'm wasting your time, my girl."

"Not at all, Madame Octave, my time is not so precious; He who made it did not sell it to us. I'm only just going to see that my fire isn't out."

In this way Françoise and my aunt together appraised, during that morning session, the first events of the day. But sometimes those events assumed a character so mysterious and so grave that my aunt felt she could not wait for the moment when Françoise would come up, and four astounding peals of the bell would echo through the house.

"But Madame Octave, it isn't time for your pepsin yet," Françoise would say. "Were you feeling faint?"

"Not at all, Françoise," my aunt would say; "what I mean is yes, you know very well there is seldom a time, now, when I don't feel faint; one day I'll pass away like Mme. Rousseau without even time to collect myself; but that's not why I rang. Would you believe that I just saw Mme. Goupil as clearly as I see you now with a little girl whom I don't know at all? Now go fetch two sous' worth of salt at Camus's. It's not often that Théodore can't tell you who someone is."

"But that'll be M. Pupin's daughter," Françoise would say, preferring to be satisfied with an immediate explanation since she had already been to Camus's twice that morning.

"M. Pupin's daughter! Oh, do you expect me to believe that, my poor Françoise? And you think I wouldn't have recognized her?"

"But I don't mean the big one, Madame Octave, I mean the little one that's away at school in Jouy. I think I saw her once already this morning."

"Ah! That must be it," said my aunt. "She must have come for the holidays. That's it! There's no need to ask, she will have come for the holidays. But then anytime now we might very likely see Mme. Sazerat come and ring at her sister's for lunch. That's what it is! I saw Galopin's boy going past with a tart! You'll see, the tart was on its way to Mme. Goupil's."

"Once Mme. Goupil has a visitor, Madame Octave, it won't be long before you'll see all her folk coming back for lunch, because it's not so early as it was," said Françoise, who, in a hurry to go back down and see to lunch, was not sorry to leave my aunt the prospect of this distraction.

"Oh, not before noon!" answered my aunt in a tone of resignation, casting an uneasy glance at the clock, yet furtively so as not to let it be seen that she, who had renounced everything, nevertheless took such a lively pleasure in learning whom Mme. Goupil was having to lunch, a pleasure that would unfortunately have to wait a little more than an hour longer. "And on top of that, it will happen during my lunch!" she added half aloud to herself. Her lunch was enough of a distraction for her so that she did not wish for another one at the same time. "Now you won't forget to give me my eggs with cream in a flat plate?" These were the only plates with pictures on them, and my aunt amused herself at each meal by reading the inscription on the one she was served that day. She would put on her glasses and spell out: Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves, Aladdin or the Magic Lamp, and smile, saying: "Very good, very good."

"I would certainly have gone to Camus's . . ." Françoise would say, seeing that now my aunt would not send her there.

"No, no, it's not worth the trouble anymore, it's certainly Mlle. Pupin. My poor Françoise, I'm sorry to have made you come up for nothing."

But my aunt knew perfectly well it was not for nothing that she had rung for Françoise, since, in Combray, a person "whom one did not know at all" was a creature as scarcely believable as a mythological god, and in fact one could not remember when, anytime one of these stupefying apparitions had occurred, in the rue du Saint-Esprit or on the square, well-conducted research had not ended by reducing the fabulous character to the proportions of a "person one knew," either personally or abstractly, in his or her civil status, as having such and such a degree of kinship with some people of Combray. It was Mme. Sauton's son returning from military service, Abbé Perdreau's niece

leaving the convent, the curé's brother, a tax collector at Châteaudun, who had just retired or had come to spend the holidays. One had had, upon seeing them, the shock of believing that there were in Combray people whom one did not know at all, simply because one had not recognized them right away. And yet, long in advance, Mme. Sauton and the curé had let everyone know they were awaiting their "travelers." When in the evening I went upstairs, after returning home, to describe our walk to my aunt, if I was so imprudent as to tell her that we had met, near Pont-Vieux, a man my grandfather did not know, "A man Grandfather did not know at all!" she would cry. "Ah! I don't believe it!" Nonetheless somewhat disturbed by this news, she would want to clear the matter up, my grandfather would be summoned. "Now who did you meet near Pont-Vieux, Uncle? A man you didn't know?" "But I did know him," my grandfather would answer, "it was Prosper, the brother of Mme. Bouilleboeuf's gardener." "Ah! All right," my aunt would say, calmed and a little flushed; shrugging her shoulders with an ironic smile, she would add: "Now, he told me you had met a man you didn't know!" And they would advise me to be more circumspect the next time and not to go on agitating my aunt with thoughtless remarks. One knew everybody so well, in Combray, both animals and people, that if my aunt had chanced to see a dog pass by "whom she did not know at all," she would not stop thinking about it and devoting to this incomprehensible fact all her talents for induction and her hours of leisure.

"That must be Mme. Sazerat's dog," Françoise would say, without great conviction but in order to pacify my aunt, and so that she would not "split her head."

"As if I didn't know Mme. Sazerat's dog!" my aunt would answer, her critical mind not accepting a fact so easily.

"Ah! Then it will be the new dog M. Galopin brought back from Lisieux."

"Ah! That must be it."

"It seems it's quite an affable creature," added Françoise, who had got the information from Théodore, "as clever as a person, always in a

good humor, always friendly, always as agreeable as you might wish. It's uncommon for an animal of that age to be so well behaved already. Madame Octave, I will have to leave you, I haven't time to enjoy myself, here it's almost ten o'clock, and my stove not lit yet, even, and I still have my asparagus to scrape."

"What, Françoise, more asparagus! Why, you've got a regular mania for asparagus this year. You'll make our Parisians grow tired of it!"

"Why, no, Madame Octave, they like it very much. They'll come home from church with an appetite and you'll see, they won't eat it with the backs of their spoons."

"Church; why, they must be there already; you'd do well not to waste any time. Go and look after your lunch."

While my aunt was conferring thus with Françoise, I was going to Mass with my parents. How I loved it, how clearly I can see it again; our church! The old porch by which we entered, black, pocked like a skimming ladle, was uneven and deeply hollowed at the edges (like the font to which it led us), as if the gentle brushing of the country-women's cloaks as they entered the church and of their timid fingers taking holy water could, repeated over centuries, acquire a destructive force, bend the stone and carve it with furrows like those traced by the wheel of a cart in a boundary stone which it knocks against every day. Its tombstones, under which the noble dust of the abbots of Combray, who were buried there, formed for the choir a sort of spiritual pavement, were themselves no longer inert and hard matter, for time had softened them and made them flow like honey beyond the bounds of their own square shapes, which, in one place, they had overrun in a flaxen billow, carrying off on their drift a flowery Gothic capital letter, drowning the white violets of the marble; and into which, elsewhere, they had reabsorbed themselves, further contracting the elliptical Latin inscription, introducing a further caprice in the arrangement of those abridged characters, bringing close together two letters of a word of which the others had been disproportionately distended. Its windows never sparkled as much as on the days when the sun hardly appeared, so that, if it was gray outside, we were sure it

would be beautiful inside the church; one was filled to its very top by a single figure like a king in a game of cards, who lived up there, under an architectural canopy, between heaven and earth (and in whose slanting blue light, on weekdays sometimes, at noon, when there is no service—at one of those rare times when the church, airy, vacant, more human, luxurious, with some sun on its rich furniture, looked almost habitable, like the hall of a medieval-style mansion, of sculpted stone and stained glass—one would see Mme. Sazerat kneel for a moment, setting down on the next prayer stool a packet of petits fours tied with string that she had just picked up from the pastry shop across the street and was going to take back home for lunch); in another, a mountain of pink snow, at whose foot a battle was being fought, seemed to have frosted onto the glass itself, blistering it with its cloudy sleet like a windowpane on which a few snowflakes remained, but snowflakes lit by some aurora (the same, no doubt, that flushed the reredos of the altar with tints so fresh they seemed set there for a moment by a gleam from outside about to vanish, rather than by colors attached forever to the stone); and all were so old that here and there one saw their silvery age sparkle with the dust of the centuries and show, shimmering and worn down to the thread, the weft of their soft tapestry of glass. One of them, a tall compartment, was divided into a hundred or so small rectangular panes in which blue predominated, like a great deck of cards resembling those meant to entertain King Charles VI;² but either because a beam of sunlight was shining, or because my gaze, as it moved, carried across the glass, snuffed and lit again by turns, a precious moving conflagration, the next moment it had assumed the changing luster of a peacock's train, then trembled and undulated in a flaming chimerical rain that dripped from the top of the dark rocky vault, along the damp walls, as if this were the nave of some grotto iridescent with sinuous stalactites into which I was following my parents, who were carrying their prayer books; a moment later the little lozenge-shaped panes had assumed the deep transparency, the infrangible hardness of sapphires which had been juxtaposed on some immense breastplate, but behind which one felt, more beloved than all these riches, a momentary smile of

sunlight; it was as recognizable in the soft blue billow with which it bathed the precious stones as on the pavement of the square or the straw of the marketplace; and even on our first Sundays when we had arrived before Easter, it consoled me for the earth being still bare and black, by bringing into bloom, as in a historical springtime dating from the age of Saint Louis's successors, this dazzling gilded carpet of glass forget-me-nots.

Two high-warp tapestries represented the coronation of Esther (tradition had it that Ahasuerus had been given the features of a king of France and Esther those of a lady of Guermantes with whom he was in love), to which their colors, by melting, had added expression, relief, light: a little pink floated over Esther's lips outside the tracing of their outline; the yellow of her dress spread so unctuously, so thickly, that it acquired a kind of solidity and stood out boldly from the receding atmosphere; and the green of the trees, remaining vivid in the lower parts of the panel of silk and wool, but "gone" at the top, brought out in a paler tone, above the dark trunks, the lofty yellowing branches, gilded and half obliterated by the abrupt, slanting illumination of an invisible sun. All this, and still more the precious objects that had come into the church from figures who were for me almost legendary (the gold cross worked, they said, by Saint Eloi³ and given by Dagobert, the tomb of the sons of Louis the Germanic,⁴ of porphyry and enameled copper), because of which I moved through the church, when we went to our seats, as though through a valley visited by the fairies, in which a country person is amazed to see in a rock, a tree, a pool, the palpable trace of their supernatural passage, all this made it, for me, something entirely different from the rest of the town: an edifice occupying a space with, so to speak, four dimensions—the fourth being Time—extending over the centuries its nave which, from bay to bay, from chapel to chapel, seemed to vanquish and penetrate not only a few yards but epoch after epoch from which it emerged victorious; hiding the rough, savage eleventh century in the thickness of the walls, from which it appeared with its heavy arches plugged and blinded by crude blocks of ashlar only in the deep gash incised near the porch by the tower staircase, and even there con-

cealed by the graceful Gothic arcades that crowded coquettishly in front of it like older sisters who, to hide him from strangers, place themselves smiling in front of a younger brother who is boorish, sulky, and badly dressed; lifting into the heavens above the square its tower which had contemplated Saint Louis and seemed to see him still; and plunging down with its crypt into a Merovingian night, in which, groping their way as they guided us under the dark vault as powerfully ribbed as the wing of an immense stone bat, Théodore and his sister would light for us with a candle the tomb of Sigebert's⁵ little daughter, on which a deep scallop—like the mark of a fossil—had been dug, it was said, "by a crystal lamp which, on the night the Frankish princess was murdered, had separated of its own accord from the golden chains by which it hung on the site of the present apse and without the crystal breaking, without the flame going out, had sunk deep into the stone which gave way softly under it."

The apse of the Combray church; what can one say about it? It was so crude, so lacking in artistic beauty and even religious spirit. From outside, because the crossroads which it commanded was on a lower level, its crude wall rose up from a subbasement of quite unpolished ashlar, bristling with flints, and having nothing particularly ecclesiastical about it, the windows seemed to have been pierced at an excessive height, and the whole looked more like the wall of a prison than the wall of a church. And certainly, later, when I recalled all the glorious apses I had seen, it would never have occurred to me to compare them with the apse of Combray. But, one day, at the bend of a little street in a country town, I noticed, opposite the crossing of three lanes, a rough and unusually high wall with windows pierced far above and the same asymmetrical appearance as the apse of Combray. Then I did not ask myself as at Chartres or Rheims how powerfully it expressed religious feeling, but involuntarily exclaimed: "The church!"

The church! Familiar; flanked, in the rue Saint-Hilaire, where its north door was situated, by its two neighbors, M. Rapin's pharmacy and Mme. Loiseau's house, which it touched without any separation; a simple citizen of Combray that could have had its number in the

street if the streets of Combray had had numbers, and where it seems that the postman should have had to stop in the morning when he was making his rounds, before going into Mme. Loiseau's and upon coming out of M. Rapin's, there existed, however, between it and everything that was not it a demarcation that my mind was never able to cross. Even though Mme. Loiseau might have at her window fuchsias which developed the bad habit of forever allowing their branches to run all over with heads lowered, and whose flowers had no business more pressing, when they were large enough, than to go and cool their flushed, violet cheeks against the dark front of the church, for me the fuchsias did not for this reason become holy; between the flowers and the blackened stone against which they leaned, if my eyes perceived no interval, my mind reserved an abyss.

One could recognize the steeple of Saint-Hilaire from quite far off inscribing its unforgettable form on the horizon where Combray had not yet appeared; when from the train which, in Easter week, was bringing us from Paris, my father caught sight of it slipping by turns over all the furrows of the sky and sending its little iron weathercock running in all directions, he would say to us: "Come, gather up the rugs, we're here." And on one of the longest walks we took from Combray, there was a spot where the narrow road emerged suddenly on an immense plateau closed at the horizon by jagged forests above which rose only the delicate tip of the steeple of Saint-Hilaire, but so thin, so pink, that it seemed merely scratched on the sky by a fingernail which wanted to give this landscape, this exclusively natural picture, that little mark of art, that indication of human presence. When one drew near and could see the remains of the half-destroyed square tower which, not as high, still stood next to it, one was struck most of all by the dark, reddish shade of the stones; and on a misty morning in autumn one might have thought it, rising above the stormy violet of the vineyards, a ruin of purple nearly the color of a wild vine.

Often in the square, when we were coming home, my grandmother would make me stop to look at it. From the windows of its tower, placed two by two one above the other, with the exact and original proportion in their spacing that gives beauty and dignity not just

to human faces, it loosed, dropped at regular intervals, volleys of crows which, for a moment, circled about shrieking, as if the old stones that allowed them to hop and flutter about without appearing to see them had suddenly become uninhabitable and emitted some principle of infinite agitation, struck them and driven them out. Then, after stripping in every direction the violet velvet of the evening air, they would return suddenly calm to be reabsorbed into the tower, which was no longer baneful but once again benign, a few of them sitting here and there, apparently motionless, but perhaps snapping up some insect, on the tip of a turret, like a seagull as still as a fisherman on the crest of a wave. Without really knowing why, my grandmother found in the steeple of Saint-Hilaire that absence of vulgarity, of pretension, of meanness, which made her love and believe rich in beneficent influence not only nature, when the hand of man had not, as had my great-aunt's gardener, shrunk and reduced it, but also works of genius. And certainly, every part of the church that one could see distinguished it from all other buildings by a sort of thoughtfulness that was infused into it, but it was in the steeple that it seemed to become aware of itself, affirm an individual and responsible existence. It was the steeple that spoke for it. I believe above all that, confusedly, my grandmother found in the steeple of Combray what for her had the highest value in the world, an air of naturalness and an air of distinction. Knowing nothing about architecture, she would say: "My children, make fun of me if you like, perhaps it isn't beautiful according to the rules, but I like its strange old face. I'm sure that if it could play the piano it would not play *dryly*." And looking at it, following with her eyes the gentle tension, the fervent inclination of its slopes of stone, which approached each other as they rose like hands meeting in prayer, she would join so fully in the effusion of the spire that her gaze seemed to soar with it; and at the same time she would smile in a friendly way at the worn old stones, of which the setting sun now illuminated only the topmost part and which, the moment they entered that sunny region, softened by the light, appeared suddenly to have risen much higher, to be quite far away, like a song taken up again in "a head voice" an octave above.

It was the steeple of Saint-Hilaire that gave all the occupations, all the hours, all the viewpoints of the town their shape, their crown, their consecration. From my bedroom, I could see only its base, which had been covered with slates; but when, on Sunday, I saw them, on a warm summer morning, blazing like a black sun, I would say to myself: "Good Heavens! Nine o'clock! I'd better get ready for Mass if I want to have time to go and give Aunt Léonie a kiss first," and I knew exactly the color of the sun on the square, the heat and dust of the market, the shadow made by the awning of the store which Mama would perhaps enter before Mass in an odor of unbleached linen, to buy some handkerchief which would be displayed to her under the direction of the shopkeeper, his chest outthrust, who, as he prepared to close, had just gone into the back of the shop to put on his Sunday jacket and soap his hands, which it was his habit, every five minutes, even in the most melancholy of circumstances, to rub together with an air of enterprise, celebration, and success.

When after Mass we went in to ask Théodore to bring us a brioche larger than usual because our cousins had taken advantage of the fine weather to come from Thiberzy to have lunch with us, we would have the steeple there in front of us, itself golden and baked like a greater blessed brioche, with flakes and gummy drippings of sun, pricking its sharp point into the blue sky. And in the evening, when I was coming home from a walk and thinking about the moment when I would soon have to say goodnight to my mother and not see her anymore, it was on the contrary so soft, at the close of day, that it looked as if it had been set down and crushed like a cushion of brown velvet against the pale sky which had yielded under its pressure, hollowing slightly to give it room and flowing back over its edges; and the cries of the birds that wheeled around it seemed to increase its silence, lift its spire to a greater height, and endow it with something ineffable.

Even on the errands we had to do behind the church, where we could not see it, everything seemed to be arranged in relation to the steeple, which would rise up here or there between the houses, perhaps even more affecting when it appeared that way, without the church. And certainly, there are many others that are more beautiful

when seen this way, and I have in my memory vignettes of steeples rising above roofs which have a different artistic character from those composed by the sad streets of Combray. I will never forget, in a curious town in Normandy near Balbec, two charming eighteenth-century houses that are in many respects dear to me and venerable and between which, when you look at it from the lovely garden that descends from the front steps to the river, the Gothic spire of a church hidden behind them soars up, appearing to complete, to surmount their facades, but in a material so different, so precious, so annulated, so pink, so polished, that you see clearly it no more belongs to them than does the crimson crenellated spire of some seashell, tapering to a turret and glazed with enamel, to the two handsome, smooth pebbles between which it is caught on the beach. Even in Paris, in one of the ugliest parts of the city, I know a window from which you can see, beyond a foreground, middle ground, and even third ground composed of the piled-up roofs of several streets, a violet bell, sometimes ruddy, sometimes also, in the noblest "proofs" of it printed by the atmosphere, a decanted cindery black, which is in fact the dome of Saint-Augustin and which gives this view of Paris the character of certain views of Rome by Piranesi. But since into none of these little engravings, with whatever taste my memory may have executed them, was it able to put what I had lost a long time ago, the feeling that makes us not consider a thing a spectacle, but believe in it as in a creature without equivalent, none of them holds in subjection an entire profound part of my life, as does the memory of those views of the Combray steeple from the streets behind the church. Whether we saw it at five o'clock, when we went to get the letters at the post office, a few houses away from us to the left, abruptly lifting with an isolated peak the ridgeline of the roofs; or whether, on the other hand, if we wanted to go in to ask for news of Mme. Sazerat, our eyes followed that line, low again after the descent of its other slope, knowing we would have to turn at the second street after the steeple; or whether, again, going on farther, if we went to the station, we saw it obliquely, showing in profile new edges and surfaces like a solid caught at an unfamiliar moment of its revolution; or whether, from the banks of the Vivonne,

the apse, muscularly gathered and raised to a greater height by the perspective, seemed to spring with the effort the steeple was making to hurl its spire into the heart of the sky: it was always to the steeple that we had to return, always the steeple that dominated everything, summing up the houses with an unexpected pinnacle, raised before me like the finger of God, whose body might be hidden in the crowd of humans, though I would not confuse it with them because of that. And even today, if in a large provincial town or a part of Paris I do not know well, a passing stranger who has "put me on the right path" shows me in the distance, as a reference point, some hospital belfry, some convent steeple lifting the peak of its ecclesiastical cap at the corner of a street I am supposed to take, if only my memory can obscurely find in it some small feature resembling the dear departed form, the stranger, if he turns around to make sure I am not going astray, may, to his astonishment, see me, forgetting the walk I had begun or the necessary errand, remain there in front of the steeple for hours, motionless, trying to remember, feeling deep in myself lands recovered from oblivion draining and rebuilding themselves; and then no doubt, and more anxiously than a short time before when I asked him to direct me, I am still seeking my path, I am turning a corner . . . but . . . I am doing so in my heart . . .

As we returned home from Mass, we would often meet M. Legrandin, who was detained in Paris by his profession of engineer and, except during the summer vacation, could come to his property in Combray only from Saturday evening until Monday morning. He was one of those men who, quite apart from a career in science in which they have in fact been brilliantly successful, possess an entirely different culture, one that is literary, artistic, which their professional specialization does not make use of and which enriches their conversation. Better read than many men of letters (we did not know at that time that M. Legrandin had a certain reputation as a writer and we were very surprised to see that a famous musician had composed a melody to some verses of his), gifted with more "facility" than many painters, they imagine that the life they are leading is not the one that

really suits them and they bring to their actual occupations either an indifference mingled with whimsy, or an application that is sustained and haughty, scornful, bitter, and conscientious. Tall, with a handsome figure, a fine, thoughtful face with a long, blond mustache and disenchanted blue eyes, exquisitely courteous, a conversationalist such as we had never heard before, he was in the eyes of my family, who always cited him as an example, the epitome of the superior man, approaching life in the noblest and most delicate way. My grandmother reproached him only for speaking a little too well, a little too much like a book, for not having the same naturalness in his language as in his loosely knotted lavalier bow ties, in his short, straight, almost schoolboyish coat. She was also surprised by the fiery tirades he often launched against the aristocracy, against fashionable life, against snobbery, "certainly the sin which Saint Paul has in mind when he speaks of the sin for which there is no forgiveness."

Worldly ambition was a sentiment that my grandmother was so incapable of feeling or even, almost, of understanding, that it seemed to her quite pointless to bring so much ardor to stigmatizing it. What was more, she did not think it in very good taste that M. Legrandin, whose sister near Balbec was married to a titled gentleman of Lower Normandy, should indulge himself in such violent attacks against the nobility, going so far as to reproach the Revolution for not having had them all guillotined.

"Greetings, my friends!" he would say, coming up to us. "How fortunate you are to live here for such extended periods of time; tomorrow I must return to Paris, to my little nook.

"Oh!" he would add, with his own particular smile, gently ironical, disappointed and slightly distracted, "of course my house contains every useless thing in the world. It lacks only the one essential, a large piece of sky like this one. Always try to keep a piece of sky over your life, little boy," he would add, turning to me. "You have a lovely soul, of a rare quality, an artist's nature, don't ever let it go without what it needs."

When we returned home and my aunt sent to ask us if Mme. Goupil

had been late coming to Mass, we could not give her any information. Instead, we increased her disturbance by telling her there was a painter at work in the church copying the window of Gilbert the Bad. Françoise, sent immediately to the grocery, came back empty-handed owing to the absence of Théodore, whose two professions, that of chorister with a part in the maintenance of the church and of grocer's boy, gave him connections in all worlds and therefore knowledge that was universal.

"Ah!" sighed my aunt, "I wish it were time for Eulalie. She's really the only one who will be able to tell me."

Eulalie was an active old maid, lame and hard-of-hearing, who had "retired" after the death of Mme. de la Bretonnerie, with whom she had been in service since her childhood, and had then taken a room next to the church, descending from it constantly either for the services or, when there was no service, to say a little prayer or give Théodore a hand; the rest of the time she visited invalids like my aunt Léonie, to whom she would describe what had happened at Mass or at Vespers. She was not above adding some revenue to the small pension paid her by the family of her former employers by going from time to time to look after the curé's linen or that of some other prominent personality in Combray's clerical world. Above a cloak of black cloth she wore a small white hood almost like a nun's, and a skin disease gave parts of her cheeks and her hooked nose the bright pink tones of an impatiens. Her visits were the great diversion of my aunt Léonie, who hardly received anyone else now, apart from M. le Curé. My aunt had gradually eliminated all the other visitors because all of them made the mistake, in her eyes, of belonging to one of two categories of people whom she detested. One group, the worst, whom she had got rid of first, were the ones who advised her not to "coddle" herself and subscribed, if only negatively and showing it only by certain disapproving silences or by certain dubious smiles, to the subversive doctrine that a little walk in the sun and a good rare beefsteak (even though two wretched sips of Vichy water would lie on her stomach for fourteen hours!) would do her more good than her bed and

her medicines. The other category was made up of the people who seemed to believe she was more seriously ill than she thought, that she was as seriously ill as she said she was. And so, those she had allowed to come up after some hesitation and upon Françoise's kindly meant entreaties and who, in the course of their visit, had shown how very unworthy they were of the favor being done them by timidly risking a "Don't you think that if you were to move about a little when the weather's fine," or who, on the contrary, when she said to them: "I'm very low, very low, this is the end, my poor friends," answered her: "Ah! when our health fails us! Still, you may last awhile longer yet as you are"—these, the former as well as the latter, were certain never to be received again. And if Françoise was amused by my aunt's horrified look when from her bed she saw one of these people in the rue du Saint-Esprit apparently coming toward her house or when she heard the doorbell ring, she would laugh more heartily still, and as though at a good trick, at my aunt's ever-victorious ruses for managing to have them turned away, and at their discomfited expressions as they went off without having seen her, and at heart admired her mistress, whom she felt to be superior to all these people since she did not want to receive them. In short, my aunt required that her visitors at the same time commend her on her regimen, commiserate with her for her sufferings, and encourage her as to her future.

This was where Eulalie excelled. My aunt might say to her twenty times in a minute: "This is the end, my poor Eulalie," twenty times Eulalie would answer: "Knowing your illness as you know it, Madame Octave, you will live to be a hundred, as Mme. Sazerin was saying to me just yesterday." (One of Eulalie's firmest beliefs, which the impressive number of denials contributed by experience had not been enough to shake, was that Mme. Sazerat's name was Mme. Sazerin.)

"I am not asking to live to a hundred," answered my aunt, who preferred not to see her days assigned a precise term.

And since along with this Eulalie knew better than anyone else how to distract my aunt without tiring her, her visits, which took place regularly every Sunday, barring an unforeseen obstacle, were for my

aunt a pleasure, the prospect of which kept her on those days in a state that was at first pleasant, but quite soon painful like an excessive hunger, if Eulalie was even a little late. Overly prolonged, this ecstasy of waiting for Eulalie became a torment, my aunt looked constantly at the time, yawned, felt faint. The sound of Eulalie's chime, if it came at the very end of the day, when she was no longer expecting it, would almost make her ill. The fact was that on Sunday, she thought only of this visit, and as soon as lunch was finished, Françoise would be in a hurry for us to leave the dining room so that she could go up and "occupy" my aunt. But (especially once the fine weather settled in at Combray) a good long time would go by after the haughty hour of noon, descending from the Saint-Hilaire steeple, which it had emblazoned with the twelve momentary rosettes of its sonorous crown, had echoed around our table close to the consecrated bread which had also come in, familiarly, after church, while we remained sitting in front of the *Thousand and One Nights* plates, oppressed by the heat and especially by the meal. For, upon a permanent foundation of eggs, cutlets, potatoes, jams, biscuits which she no longer even announced to us, Françoise would add—depending on the labors in the fields and orchards, the fruit of the tide, the luck of the marketplace, the kindness of neighbors, and her own genius, and with the result that our menu, like the quatrefoils carved on the portals of cathedrals in the thirteenth century, reflected somewhat the rhythm of the seasons and the incidents of daily life—a brill because the monger had guaranteed her that it was fresh, a turkey hen because she had seen a large one at the Roussainville-le-Pin market, cardoons with marrow because she had not made them for us that way before, a roast leg of mutton because fresh air whets the appetite and it would have plenty of time to "descend" in the next seven hours, spinach for a change, apricots because they were still uncommon, gooseberries because in two weeks there would not be any more, raspberries that M. Swann had brought especially, cherries, the first that had come from the cherry tree in the garden after two years in which it had not given any, cream cheese, which I liked very much at one time, an almond cake because she had

ordered it the day before, a brioche because it was our turn to present it. When all of that was finished, there came a work of art composed expressly for us, but more particularly dedicated to my father who was so fond of it, a chocolate custard, the product of Françoise's personal inspiration and attention, ephemeral and light as an occasional piece into which she had put all her talent. If anyone had refused to taste it, saying: "I'm finished, I'm not hungry anymore," that person would immediately have been relegated to the rank of those barbarians who, even in a gift an artist makes them of one of his works, scrutinize its weight and its material when the only things of value in it are its intention and its signature. To leave even a single drop of it on the plate would have been to display the same impoliteness as to stand up before the end of a piece under the very nose of the composer.

At last my mother would say to me: "Now, don't stay here all day, go up to your room if you're too hot outdoors, but get a little fresh air first so that you don't start reading right after leaving the table." I would go and sit down beside the pump and its trough, often ornamented, like a Gothic font, with a salamander which sculpted on the rough stone the mobile relief of its allegorical tapering body, on the backless bench shaded by a lilac, in the little corner of the garden that opened through a service gate onto the rue du Saint-Esprit and from whose untended earth the scullery rose by two steps, projecting from the house like an independent structure. One could see its red paving stones gleaming like porphyry. It looked not so much like Françoise's lair as a little temple of Venus. It overflowed with the offerings of the dairyman, the fruit man, the vegetable monger, who had come sometimes from quite remote hamlets to dedicate to it the first fruits of their fields. And its roof was forever crowned with the cooing of a dove.

In earlier years I did not linger in the sacred grove surrounding it, since, before going upstairs to read, I would enter the little sitting room that my uncle Adolphe, a brother of my grandfather and a veteran who had retired with the rank of major, occupied on the ground

floor, and which, even when its open windows let in the heat, if not the rays of the sun, which seldom reached that far, gave off inexhaustibly that dark cool smell of both forest and ancien régime, that makes your nostrils linger in a daydream when you venture into certain abandoned hunting lodges. But for a number of years now I had not gone into my uncle Adolphe's room, since he no longer came to Combray because of a quarrel that had occurred between him and my family, through my fault, in the following circumstances.

Once or twice a month, in Paris, I used to be sent to pay him a visit as he was finishing lunch wearing a plain uniform jacket and waited on by his servant in a work jacket of striped drill, violet and white. He would complain that I had not come for a long time, grumble that we were abandoning him; he would offer me a marzipan cake or a tangerine, we would pass through a drawing room in which no one ever stopped, where no one ever made a fire, whose walls were ornamented with gilded moldings, its ceilings painted with a blue that was meant to imitate the sky and its furniture upholstered in satin as at my grandparents', but yellow; then we would go on into what he called his "study," whose walls were hung with some of those engravings depicting, against a dark background, a fleshy pink goddess driving a chariot, standing on a globe, or wearing a star on her forehead, which were admired during the Second Empire⁶ because they were felt to have a Pompeiian look about them, were then hated, and are beginning to be admired again for one reason and one reason only, despite the others that are given, and that is that they have such a Second Empire look about them. And I would stay with my uncle until his valet came to him from the coachman to ask what time the latter should harness up. My uncle would then sink into a deep meditation while his admiring valet, afraid of disturbing him by the slightest movement, waited curiously for the result, which was always identical. At last, after the greatest hesitation, my uncle would unfailingly utter these words: "At quarter past two," which the valet would repeat with surprise, but without disputing them: "At quarter past two? Very good . . . I'll go and tell him . . ."

In those days I loved the theater, with a platonic passion since my

parents had not yet allowed me to enter a theater, and I pictured to myself so inaccurately the pleasures one might experience there that I almost believed that each spectator looked as though into a stereoscope at a scene that was for him alone, though similar to the thousand others being looked at, each one for himself, by the rest of the audience.

Every morning I would run to the Morris column⁷ to see what shows were being announced. Nothing could have been more disinterested or happier than the daydreams inspired in my imagination by each play that was announced, daydreams conditioned by the images inseparable from the words that made up its title and also by the color of the posters, still damp and blistered with paste, against which the title appeared. Except for those strange works like *Le Testament de César Girodot* or *Oedipe-Roi*, which were inscribed, not on the green poster of the Opéra-Comique, but on the wine-red poster of the Comédie-Française, nothing seemed to me more different from the sparkling white plume of *Les Diamants de la Couronne* than the smooth, mysterious satin of *Le Domino Noir*,⁸ and, since my parents had told me that when I went to the theater for the first time I would have to choose between these two plays, as I tried to study exhaustively and in turn the title of one and then the title of the other, since this was all I knew of them, so as to attempt to discern the pleasure each one promised me and compare it to the pleasure that lay concealed within the other, I managed to picture to myself so forcefully, on the one hand a play that was dazzling and proud, on the other a play that was soft and velvety, that I was as incapable of deciding which I would prefer as if, for dessert, I had been given the choice between rice à l'Impératrice and chocolate custard.

All my conversations with my friends concerned these actors whose art, though unknown to me, was the first form, of all those it assumes, in which Art allowed me a presentiment of what it was. Between the manner in which one actor and another delivered, nuanced a declamatory speech, the tiniest differences seemed to me to have an incalculable importance. And I would rank them in order of talent, according to what I had been told about them, in lists that I recited to

myself all day long, and that in the end hardened in my brain and obstructed it with their immovability.

Later, when I was in school, each time I wrote to a new friend during class as soon as the teacher's head was turned, my first question was always whether he had been to the theater yet and whether he thought the greatest actor really was Got, the second best Delaunay, etc. And if, in his opinion, Febvre came only after Thiron, or Delaunay only after Coquelin, the sudden mobility that Coquelin, losing his stony rigidity, would develop in my mind in order to pass to second place, and the miraculous agility, the fecund animation with which Delaunay would be endowed in order to withdraw to fourth, would restore the sensation of flowering and life to my newly supple and fertilized brain.

But if the actors preoccupied me so, if the sight of Maubaut coming out of the Théâtre-Français one afternoon had filled me with the ecstasy and suffering of love, how much more did the name of a star, blazing on the door of a theater, how much more did the sight, at the window of a brougham passing in the street, its horses blossoming with roses in their headbands, of a woman I thought might be an actress, leave me in a state of prolonged disturbance, as I tried impotently and painfully to imagine her life! I would rank the most illustrious in order of talent, Sarah Bernhardt, La Berma, Bartet, Madeleine Brohan, Jeanne Samary, but all of them interested me. Now my uncle knew many of them and also some courtesans whom I did not distinguish clearly from the actresses. He would entertain them at home. And if we went to see him only on certain days, this was because on the other days women came whom his family could not have met, or so at least they thought, since my uncle himself, on the contrary, was only too ready to pay pretty widows who had perhaps never been married, and countesses with high-sounding names which were doubtless only noms de guerre, the courtesy of introducing them to my grandmother or even of presenting them with some of the family jewels, tendencies which had already embroiled him more than once with my grandfather. Often, when an actress's name came into the conversation, I would hear my father say to my mother,

smiling: "A friend of your uncle's"; and I would think that the novice pointlessly endured for perhaps years on end by eminent men at the door of some woman who would not answer their letters and would ask her doorman to turn them away could have been spared a boy like me by my uncle, who could introduce him in his own home to the actress who, unapproachable by so many others, was for him an intimate friend.

And so—using the excuse that a lesson which had been moved now came at such an awkward hour that it had prevented me several times and would continue to prevent me from seeing my uncle—one day, different from the day set apart for the visits we made to him, taking advantage of the fact that my parents had had lunch early, I went out and, instead of going to look at the column of posters, for which I was allowed to go out alone, I ran to him. I noticed in front of his door a carriage with two horses, each of which had a red carnation at its blinkers, as did the coachman in his buttonhole. From the staircase I heard a laugh and a woman's voice, and, as soon as I rang, a silence, then the sound of doors being shut. The valet came to open the door, and when he saw me seemed embarrassed, told me my uncle was very busy, probably would not be able to see me, and when he went to let him know anyway, the same voice I had heard before said: "Oh, yes! do let him come in; just for a minute, I would enjoy it so much. In the photograph you have on your desk, he looks so much like his mother, your niece; that's her photograph next to his, isn't it? I would so like to see the boy, just for a moment."

I heard my uncle grumble, become cross, finally the valet showed me in.

On the table, there was the same plate of marzipan as always; my uncle had on his usual jacket, but across from him, in a pink-silk dress with a long string of pearls around her neck, sat a young woman who was eating the last of a tangerine. My uncertainty as to whether I should call her Madame or Mademoiselle made me blush and, not daring to turn my eyes too much in her direction for fear of having to talk to her, I went to kiss my uncle. She looked at me, smiling, my uncle said to her, "My nephew," without telling her my name, or

telling me hers, probably because, ever since the difficulties he had had with my grandfather, he had been trying as far as possible to avoid any association of his family with this sort of acquaintance.

"How much like his mother he is," she said.

"But you've never seen my niece except in a photograph," said my uncle brusquely.

"I beg your pardon, my dear friend, I passed her on the stairs last year when you were so ill. It's true that I saw her for only a split second and your stairs are quite dark, but that was enough for me to admire her. This young man has her beautiful eyes and also *that*," she said, drawing a line with her finger along the lower part of her forehead. "Does Madame, your niece, have the same name as you, my dear?" she asked my uncle.

"He looks like his father more than anyone," muttered my uncle, who was no more anxious to introduce them at a distance by saying Mama's name than to do so at close quarters. "He is exactly like his father and also my poor mother."

"I don't know his father," said the lady in pink with a slight inclination of her head, "and I never knew your poor mother, my dear. You remember, it was shortly after your bereavement that we met."

I was feeling a little disappointed, because this young lady was no different from the other pretty women I had sometimes seen in my family, in particular the daughter of a cousin of ours to whose house I went every year on the first of January. Better dressed, only, my uncle's friend had the same quick and kind glance, she seemed as open and affectionate. In her I found no trace of the theatrical appearance that I admired in photographs of actresses, nor of the diabolical expression that would have suited the life she must lead. I had trouble believing she was a courtesan and I especially would not have believed she was a stylish courtesan, if I had not seen the carriage and pair, the pink dress, the pearl necklace, if I had not known that my uncle was acquainted only with those of the highest sort. But I wondered how the millionaire who had given her her carriage and her house and her jewels could enjoy squandering his fortune on a person

whose appearance was so simple and proper. And yet, as I thought about what her life must be like, the immorality of it disturbed me perhaps more than if it had taken concrete form before my eyes in some special guise—it was so invisible, like the secret of some romantic story, of some scandal which had driven out of the home of her bourgeois parents and consigned to the public, which had brought to a bloom of beauty and raised to the demimonde and to notoriety, this woman, the play of whose features, the intonations of whose voice, the same as so many others I knew already, made me consider her despite myself to be a young woman from a good family, though she was no longer from any family.

We had gone into the "study," and my uncle, appearing somewhat ill at ease because of my presence, offered her a cigarette.

"No," she said, "my dear, you know I've become used to the ones the grand duke sends me. I told him you were jealous." And from a case she drew cigarettes covered with gilded foreign writing. "Why yes," she added abruptly, "I must have met this young man's father at your house. Isn't he your nephew? How could I have forgotten? He was so good, so exquisite to me," she said modestly and sensitively. But as I thought about what might have been my father's rude greeting which she said she had found so exquisite, I, who knew his reserve and his coldness, was embarrassed, as by an indelicacy he had committed, by this disparity between the excessive gratitude that was bestowed on him and his insufficient friendliness. It seemed to me later that it was one of the touching aspects of the role of these idle and studious women that they devote their generosity, their talent, a free-floating dream of beauty in love—for, like artists, they do not carry it to fruition, do not bring it into the framework of a shared existence—and a gold that costs them little, to enrich with a precious and refined setting the rough and ill-polished lives of men. And just as this one filled the smoking room, where my uncle was wearing a jacket to receive her, with her gentle person, her dress of pink silk, her pearls, the elegance emanating from the friendship of a grand duke, so in the same way she had taken some insignificant remark of my father's, had

worked it delicately, turned it, given it a precious appellation, and en-
chasing it with one of her glances of the finest water, tinged with hu-
mility and gratitude, had given it back changed into an artistic jewel,
into something "completely exquisite."

"Come now, it's time for you to go," my uncle said to me.

I stood up, I had an irresistible desire to kiss the hand of the lady
in pink, but it seemed to me this would have been something as bold
as an abduction. My heart pounded as I said to myself: "Should I do
it, should I not do it," then I stopped asking myself what I should do
so as to be able to do something. And with a blind and senseless ges-
ture divested of all the reasons I had found in its favor a moment ago,
I carried to my lips the hand she was holding out to me.

"How nice he is! How gallant! Why, the boy's a bit of a ladies'
man already: he takes after his uncle. He'll be a perfect *gentleman*,"⁹
she added, clenching her teeth to give the phrase a slightly British ac-
cent. "Couldn't he come have *a cup of tea* with me sometime, as our
neighbors the English say? He need only send me a 'blue'¹⁰ in the
morning."

I did not know what a "blue" was. I did not understand half the
words the lady said, but my fear that there was some question con-
cealed in them which it would have been impolite of me not to an-
swer made me keep on listening to them with close attention, and this
made me very tired.

"Oh no, that's not possible," said my uncle, shrugging his shoul-
ders, "he's very busy, he works hard. He wins all the prizes at school,"
he added in a low voice so that I would not hear this lie and contra-
dict it. "Who knows? Perhaps the boy will be a little Victor Hugo, an-
other *Vaulabelle*," you know."

"I adore artists," answered the lady in pink, "they're the only ones
who understand women . . . besides a few superior creatures like you.
Excuse my ignorance, my dear, but who is *Vaulabelle*? Is it those gilt-
edged volumes in the little glass bookcase in your sitting room? You
know you promised to lend them to me, I'll take great care of them."

My uncle, who hated lending his books, said nothing in answer

and took me to the front hall. Crazed with love for the lady in pink, I
covered my old uncle's tobacco-filled cheeks with mad kisses, and,
while with some embarrassment he let me know without venturing to
tell me openly that he would just as soon I not talk about this visit to
my parents, I said to him, tears in my eyes, that the memory of his
goodness was so powerful within me that one day I would certainly
find the means to show him my gratitude. It was so powerful, in fact,
that two hours later, after a few mysterious phrases that did not seem
to me to give my parents a distinct enough idea of the new impor-
tance with which I was endowed, I found it more explicit to describe
to them every last detail of the visit I had just paid. I did not think
that in doing this I was causing problems for my uncle. How could I
have thought that, since I did not wish it? And I could not imagine
that my parents would see any harm in a visit in which I saw none.
Doesn't it happen every day that a friend asks us to be sure to apolo-
gize for him to a woman to whom he has been prevented from writ-
ing, and that we neglect to do it, feeling that this person cannot attach
any importance to a silence that has none for us? I imagined, like
everyone else, that the brain of another person was an inert and
docile receptacle, without the power to react specifically to what one
introduced into it; and I did not doubt that in depositing in my par-
ents' brains the news of the acquaintance I had made through my
uncle, I was transmitting to them at the same time, as I wished to, the
kindly opinion that I had of this introduction. My parents unfortu-
nately deferred to principles entirely different from those I was sug-
gesting they adopt, when they wished to appraise my uncle's action.
My father and grandfather had some violent arguments with him; of
this, I was indirectly informed. A few days later, encountering my
uncle outdoors as he was passing in an open carriage, I was filled with
all the pain, the gratitude, the remorse that I would have liked to ex-
press to him. Compared to their immensity, I felt that raising my hat
would be shabby and might make my uncle think I did not believe I
owed him more than an ordinary sort of courtesy. I decided to refrain
from that inadequate gesture and I turned my head away. My uncle

thought that in doing this I was following my parents' orders, he did not forgive them, and he died many years later without any of us ever seeing him again.

And so I no longer went into my uncle Adolphe's sitting room, now closed, and would linger in the vicinity of the scullery until Françoise appeared in her temple yard and said to me: "I'm going to let my kitchen maid serve the coffee and take up the hot water, I must fly to Mme. Octave," when I would decide to go back in and would go straight upstairs to read in my room. The kitchen maid was an abstract entity, a permanent institution whose invariable set of attributes assured her a sort of continuity and identity, through the succession of temporary forms in which she was incarnated, for we never had the same one two years running. The year we ate so much asparagus, the kitchen maid usually given the job of "scraping" them was a poor, sickly creature, in a state of pregnancy already rather advanced when we arrived at Easter, and we were in fact surprised that Françoise allowed her to do so many errands and so much heavy work, for she was beginning to have difficulty carrying before her the mysterious basket, rounder every day, whose magnificent form one could divine under her ample smocks. These smocks reminded me of the cloaks worn by certain of Giotto's symbolic figures, photographs of whom I had been given by M. Swann. He himself was the one who had pointed this out to us and when he asked for news of the kitchen maid he would say: "How is Giotto's Charity?" What was more, she herself, poor girl, fattened by her pregnancy even in her face, even in her cheeks, which descended straight and square, rather resembled, in fact, those strong, mannish virgins, matrons really, in whom the virtues are personified in the Arena. And I realize now that those Virtues and Vices of Padua¹² resembled her in still another way. Just as the image of this girl was increased by the added symbol she carried before her belly without appearing to understand its meaning, without expressing in her face anything of its beauty and spirit, as a mere heavy burden, in the same way the powerful housewife who is represented at the Arena below the name "Caritas," and a reproduction of whom hung on the wall of my schoolroom at Combray, embodies

this virtue without seeming to suspect it, without any thought of charity seeming ever to have been capable of being expressed by her vulgar, energetic face. Through a lovely invention of the painter, she is trampling upon the treasures of the earth, but absolutely as if she were treading grapes to extract their juice or rather as she would have climbed on some sacks to raise herself up; and she holds her flaming heart out to God, or, to put it more exactly, "hands" it to him, as a cook hands a corkscrew through the vent of her cellar to someone who is asking her for it at the ground-floor window. Envy, too, might have had more of a particular expression of envy. But in this fresco too, the symbol occupies such a large place and is represented as so real, the serpent hissing at the lips of Envy is so fat, it fills her wide-open mouth so completely, that the muscles of her face are distended to contain it, like those of a child swelling a balloon with its breath, and that Envy's attention—and ours along with it—entirely concentrated as it is on the action of her lips, has scarcely any time for envious thoughts.

Despite all the admiration M. Swann professed for these figures of Giotto, for a long time I took no pleasure in contemplating, in our schoolroom, where the copies he had brought back to me had been hung, this Charity without charity, this Envy which looked like nothing more than a plate in a medical book illustrating the compression of the glottis or uvula by a tumor of the tongue or by the introduction of the operating surgeon's instrument, a Justice whose grayish and meanly regular face was the very same which, in Combray, characterized certain pretty, pious, and unfeeling bourgeois ladies I saw at Mass, some of whom had long since been enrolled in the reserve militia of Injustice. But later I understood that the startling strangeness, the special beauty of these frescoes was due to the large place which the symbol occupied in them, and the fact that it was represented, not as a symbol, since the thought symbolized was not expressed, but as real, as actually experienced or physically handled, gave something more literal and more precise to the meaning of the work, something more concrete and more striking to the lesson it taught. In the case of the poor kitchen maid, too, wasn't one's attention constantly brought

back to her belly by the weight that pulled on it; and in the same way, also, the thoughts of the dying are quite often turned toward the aspect of death that is real, painful, dark, visceral, toward the underside of death, which is in fact the side it presents to them and so harshly makes them feel, and which more closely resembles a crushing burden, a difficulty breathing, a need to drink, than what we call the idea of death.

There must have been a good deal of reality in those Virtues and Vices of Padua, since they seemed to me as alive as the pregnant servant, and since she herself did not appear to me much less allegorical. And perhaps this (at least apparent) nonparticipation of a person's soul in the virtue that is acting through her has also, beyond its aesthetic value, a reality that is, if not psychological, at least, as they say, physiognomical. When, later, I had occasion to meet, in the course of my life, in convents for instance, truly saintly embodiments of practical charity, they generally had the cheerful, positive, indifferent, and brusque air of a busy surgeon, the sort of face in which one can read no commiseration, no pity in the presence of human suffering, no fear of offending it, the sort which is the ungentle face, the antipathetic and sublime face of true goodness.

While the kitchen maid—involuntarily causing Françoise's superiority to shine forth, just as Error, by contrast, renders more dazzling the triumph of Truth—served coffee which according to Mama was merely hot water, and then took up to our rooms hot water which was barely lukewarm, I had lain down on my bed, a book in my hand, in my room which tremulously protected its frail transparent coolness from the afternoon sun behind its nearly closed shutters, through which a gleam of daylight had nonetheless contrived to pass its yellow wings, remaining motionless between the wood and the windowpane, in a corner, like a poised butterfly. It was barely light enough to read, and the sensation of the splendid brightness of the day came to me only from the blows struck in the rue de la Cure by Camus (told by Françoise that my aunt was "not resting" and that one could make noise) against some dusty crates, which, however, reverberating in the sonorous atmosphere peculiar to hot weather, seemed to send scarlet

stars flying into the distance; and also by the houseflies that performed for me, in a little concert, a sort of chamber music of summer: this music does not evoke summer in the same way as a melody of human music, which, when you happen to hear it during the warm season, afterward reminds you of it; it is connected to the summer by a more necessary bond: born of the fine days, born again only with them, containing a little of their essence, it not only awakens their image in our memory, it guarantees their return, their presence, actual, ambient, immediately accessible.

This dim coolness of my room was to the full sun of the street what a shadow is to a ray of light, that is to say, it was just as luminous and offered my imagination the full spectacle of summer, which my senses, had I been out walking, could have enjoyed only piecemeal; and so it was quite in harmony with my repose, which (because of the stirring adventures narrated in my books) sustained, like the repose of an unmoving hand in the midst of a stream of water, the shock and animation of a torrent of activity.

But my grandmother, even if the hot weather had turned bad, if a storm or merely a squall had arisen, would come and beg me to go out. And not wanting to stop my reading, I would go and continue it in the garden, at least, under the chestnut tree, in a little hooded chair of wicker and canvas, in the depths of which I would sit and think I was hidden from the eyes of the people who might come and pay a visit to my parents.

And wasn't my mind also like another crib in the depths of which I felt I remained ensconced, even in order to watch what was happening outside? When I saw an external object, my awareness that I was seeing it would remain between me and it, lining it with a thin spiritual border that prevented me from ever directly touching its substance; it would volatilize in some way before I could make contact with it, just as an incandescent body brought near a wet object never touches its moisture because it is always preceded by a zone of evaporation. In the sort of screen dappled with different states of mind which my consciousness would simultaneously unfold while I read, and which ranged from the aspirations hidden deepest within me to

the completely exterior vision of the horizon which I had, at the bottom of the garden, before my eyes, what was first in me, innermost, the constantly moving handle that controlled the rest, was my belief in the philosophical richness and the beauty of the book I was reading, and my desire to appropriate them for myself, whatever that book might be. For, even if I had bought it in Combray, having seen it in front of Borange's grocery, which was too far away from the house for Françoise to be able to do her shopping there as she did at Camus's, but which was better stocked as stationer and bookshop, held in place by some strings in the mosaic of pamphlets and monthly serials that covered the two panels of its door, which was itself more mysterious, more sown with ideas than the door of a cathedral, the fact was that I had recognized it as having been mentioned to me as a remarkable work by the teacher or friend who appeared to me at that period to hold the secret of the truth and beauty half sensed, half incomprehensible, the knowledge of which was the goal, vague but permanent, of my thoughts.

After this central belief, which moved incessantly during my reading from inside to outside, toward the discovery of the truth, came the emotions aroused in me by the action in which I was taking part, for those afternoons contained more dramatic events than does, often, an entire lifetime. These were the events taking place in the book I was reading; it is true that the people affected by them were not "real," as Françoise said. But all the feelings we are made to experience by the joy or the misfortune of a real person are produced in us only through the intermediary of an image of that joy or that misfortune; the ingeniousness of the first novelist consisted in understanding that in the apparatus of our emotions, the image being the only essential element, the simplification that would consist in purely and simply abolishing real people would be a decisive improvement. A real human being, however profoundly we sympathize with him, is in large part perceived by our senses, that is to say, remains opaque to us, presents a dead weight which our sensibility cannot lift. If a calamity should strike him, it is only in a small part of the total notion we have of him that we will be able to be moved by this; even

more, it is only in a part of the total notion he has of himself that he will be able to be moved himself. The novelist's happy discovery was to have the idea of replacing these parts, impenetrable to the soul, by an equal quantity of immaterial parts, that is to say, parts which our soul can assimilate. What does it matter thenceforth if the actions, and the emotions, of this new order of creatures seem to us true, since we have made them ours, since it is within us that they occur, that they hold within their control, as we feverishly turn the pages of the book, the rapidity of our breathing and the intensity of our gaze. And once the novelist has put us in that state, in which, as in all purely internal states, every emotion is multiplied tenfold, in which his book will disturb us as might a dream but a dream more lucid than those we have while sleeping and whose memory will last longer, then see how he provokes in us within one hour all possible happinesses and all possible unhappinesses just a few of which we would spend years of our lives coming to know and the most intense of which would never be revealed to us because the slowness with which they occur prevents us from perceiving them (thus our heart changes, in life, and it is the worst pain; but we know it only through reading, through our imagination: in reality it changes, as certain phenomena of nature occur, slowly enough so that, even if we are able to observe successively each of its different states, we are still spared the actual sensation of change).

Already less interior to my body than these lives of the characters, next came, half projected in front of me, the landscape in which the action unfolded and which exerted on my thoughts a much greater influence than the other, the one I had before my eyes when I lifted them from the book. It was thus that during two summers, in the heat of the garden at Combray, I felt, because of the book I was reading then, homesick for a mountainous and fluvial country, where I would see many sawmills and where, in the depths of the clear water, pieces of wood rotted under tufts of watercress: not far off, climbing along low walls, were clusters of violet and reddish flowers. And since the dream of a woman who would love me was always present in my mind, during those summers that dream was impregnated with the

coolness of the running waters; and whichever woman I conjured up, clusters of violet and reddish flowers would rise immediately on either side of her like complementary colors.

This was not only because an image of which we dream remains forever stamped, is adorned and enriched, by the glimmer of the colors not its own that may happen to surround it in our daydream; for the landscapes in the books I read were for me not merely landscapes more vividly portrayed in my imagination than those which Combray set before my eyes but otherwise analogous. Because the author had chosen them, because of the faith with which my mind went to meet his word as though it were a revelation, they seemed to be—an impression hardly ever given me by the countryside in which I happened to be, and especially by our garden, the unmagical product of the perfectly correct conception of the gardener so despised by my grandmother—an actual part of Nature itself, worthy to be studied and explored.

If my parents had allowed me, when I was reading a book, to go visit the region it described, I would have believed I was taking an invaluable step forward in the conquest of truth. For even if we have the sensation of being always surrounded by our own soul, it is not as though by a motionless prison: rather, we are in some sense borne along with it in a perpetual leap to go beyond it, to reach the outside, with a sort of discouragement as we hear around us always that same resonance, which is not an echo from outside but the resounding of an internal vibration. We try to rediscover in things, now precious because of it, the glimmer that our soul projected on them; we are disappointed to find that they seem to lack in nature the charm they derived in our thoughts from the proximity of certain ideas; at times we convert all the forces of that soul into cunning, into magnificence, in order to have an effect on people who are outside us, as we are well aware, and whom we will never reach. Thus, if I always imagined the woman I loved surrounded by the places I longed for most at that time, if I would have liked her to be the one who took me to visit them, who opened the way for me into an unknown world, it was not because of a simple chance association of thoughts; no, it was be-

cause my dreams of travel and of love were only moments—which I am separating artificially today as if I were cutting sections at different heights of an apparently motionless iridescent jet of water—in a single inflexible upsurge of all the forces of my life.

Lastly, continuing to trace from the inside to the outside these states simultaneously juxtaposed in my consciousness, and before reaching the real horizon that enveloped them, I find pleasures of another kind, the pleasure of being comfortably seated, of smelling the good scent of the air, of not being disturbed by a visit; and, when an hour rang in the bell tower of Saint-Hilaire, of seeing fall piece by piece what was already consumed of the afternoon, until I heard the last stroke, which allowed me to add up the total and after which the long silence that followed it seemed to commence in the blue sky that whole part that was still granted me for reading until the good dinner which Françoise was preparing and which would restore me from the hardships I had incurred, during the reading of the book, in pursuit of its hero. And at each hour it would seem to me only a few moments since the preceding hour had rung; the most recent would come and inscribe itself close to the other in the sky, and I would not be able to believe that sixty minutes were held in that little blue arc comprised between their two marks of gold. Sometimes, even, this premature hour would ring two strokes more than the last; there was therefore one that I had not heard, something that had taken place had not taken place for me; the interest of the reading, as magical as a deep sleep, had deceived my hallucinated ears and erased the golden bell from the azure surface of the silence. Lovely Sunday afternoons under the chestnut tree in the garden at Combray, carefully emptied by me of the ordinary incidents of my own existence, which I had replaced by a life of foreign adventures and foreign aspirations in the heart of a country washed by running waters, you still evoke that life for me when I think of you and you contain it in fact from having gradually encircled and enclosed it—while I went on with my reading in the falling heat of the day—in the crystalline succession, slowly changing and spanned by leafy branches, of your silent, sonorous, redolent, and limpid hours.

Sometimes I would be drawn from my reading, in the middle of the afternoon, by the gardener's daughter, who would run like a lunatic, overturning an orange tree in its tub as she went by, cutting a finger, breaking a tooth, and shouting, "They're coming, they're coming!" so that Françoise and I should run out too and not miss any of the show. This was on the days when the regiment passed through Combray on its way to garrison maneuvers, generally going down the rue Sainte-Hildegarde. While our servants, sitting in a row on chairs outside the railings, gazed at the people of Combray taking their Sunday walk and allowed themselves to be gazed at in return, the gardener's daughter through a slit left between two distant houses in the avenue de la Gare had caught sight of the glitter of helmets. The servants had rushed to bring in their chairs, for when the cuirassiers paraded down the rue Sainte-Hildegarde, they filled its entire breadth, and the cantering horses grazed the houses, covering pavements submerged like banks that offer too narrow a bed for a torrent unleashed.

"Poor children," said Françoise, having barely reached the railings and already in tears; "poor boys, to be mown down like grass in a meadow; the very thought of it gives me a shock," she added, putting her hand on her heart, where she had received that *shock*.

"A fine sight, isn't it, Madame Françoise, all these youngsters with no care for their lives?" said the gardener to get a "rise" out of her.

He had not spoken in vain:

"No care for their lives? Well, now, what should we care for if we don't care for our lives, the only gift the dear Lord never gives us twice over? Alas, dear God! It's quite true, though, they don't care! I saw them in '70; in those wretched wars they've no fear of death left in them; they're nothing more nor less than madmen; and then they're not worth the rope to hang them with; they're not men anymore, they're lions." (For Françoise, the comparison of a man to a lion, which she pronounced lie-on, was not at all complimentary.)

The rue Sainte-Hildegarde turned too sharply for us to be able to see anything coming from far off, and it was through that slit between

the two houses in the avenue de la Gare that we saw more and more new helmets flowing and shining in the sun. The gardener wanted to know if there were many more still to come, and he was thirsty, because the sun was beating down. So, all of a sudden, his daughter, leaping out as though from a place besieged, would sally forth, gain the corner of the street, and after braving death a hundred times, come back to us bringing, along with a carafe of licorice water, the news that there were at least a thousand of them coming without a break from the direction of Thiberzy and Méséglise. Françoise and the gardener, reconciled, would discuss what action should be taken in case of war.

"You see, Françoise," said the gardener, "revolution would be better, because when they declare a revolution, it's only them that wants to that goes."

"Well now, at least I can understand that, it's more honest."

The gardener believed that when war was declared they would stop all the railway trains.

"Of course! So we doesn't run off," said Françoise.

And the gardener: "Oh, they're clever ones!" because he would not admit that war was not a kind of bad trick that the State tried to play on the people, and that if only they had the means to do it, there was not a single person who would not have run away from it.

But Françoise would hurry back to my aunt, I would return to my book, the servants would settle in front of the gate again to watch as the dust subsided along with the emotion roused by the soldiers. Long after calm had descended, an unaccustomed flow of people out walking would continue to darken the streets of Combray. And in front of each house, even those where it was not the custom, the servants or even the masters, sitting and watching, would festoon the sill with a border as dark and irregular as the border of seaweed and shells whose crepe and embroidery are left on the shore by a strong tide after it recedes.

Except on those days, however, I could usually read in peace. But the interruption and the commentary that a visit of Swann's once

produced as I was in the midst of reading a book by an author quite new to me, Bergotte, had the consequence that for a long time afterward it was not against a wall adorned with spikes of violet flowers, but against a quite different background, before the portal of a Gothic cathedral, that the image now appeared of one of the women I dreamed of.

I had heard Bergotte mentioned for the first time by a friend of mine older than I whom I greatly admired, Bloch. When he heard me admit how much I admired "La Nuit d'Octobre,"¹³ he had exploded in laughter as noisy as a trumpet and said to me: "Beware this rather low fondness of yours for the Honorable de Musset. He's an extremely pernicious individual and a rather sinister brute. I must admit, however, that he and even our man Racine did, each of them, in the course of their lives, make one fairly rhythmical line of verse that also has in its favor what I believe to be the supreme merit of meaning absolutely nothing. They are: 'The white Oloossone and the white Camyre' and 'The daughter of Minos and Pasiphaë.'¹⁴ They were pointed out to me in defense of those two rogues in an article by my very dear master, old Leconte, acceptable to the Immortal Gods. Speaking of which, here's a book I don't have time to read right now which is recommended, it seems, by that colossal fellow. I've been told he considers the author, the Honorable Bergotte, to be a most subtle individual; and even though he may evince, at times, a goodness of heart rather hard to explain, for me his word is a Delphic Oracle. Do read these lyrical pieces of prose, therefore, and if the titanic rhymester who composed 'Bhagavat' and 'Le Lévrier de Magnus'¹⁵ has spoken the truth, by Apollo, you will taste, dear master, the nectarine joys of Olympos." It was in a sarcastic tone that he had asked me to call him "dear master" and that he called me the same. But in reality we took a certain pleasure in this game, since we were still close to the age when one believes one creates what one names.

Unfortunately, I was unable to talk to Bloch and ask him for an explanation in order to quiet the disturbance he had caused in me when he told me that fine lines of poetry (from which I expected nothing less than a revelation of the truth) were all the finer if they meant nothing at all. For Bloch was not invited to the house again. At

first he had been made quite welcome. It was true that my grandfather claimed that each time I formed a closer attachment to one of my friends than the others and brought him home, he was always a Jew, which would not have displeased him in principle—even his friend Swann was of Jewish extraction—had he not felt that it was not from among the best that I had chosen him. And so when I brought home a new friend, he very seldom failed to hum "Oh God of our Fathers" from *La Juive*¹⁶ or "Israel, break thy bond,"¹⁷ singing only the tune, naturally (Ti la lam talam, talim), but I was afraid my friend would know it and restore the words.

Before he saw them, simply from hearing the name, which quite often had nothing particularly Jewish about it, he would guess not only the Jewish background of those of my friends who were in fact Jewish, but even whatever might be distressing about their family.

"And what is the name of this friend of yours who's coming this evening?"

"Dumont, Grandfather."

"Dumont! Oh, now I'm suspicious!"

And he would sing:

Archers, be on your guard!

Watch without rest, without sound.¹⁸

And after adroitly asking us a few more specific questions, he would cry out: "On guard! On guard!" or, if it was the victim himself, already there, whom he had forced, by a subtle interrogation, unwittingly to confess his origins, then, to show us he no longer had any doubts, he would simply gaze at us while barely perceptibly humming:

Let you now guide

The steps of this timid Israelite!¹⁹

or:

Fields of our fathers, sweet valley of Hebron.²⁰

or else:

Yes, I am of the chosen race.²¹

These little idiosyncrasies of my grandfather's did not imply any feeling of ill will toward my friends. But Bloch had displeased my family for other reasons. He had begun by irritating my father, who, noticing that he was wet, had said to him with lively interest:

"Why, Monsieur Bloch, what's the weather like? Has it been raining? I don't understand this at all, the barometer couldn't have been *better*."

The only answer he had drawn from him had been this:

"Monsieur, I absolutely cannot tell you if it has been raining. I live so resolutely beyond physical contingencies that my senses do not bother to notify me of them."

"Why, my poor son, that friend of yours is an idiot," my father had said to me when Bloch had gone. "My goodness! He can't even tell me what the weather's like! Why, nothing is more interesting! He's an imbecile."

Then Bloch had displeased my grandmother because after lunch, when she said she was feeling a little indisposed, he had stifled a sob and wiped away a few tears.

"How can you tell me he's sincere?" she said to me. "He doesn't know me; unless he's out of his mind, of course."

And finally he had annoyed everyone because, having come for lunch an hour and a half late covered with mud, instead of apologizing, he had said:

"I never allow myself to be influenced either by atmospheric perturbations or by the conventional divisions of time. I would happily instate the use of the opium pipe and the Malay kris,²² but I know nothing about the use of those infinitely more pernicious and also insipidly bourgeois implements, the watch and the umbrella."

He would have returned to Combray despite all this. He was not, of course, the friend my parents would have wanted for me; in the end they had believed that the tears he shed over my grandmother's indisposition were not feigned; but they knew, either instinctively or from

experience, that our impulsive emotions have little influence over the course of our actions or the conduct of our lives, and that regard for moral obligations, loyalty to friends, the completion of a piece of work, obedience to a rule of life, have a surer foundation in blind habits than in those momentary transports, ardent and sterile. They would have preferred for me, over Bloch, companions who would have given me no more than is suitable to give one's friends, according to the laws of bourgeois morality; who would not unexpectedly send me a basket of fruits because they had been thinking of me with affection that day, but who, being incapable of tipping in my favor the correct balance of the obligations and claims of friendship by a simple impulse of their imagination and sensibility, would also not tamper with it to my detriment. Even our offenses will not easily divert from their duty toward us those natures of which the model was my great-aunt, who, estranged for years from a niece to whom she never spoke, did not for this reason change the will in which she left that niece her entire fortune, because she was her closest relative and it "was proper."

But I liked Bloch, my parents wanted to make me happy, the insoluble problems I posed for myself concerning the meaningless beauty of the daughter of Minos and Pasiphaë tired me more and made me more ill than further conversations with him would have done, even though my mother felt they were harmful. And he would still have been received at Combray, if, after that dinner, having just informed me—news that later had a great deal of influence on my life and made it first happier, then less happy—that no woman ever thought about anything but love and that there was not one whose resistance could not be overcome, he had not assured me that he had heard most positively that my great-aunt had had a wild youth and had been known to be a kept woman. I could not stop myself from repeating these remarks to my parents, he was shown the door when he returned, and when I approached him afterward in the street, he was extremely cold to me.

But on the subject of Bergotte what he had said was true.

In the first few days, like a melody with which one will become

infatuated but which one cannot yet make out, what I was to love so much in his style was not apparent to me. I could not put down the novel of his that I was reading, but thought I was interested only in the subject, as during that first period of love when you go to meet a woman every day at some gathering, some entertainment, thinking you are drawn to it by its pleasures. Then I noticed the rare, almost archaic expressions he liked to use at certain moments, when a hidden wave of harmony, an inner prelude, would heighten his style; and it was also at these moments that he would speak of the "vain dream of life," the "inexhaustible torrent of beautiful appearance," the "sterile and delicious torment of understanding and loving," the "moving effigies that forever ennoble the venerable and charming facades of our cathedrals," that he expressed an entire philosophy, new to me, through marvelous images which seemed themselves to have awakened this harp song which then arose and to whose accompaniment they gave a sublime quality. One of these passages by Bergotte, the third or fourth that I had isolated from the rest, filled me with a joy that could not be compared to the joy I had discovered in the first one, a joy I felt I was experiencing in a deeper, vaster, more unified region of myself, from which all obstacles and partitions seemed to have been removed. What had happened was that, recognizing the same preference for rare expressions, the same musical effusion, the same idealist philosophy that had already, the other times, without my realizing it, been the source of my pleasure, I no longer had the impression I was in the presence of a particular passage from a certain book by Bergotte, tracing on the surface of my mind a purely linear figure, but rather of the "ideal passage" by Bergotte, common to all his books, to which all the analogous passages that merged with it had added a sort of thickness, a sort of volume, by which my mind seemed enlarged.

I was not quite Bergotte's only admirer; he was also the favorite writer of a friend of my mother's, a very well read woman, while Dr. du Boulbon would keep his patients waiting as he read Bergotte's most recent book; and it was from his consulting room, and from a park near Combray, that some of the first seeds of that predilection

for Bergotte took flight, a rare species then, now universally widespread, so that all through Europe, all through America, even in the smallest village, one can find its ideal and common flower. What my mother's friend and, it seems, Dr. du Boulbon liked above all in Bergotte's books, as I did, was that same melodic flow, those old-fashioned expressions, a few others which were very simple and familiar, but which enjoyed, to judge from the places in which he focused attention on them, a particular preference on his part; lastly, in the sad passages, a certain brusqueness, a tone that was almost harsh. And no doubt he himself must have felt that these were his greatest charms. For in the books that followed, if he had found out some great truth, or the name of a famous cathedral, he would interrupt his narrative and, in an invocation, an apostrophe, a long prayer, he would give vent to those exhalations which in his early works remained interior to his prose, revealed only by the undulations of its surface, even sweeter, perhaps, more harmonious, when they were thus veiled and one could not have pointed out precisely where their murmur rose, where it died. These passages in which he took such pleasure were our favorite passages. I myself knew them by heart. I was disappointed when he resumed the thread of his narrative. Each time he talked about something whose beauty had until then been hidden from me, about pine forests, about hail, about Notre-Dame Cathedral, about *Athalie* or *Phèdre*,²³ with one image he would make that beauty explode into me. And so, realizing how many parts of the universe there were that my feeble perception would not be able to distinguish if he did not convey them to me, I wanted to possess an opinion of his, a metaphor of his, for everything in the world, especially those things that I would have an opportunity to see myself, and, of the latter, particularly some of the historic buildings of France and certain seascapes, because the insistence with which he mentioned them in his books proved that he considered them rich in meaning and beauty. Unfortunately, concerning almost everything in the world I did not know what his opinion was. I did not doubt that it was entirely different from my own, since it came down from an unknown world toward which I was trying to rise: persuaded that my

thoughts would have looked like pure ineptitude to that perfect mind, I had made such a clean sweep of them all that, when by chance I happened to encounter in one of his books a thought that I had already had myself, my heart would swell as though a god in his goodness had given it back to me, had declared it legitimate and beautiful. It happened now and then that a page of his would say the same things that I often wrote to my grandmother and my mother at night when I could not sleep, so that this page by Bergotte seemed like a collection of epigraphs to be placed at the beginnings of my letters. Later still, when I began writing a book, and the quality of certain sentences was not high enough to persuade me to continue it, I would find their equivalent in Bergotte. But it was only then, when I read them in his book, that I could enjoy them; when I was the one composing them, anxious that they should reflect exactly what I perceived in my thoughts, afraid I would not "make a good likeness," I hardly had time to ask myself whether what I was writing was agreeable! But in fact there was no other sort of sentence, no other sort of idea, that I really loved. My uneasy and dissatisfied efforts were themselves a sign of love, a love without pleasure but profound. And so, when I suddenly found sentences like these in a book by another person, that is, without having to suffer my usual qualms, my usual severity, without having to torment myself, I would at last abandon myself with delight to my partiality for them, like a cook who, when for once he does not have to prepare the meal, at last finds the time to gormandize. One day, when I encountered in a book by Bergotte a joke about an old servant woman which the writer's magnificent and solemn language made even more ironical, but which was the same joke I had often made to my grandmother when talking about Françoise, another time when I saw that he did not think it unworthy to portray in one of those mirrors of truth which were his books a remark similar to one I had had occasion to make about our friend M. Legrandin (remarks about Françoise and M. Legrandin that were certainly among those I would most resolutely have sacrificed to Bergotte, persuaded that he would find them uninteresting), it seemed to me suddenly that my humble life and the realms of the truth were not as widely separated

as I had thought, that they even coincided at certain points, and from confidence and joy I wept over the writer's pages as though in the arms of a father I had found again.

From his books, I imagined Bergotte to be a frail, disappointed old man who had lost several of his children and never recovered. And so I would read, I would sing his prose to myself, more *dolce*, more *lento*²⁴ perhaps than it was written, and the simplest sentence spoke to me with a more tender intonation. Above all else I loved his philosophy, I had pledged myself to it for life. It made me impatient to reach the age when I would enter secondary school and enroll in the class called Philosophy. But I did not want to do anything else there but live according to Bergotte's ideas exclusively, and, had I been told that the metaphysicians to whom I would be devoting myself by then would not resemble him at all, I would have felt the despair of a lover who wants his love to be lifelong and to whom one talks about the other mistresses he will have later.

One Sunday, as I was reading in the garden, I was disturbed by Swann, who had come to see my parents.

"What are you reading? May I look? Well, well! Bergotte! Now, who told you about his books?" I said it was Bloch.

"Ah, yes! The boy I saw here once, who looks so much like the portrait of Mohammed II by Bellini."²⁵ Oh, it's quite striking! He has the same circumflex eyebrows, the same curved nose, the same jutting cheekbones. When he has a goatee, he'll be the same person. Well, he has good taste, in any case, because Bergotte is quite enchanting." And seeing how much I appeared to admire Bergotte, Swann, who never talked about the people he knew, out of kindness made an exception and said to me:

"I know him very well. If you would like him to write a few words in the front of your book, I could ask him."

I did not dare accept his offer, but asked Swann some questions about Bergotte. "Could you tell me which is his favorite actor?"

"Actor? I don't know. But I do know that he doesn't consider any man on the stage equal to La Berma; he puts her above everyone else. Have you seen her?"

"No, monsieur, my parents don't allow me to go to the theatre."

"That's unfortunate. You ought to ask them. La Berma in *Phèdre*, in *Le Cid*,²⁶ is only an actress, you might say, but you know, I'm not much of a believer in the 'hierarchy!' of the arts" (and I noticed, as had often struck me in his conversations with my grandmother's sisters, that when he talked about serious things, when he used an expression that seemed to imply an opinion about an important subject, he took care to isolate it in a tone of voice that was particularly mechanical and ironic, as though he had put it between quotation marks, seeming not to want to take responsibility for it, as though saying "*hierarchy*, you know, as it is called by silly people?") But then if it was so silly, why did he say hierarchy?). A moment later, he added: "It will give you as noble a vision as any masterpiece, I don't know, really . . . as"—and he began to laugh—"the Queens of Chartres!"²⁷ Until then his horror of ever expressing a serious opinion had seemed to me a thing that must be elegant and Parisian and that was the opposite of the provincial dogmatism of my grandmother's sisters; and I also suspected that it was a form of wit in the social circles in which Swann moved, where, reacting against the lyricism of earlier generations, they went to an extreme in rehabilitating those small, precise facts formerly reputed to be vulgar, and proscribed "fine phrases." But now I found something shocking in this attitude of Swann's toward things. It appeared that he dared not have an opinion and was at his ease only when he could with meticulous accuracy offer some precise piece of information. But if that was the case, he did not realize that to postulate that the accuracy of these details was important was to profess an opinion. I thought again of that dinner at which I was so sad because Mama would not be coming up to my room and at which he had said that the balls given by the Princesse de Léon were of no importance whatsoever. But it was to just that sort of pleasure that he devoted his life. I found all this contradictory. For what other lifetime was he reserving the moment when he would at last say seriously what he thought of things, formulate opinions that he did not have to put between quotation marks, and no longer indulge with punctilious politeness in occupations which he declared at the same time to be

ridiculous? I also noticed in the way Swann talked to me about Bergotte something that was, on the other hand, not peculiar to him, but shared at the time by all the writer's admirers, by my mother's friend, by Dr. du Boulbon. Like Swann, they said about Bergotte: "He's quite enchanting, so individual, he has his own way of saying things which is a little overly elaborate, but so pleasing. You don't need to see the signature, you know right away that it's by him." But none of them would have gone so far as to say: "He's a great writer, he has a great talent." They did not even say he had talent. They did not say it because they did not know it. We are very slow to recognize in the particular features of a new writer the model that is labeled "great talent" in our museum of general ideas. Precisely because these features are new, we do not think they fully resemble what we call talent. Instead, we talk about originality, charm, delicacy, strength; and then one day we realize that all of this is, in fact, talent.

"Are there any books by Bergotte in which he talks about La Berma?" I asked M. Swann.

"I think so, in his slim little volume on Racine, but it must be out of print. There may have been a reissue, though. I'll find out. I can also ask Bergotte anything you like; there isn't a week in the whole year when he doesn't come to dinner at our house. He's my daughter's greatest friend. They go off together visiting old towns, cathedrals, castles."

Since I had no notion of social hierarchy, for a long time the fact that my father found it impossible for us to associate with Mme. and Mlle. Swann had had the effect above all, by making me imagine a great distance between them and us, of giving them prestige in my eyes. I was sorry my mother did not dye her hair and redden her lips as I had heard our neighbor Mme. Sazerat say that Mme. Swann did in order to please, not her husband, but M. de Charlus, and I thought we must be an object of scorn to her, which distressed me most of all because of Mlle. Swann, who, from what I had been told, was such a pretty little girl and about whom I often dreamed, giving her each time the same arbitrary and charming face. But when I learned that day that Mlle. Swann was a creature of so rare a condition, bathing as

though in her natural element in the midst of such privileges, that when she asked her parents if anyone was coming to dinner, she would be answered by those syllables filled with light, by the name of that golden dinner guest who was for her only an old friend of the family: Bergotte; that for her the intimate talk at the table, the equivalent for me of my great-aunt's conversation, would be Bergotte's words on all the subjects he had not been able to broach in his books, and on which I would have liked to hear him pronounce his oracles; and that, lastly, when she went to visit other towns, he would walk along next to her, unknown and glorious, like the Gods who descended among mortals; then I was conscious both of the worth of a creature like Mlle. Swann and also of how crude and ignorant I would appear to her, and I felt so keenly the sweetness and the impossibility of my being her friend that I was filled with both desire and despair. Most often, now, when I thought of her, I would see her in front of a cathedral porch, explaining to me what the statues signified and, with a smile that said good things about me, introducing me as her friend to Bergotte. And always the charm of all those ideas awakened in me by the cathedrals, the charm of the hills of Île-de-France and the plains of Normandy, cast its glimmers over the picture I was forming of Mlle. Swann: this was what it meant to be on the point of falling in love with her. Our belief that a person takes part in an unknown life which his or her love would allow us to enter is, of all that love demands in order to come into being, what it prizes the most, and what makes it care little for the rest. Even women who claim to judge a man by his appearance alone see that appearance as the emanation of a special life. This is why they love soldiers, firemen; the uniform makes them less particular about the face; they think that under the breastplate they are kissing a different heart, adventurous and sweet; and a young sovereign, a crown prince, may make the most flattering conquests in the foreign countries he visits without needing the regular profile that would perhaps be indispensable to a stockbroker.

While I read in the garden, something my great-aunt would not have understood my doing except on a Sunday, a day when it is forbidden

to occupy oneself with anything serious and when she did not sew (on a weekday, she would have said to me, "What? Still *amusing* yourself with a book? This isn't Sunday, you know," endowing the word *amusement* with the meaning of childishness and waste of time), my aunt Léonie would gossip with Françoise, waiting until it was time for Eulalie. She would announce that she had just seen Mme. Goupil go by "without an umbrella, in that silk dress she had made for her at Châteaudun. If she has far to go before Vespers, she could very well get it properly drenched."

"Maybe, maybe" (meaning maybe not), said Françoise so as not to rule out absolutely the possibility of a more favorable alternative.

"Oh dear," said my aunt, striking her forehead, "that reminds me I never found out if she arrived at church after the Elevation. I will have to remember to ask Eulalie . . . Françoise, just look at that black cloud behind the steeple, and that pitiful sunlight on the slates. It's sure to rain before the day is done. It couldn't possibly stay like this, it was too hot. And the sooner the better, because until the storm breaks, my Vichy water won't go down," added my aunt, in whose mind her desire to hasten the descent of her Vichy water was infinitely more important than her fear of seeing Mme. Goupil ruin her dress.

"Maybe, maybe."

"And the fact is, when it rains on the square there isn't much shelter. What, three o'clock?" my aunt cried out suddenly, turning pale. "Why, my goodness, Vespers has begun and I've forgotten my pepsin! Now I know why my Vichy water was lying on my stomach."

And swooping down on a missal bound in violet velvet, with gilt clasps, from which, in her haste, she let escape a few of those pictures edged with a band of yellowing paper lace that mark the pages of the feast days, my aunt, while swallowing her drops, began reading the sacred texts as fast as she could, her comprehension of them slightly obscured by her uncertainty as to whether the pepsin, taken so long after the Vichy water, would still be able to catch up with it and make it go down. "Three o'clock! It's unbelievable how the time passes!"

A little tap against the windowpane, as though something had

struck it, followed by a copious light spill, as of grains of sand dropping from a window above, then the spill extending, becoming regular, finding a rhythm, turning fluid, resonant, musical, immeasurable, universal: it was the rain.

"Well, now, Françoise! What did I tell you? How it's coming down! But I think I heard the bell at the garden gate: go and see who could be outside in such weather."

Françoise returned:

"It was Mme. Amédée" (my grandmother). "She said she was going for a little walk. And yet it's raining hard."

"That doesn't surprise me at all," said my aunt, lifting her eyes to the heavens. "I've always said that her way of thinking is different from everyone else's. I'd rather it be her than me outdoors just now."

"Mme. Amédée is always as different as she can be from everyone else," said Françoise gently, refraining until she should be alone with the other servants from saying that she believed my grandmother was a little "touched."

"Now, *see*? The Benediction is over! Eulalie won't be coming," sighed my aunt; "the weather must have frightened her away."

"But it's not five o'clock, Madame Octave, it's only half-past four."

"Only half-past four? And I had to raise the little curtains to get a wretched glimmer of daylight. At half-past four! One week before the Rogations! Oh, my poor Françoise, the Good Lord must be sorely vexed with us. The world is going too far these days! As my poor Octave used to say, we have forgotten the Good Lord too often and he's taking his revenge."

A bright flush enlivened my aunt's cheeks; it was Eulalie. Unfortunately, scarcely had she been shown in before Françoise returned and, with a smile that was meant to indicate her participation in the joy she was sure her words would give my aunt, articulating the syllables to show that, despite her use of the indirect style, she was reporting, good servant that she was, the very words the visitor had condescended to use:

"M. le Curé would be delighted, enchanted, if Mme. Octave is not

resting and could see him. M. le Curé does not wish to disturb. M. le Curé is downstairs; I told him to go into the parlor."

In fact, the curé's visits did not give my aunt as much pleasure as Françoise supposed, and the air of jubilation with which Françoise thought she must illuminate her face each time she had to announce him did not entirely correspond to the invalid's feelings. The curé (an excellent man with whom I am sorry I did not have more conversations, for if he understood nothing about the arts, he did know many etymologies), being in the habit of enlightening distinguished visitors with information about the church (he even intended to write a book about the parish of Combray), fatigued her with endless explanations that were in fact always the same. But when his visit came at the very same time as Eulalie's, it became frankly unpleasant for my aunt. She would have preferred to make the most of Eulalie and not have all her company at once. But she did not dare decline to see the curé and only made a sign to Eulalie not to leave at the same time, so that she could keep her there by herself for a little while after he was gone.

"Monsieur le Curé, what's this they've been telling me, that a painter has set up his easel in your church and is copying a window? I must say, old as I am, I've never in my life heard of such a thing! What is the world coming to? And the ugliest part of the church, too!"

"I will not go so far as to say it is the ugliest, for if there are some parts of Saint-Hilaire that are well worth a visit, there are others that are very old now, in my poor basilica, the only one in all the diocese that has never even been restored! My Lord, the porch is dirty and ancient, but still it is really majestic in character; the same is true of the tapestries of Esther, for which personally I would not give two sous but which the experts rank immediately below those at Sens. I can quite see, too, that apart from certain rather realistic details, they offer other details that show a genuine power of observation. But don't talk to me about the windows! Is it really sensible to leave us with windows that give no light and even deceive our eyes with patches of color I would never be able to identify, in a church where no two paving stones are on the same level and they refuse to replace them

for me, giving the excuse that these are the tombstones of the Abbés de Combray and the Seigneurs de Guermantes, the old Comtes de Brabant? The direct ancestors of the present Duc de Guermantes and of the Duchesse too since she's a Demoiselle de Guermantes who married her cousin." (My grandmother, who, because she took no great interest in "persons," ended by confusing all names, would claim, each time anyone mentioned the Duchesse de Guermantes, that she must be a relative of Mme. de Villeparisis. Everyone would burst out laughing; she would try to defend herself by referring back to some official announcement: "I seem to recall there was something in it about Guermantes." And for once I would side with the others against her, unable to admit that there was any connection between her friend from boarding school and the descendant of Geneviève de Brabant.) "Look at Roussainville, today it is no more than a parish of farmers, though in ancient times the locality experienced a great boom in the commerce of felt hats and clocks. (I'm not sure of the etymology of Roussainville. I'm inclined to think the original name was Rouville [*Radulfi villa*], analogous to Châteauroux [*Castrum radulfi*], but we can talk about that some other time.) Well! The church has superb windows, almost all modern, including that impressive *Entry of Louis-Philippe into Combray*, which would be more suited to Combray itself and is just as good, they say, as the famous windows at Chartres. Only yesterday I saw Dr. Percepied's brother, who goes in for these things and who regards it as a very fine piece of work. But, as I in fact said to this artist, who seems very courteous, by the way, and who is apparently a veritable virtuoso with the paintbrush, I said, now what do you find so extraordinary about this window, which is if anything a little darker than the others?"

"I'm sure that if you asked the bishop," my aunt said feebly, beginning to think she was going to be tired, "he would not refuse you a new window."

"You may depend upon it, Madame Octave," answered the curé. "But it was His Grace himself who started all the fuss about this wretched window by proving that it represented Gilbert the Bad, Sire de Guermantes, a direct descendant of Geneviève de Brabant, who

was a Demoiselle de Guermantes, receiving absolution from Saint Hilaire."

"But I can't see where Saint Hilaire would be."

"Why, in the corner of the window—you never noticed a lady in a yellow dress? Well, now, that's Saint Hilaire, who in certain provinces is also called, you know, Saint Illiers, Saint Hélier, and even, in the Jura, Saint Ylie. And these various corruptions of *sanctus Hilarius* are not the most curious that have occurred in the names of the blessed. For instance, your own patron, my good Eulalie, *sancta Eulalia*—do you know what she is in Burgundy? *Saint Éloi*, quite simply: she has become a male saint. You see Eulalie?—after you die they will turn you into a man."

"Monsieur le Curé always has a joke for us."

"Gilbert's brother, Charles the Stammerer, was a pious prince, but having early in life lost his father, Pépin the Mad, who died as a result of his mental infirmity, he wielded the supreme power with all the arrogance of a man who has had no discipline in his youth, and if in a certain town he saw a man whose face he didn't like, he would massacre every last inhabitant. Gilbert, wishing to take revenge on Charles, caused the church of Combray to be burned down, the original church at the time, which Théodebert, when he and his court left the country house he had near here, at Thiberzy (which would be *Theodeberciacus*), to go fight the Burgundians, had promised to build over the tomb of Saint Hilaire if the Blessed One would grant him the victory. Nothing remains of it now but the crypt which Théodore must have taken you down into, for Gilbert burned the rest. Finally, he defeated the unfortunate Charles with the help of William the Conqueror" (the curé pronounced it Will'am), "which is why so many English visitors come to see it. But he apparently was unable to win the affection of the people of Combray, for they rushed upon him as he was coming out of Mass and cut off his head. Théodore has a little book he lends out to people that explains it all.

"But what is unquestionably the most extraordinary thing about our church is the view from the belfry, which is magnificent. Certainly in your case, since you're not strong, I would never advise you

to climb our ninety-seven steps, exactly half the number of the celebrated dome in Milan. It's quite tiring enough for someone in good health, especially as you must go up bent double if you don't want to crack your head, and you collect all the cobwebs off the stairwell on your clothes. In any case you would have to wrap yourself up quite snugly," he added (without noticing my aunt's indignation at the idea that she was capable of climbing into the belfry), "because there's quite a breeze once you get to the top! Some people declare they have felt the chill of death up there. Nonetheless, on Sundays there are always groups coming even from a long way off to admire the beauty of the panorama, and they go away enchanted. Now next Sunday, if the weather holds, you'll be sure to find some people there, since it's Rogation Day. It really must be admitted, though, that from that spot the scene is magical, with what you might call vistas over the plain that have quite a special charm of their own. On a clear day, you can see all the way to Verneuil. But the marvelous thing is that you can see, all in one glance, things you can't usually see except one at a time separately, like the course of the Vivonne and the ditches at Saint-Assise-lès-Combray, which are separated by a screen of tall trees, or the different canals at Jouy-le-Vicomte (*Gaudiacus vice comitis*, as you know). Each time I've gone to Jouy-le-Vicomte, of course, I've seen a bit of the canal, and then I've turned a corner and seen another bit, but by then I could no longer see the preceding bit. I could put them together in my mind, but that didn't have much of an effect for me. But from the Saint-Hilaire belfry it's different, the whole area seems to have been caught in one great net. But you can't see any water; it's as though there were deep clefts dividing the town into different neighborhoods so neatly it looks like a brioche still holding together after it has been sliced. To do it right, you'd have to be in both places at the same time, in the steeple of Saint-Hilaire and at Jouy-le-Vicomte."

The curé had so exhausted my aunt that he was scarcely gone before she had to send Eulalie away too.

"Here, my poor Eulalie," she said weakly, drawing a coin from a

little purse that she had within reach of her hand, "this is so that you won't forget me in your prayers."

"Oh, Madame Octave! I don't know if I should; you know I don't come here for that!" Eulalie would say with the same hesitation and the same awkwardness, each time, as if it were the first, and with an appearance of dissatisfaction that diverted my aunt but did not displease her, because if one day Eulalie looked a little less vexed than usual as she took the coin, my aunt would say:

"I don't know what was bothering Eulalie; I gave her the same as usual, and yet she didn't look happy."

"I think she has nothing to complain about, all the same," Françoise would sigh, inclined to consider as small change anything my aunt gave her for herself or her children and as treasure madly squandered on an ingrate the little coins placed in Eulalie's hand each Sunday, but so discreetly that Françoise never managed to see them. It was not that Françoise would have wanted for herself the money my aunt gave Eulalie. She took sufficient pleasure in what my aunt possessed, knowing that the mistress's wealth both elevated and embellished her servant in everyone's eyes; and that she, Françoise, was distinguished and renowned in Combray, Jouy-le-Vicomte, and other places, on account of my aunt's many farms, the curé's frequent and extended visits, the singular number of bottles of Vichy water consumed. She was greedy only for my aunt; if it had been up to her to manage my aunt's fortune, which would have been her dream, she would have preserved it from the encroachments of others with a maternal ferocity. She would not, however, have seen any great harm in what my aunt, whom she knew to be incurably generous, allowed herself to give away, as long as it went to rich people. Perhaps she thought that they, having no need of gifts from my aunt, could not be suspected of showing fondness for her because of them. Besides, gifts made to people of eminence and wealth, like Mme. Sazerat, M. Swann, M. Legrandin, Mme. Goupil, to persons "of the same rank" as my aunt who "were well suited," appeared to her to belong to the customs of the strange and brilliant life of the wealthy who hunt,

give balls, visit back and forth, people whom she admired and smiled upon. But it was not the same if the beneficiaries of my aunt's generosity were what Françoise called "people like me, people who are no better than me," the ones of whom she was most scornful unless they called her "Madame Françoise" and considered themselves to be "less than her." And when she saw that despite her advice my aunt did just as she pleased and threw her money away—as Françoise saw it, at least—on the unworthy, she began to think the gifts my aunt made to her were quite small compared to the imaginary sums lavished on Eulalie. There was not a single farm in the vicinity of Combray so substantial that Françoise did not suppose Eulalie could easily have bought it with all she earned from her visits. It is true that Eulalie formed the same estimate of the immense and hidden riches of Françoise. It was Françoise's habit, when Eulalie had gone, to make unkind predictions about her. She detested her, but she was also afraid of her and believed that when Eulalie was there she had to present a "good face." She made up for it after Eulalie's departure, without ever naming her, in fact, but proffering sibylline oracles or pronouncements of a general character like those in Ecclesiastes, whose application could not escape my aunt. After watching through a corner of the curtain to see if Eulalie had closed the gate behind her, she would say: "Flatterers know how to make themselves welcome and collect a little pocket money; but have patience, the Good Lord will punish them all one fine day," with the sidelong glance and the insinuation of Joas thinking only of Athalie when he says:

The happiness of the wicked rushes down like a mountain stream.²⁸

But when the curé had come as well and his interminable visit had exhausted my aunt's strength, Françoise would leave the bedroom behind Eulalie and say:

"Madame Octave, I will let you rest, you look very tired."

And my aunt would not even answer, breathing a sigh that must, it seemed, be the last, her eyes closed, as though dead. But scarcely had Françoise gone down than four peals dealt with the greatest violence

would echo through the house, and my aunt, upright on her bed, would cry out:

"Has Eulalie gone yet? Can you believe it—I forgot to ask her if Mme. Goupil arrived at Mass before the Elevation! Quick, run after her!"

But Françoise would return without having been able to catch up with Eulalie.

"It's vexing," my aunt would say, shaking her head. "The only important thing I had to ask her!"

In this way life went on for my aunt Léonie, always the same, in the sweet uniformity of what she called, with affected disdain and deep tenderness, her "little routine." Preserved by everyone, not only in the house, where we had all experienced the futility of advising her to adopt a better health regimen and so had gradually resigned ourselves to respecting the routine, but even in the village where, three streets away from us, the goods packer, before nailing his crates, would send word to ask Françoise if my aunt was "resting"—this routine was, however, disturbed once during that year. Like a hidden fruit that had ripened without anyone's noticing and had dropped spontaneously, one night the kitchen maid gave birth. But her pains were intolerable, and since there was no midwife in Combray, Françoise had to go off before daybreak to find one in Thiberzy. My aunt could not rest because of the kitchen maid's cries, and since Françoise, despite the short distance, did not come back until very late, my aunt missed her very much. And so my mother said to me in the course of the morning: "Go up, why don't you, and see if your aunt needs anything." I went into the first room, and through the open door saw my aunt lying on her side sleeping; I heard her snoring lightly. I was going to go away quietly, but the noise I had made had probably interfered with her sleep and made it "shift gears," as they say about cars, because the music of her snoring broke off for a second and resumed on a lower note, then she woke up and half turned her face, which I could now see; it expressed a sort of terror; she had obviously just had a horrible dream; she could not see me the way she was positioned,

and I stayed there not knowing if I should go in to her or leave; but already she seemed to have returned to a sense of reality and had recognized the falsity of the visions that had frightened her; a smile of joy, of pious gratitude to God who permits waking life to be less cruel than dreams, weakly illuminated her face, and in the habit she had formed of talking to herself half aloud when she thought she was alone, she murmured: "God be praised! Our only worry is the kitchen maid, who is having a baby. And here I've gone and dreamed that my poor Octave had come back to life and was trying to make me go for a walk every day!" Her hand went out toward her rosary, which lay on the little table, but sleep was overcoming her again and did not leave her the strength to reach it: she fell asleep, soothed, and I crept out of the room without her or anyone else ever finding out what I had heard.

When I say that except for very rare events, like that confinement, my aunt's routine never suffered any variation, I am not speaking of those variations which, always the same and repeated at regular intervals, introduced into the heart of that uniformity only a sort of secondary uniformity. And so, for instance, every Saturday, because Françoise went to the Roussainville-le-Pin market in the afternoon, lunch was, for everyone, an hour earlier. And my aunt had so thoroughly acquired the habit of this weekly violation of her habits that she clung to it as much as to the others. She was so well "routined" to it, as Françoise said, that if she had had to wait, some Saturday, to have lunch at the regular hour, this would have "disturbed" her as much as if on another day she had had to move her lunch forward to the Saturday hour. What was more, this early lunch gave Saturday, for all of us, a special face, indulgent and almost kindly. At the time of day when one usually has another hour to live through before the relaxation of the meal, we knew that in a few seconds we would see the arrival of some precocious endives, a gratuitous omelette, an undeserved beefsteak. The return of this asymmetrical Saturday was one of those little events, internal, local, almost civic, which, in peaceful lives and closed societies, create a sort of national bond and become the favorite theme of conversations, jokes, stories wantonly exagger-

ated: it would have been the ready-made nucleus for a cycle of legends, if one of us had had an epic turn of mind. First thing in the morning, before we were dressed, for no reason, for the pleasure of feeling the strength of our comradeship, we would say to one another with good humor, with warmth, with patriotism: "There's no time to lose; don't forget—it's Saturday!" while my aunt, conferring with Françoise and remembering that the day would be longer than usual, would say: "You might make them a nice bit of veal, since it's Saturday." If at ten-thirty one of us absentmindedly drew out his watch and said: "Let's see, still an hour and a half before lunch," everyone was delighted to have to say to him: "Come now, what are you thinking of, you're forgetting it's Saturday!"; we would still be laughing over it a quarter of an hour after and we would promise ourselves to go up and report this lapse to my aunt to amuse her. Even the face of the sky seemed changed. After lunch, the sun, aware that it was Saturday, would linger an hour longer at the top of the sky, and when someone, thinking we were late for our walk, said, "What, only two o'clock?," watching, as they passed, the two strokes from the Saint-Hilaire steeple (which do not usually encounter anyone yet on paths which are deserted because of the midday meal or the afternoon nap, alongside the lively white stream which even the fisherman has abandoned, and go on alone into the empty sky where only a few lazy clouds remain), we would all answer him in chorus: "But you're wrong, we had lunch an hour early; you know very well it's Saturday!" The surprise of a barbarian (this was what we called anyone who did not know what was special about Saturday) who, arriving at eleven o'clock to talk to my father, found us at the table, was one of the things in her life which most amused Françoise. But if she found it funny that the dumbfounded visitor did not know we had lunch earlier on Saturday, she found it even more comical (while at the same time sympathizing from the bottom of her heart with this narrow chauvinism) that my father himself had not realized that the barbarian might not know this and had responded with no further explanation to his astonishment at seeing us already in the dining room: "Well what do you expect, it's Saturday!" Having reached this point in her story, she would wipe

away a few tears of hilarity and, to increase her own pleasure, would prolong the dialogue, invent what had been said in answer by the visitor, to whom this "Saturday" did not explain anything. And quite far from complaining about her embellishments, we would feel they were not enough for us and we would say: "But I think he also said something else. It was longer the first time you told it." Even my great-aunt would put down her needlework, lift her head, and look over her glasses.

What was also special about Saturday was that on this day, during the month of May, we would go out after dinner to attend the "Month of Mary."

Since there we would sometimes meet M. Vinteuil, who was very severe about "the deplorable fashion of slovenliness in young people, which seems to be encouraged these days," my mother would take care that nothing was wrong with my appearance, then we would leave for church. It was in the Month of Mary that I remember beginning to be fond of hawthorns. Not only were they in the church, which was so holy but which we had the right to enter, they were put up on the altar itself, inseparable from the mysteries in whose celebration they took part, their branches running out among the candles and holy vessels, attached horizontally to one another in a festive preparation and made even lovelier by the festoons of their foliage, on which were scattered in profusion, as on a bridal train, little bunches of buds of a dazzling whiteness. But, though I dared not do more than steal a glance at them, I felt that the ceremonious preparations were alive and that it was nature herself who, by carving those indentations in the leaves, by adding the supreme ornament of those white buds, had made the decorations worthy of what was at once a popular festivity and a mystical celebration. Higher up, their corollas opened here and there with a careless grace, still holding so casually, like a last and vaporous adornment, the bouquets of stamens, delicate as gossamer, which clouded them entirely, that in following, in trying to mime deep inside myself the motion of their flowering, I imagined it as the quick and thoughtless movement of the head, with coquet-

tish glance and contracted eyes, of a young girl in white, dreamy and alive. M. Vinteuil had come in with his daughter and sat down beside us. He was from a good family and had been my grandmother's sisters' piano teacher, and when, after his wife died and he came into an inheritance, he retired near Combray, we often entertained him at the house. But he was extremely prudish, and stopped coming so as not to meet Swann, who had made what he called "an unsuitable marriage, as is the fashion these days." My mother, after learning that he composed, had said to him in a friendly way that when she went to see him, he would have to let her hear something of his. M. Vinteuil would have taken great joy in this, but he was so scrupulous in his politeness and kindness that, always putting himself in the place of others, he was afraid he would bore them and appear egotistical if he pursued or even allowed them to infer his own desires. The day my parents had gone to visit him at his home, I had gone with them, but they had allowed me to stay outside and, since M. Vinteuil's house, Montjouvain, stood at the foot of a brush-covered hillock where I had hidden, I had found I was on a level with the second-floor drawing room, a foot or two from the window. When the servant had come to announce my parents, I had seen M. Vinteuil hurry to place a piece of music in a conspicuous position on the piano. But once my parents had entered, he had taken it away and put it in a corner. No doubt he had been afraid of letting them think he was happy to see them only so that he could play them some of his compositions. And each time my mother had made a fresh attempt in the course of the visit, he had repeated several times: "I don't know who put that on the piano, it doesn't belong there," and had diverted the conversation to other subjects, precisely because they interested him less. His only passion was for his daughter, and she, with her boyish appearance, seemed so robust that one could not help smiling at the sight of the precautions her father took for her sake, always having extra shawls to throw over her shoulders. My grandmother pointed out what a gentle, delicate, almost shy expression often came into the eyes of that rough-mannered child, whose face was covered with freckles. After

she made a remark, she would hear it with the minds of the people to whom she had made it, would grow alarmed at possible misunderstandings, and one would see, illuminated, showing through as though by transparency, under the mannish face of the "good fellow" that she was, the more refined features of a young girl in tears.

When, before leaving the church, I kneeled in front of the altar, I suddenly smelled, as I stood up, a bittersweet scent of almonds escaping from the hawthorns, and then I noticed, on the flowers, little yellow places under which I imagined that scent must be hidden, as the taste of a frangipani must be hidden under the burned parts, or that of Mlle. Vinteuil's cheeks under their freckles. Despite the silence and stillness of the hawthorns, this intermittent scent was like the murmuring of an intense life with which the altar quivered like a country hedge visited by living antennae, of which I was reminded by the sight of certain stamens, almost russet red, that seemed to have preserved the springtime virulence, the irritant power, of insects now metamorphosed into flowers.

We would talk with M. Vinteuil for a moment in front of the porch on our way out of the church. He would intervene among the children squabbling in the square, take up the defense of the little ones, deliver a lecture to the older ones. If his daughter said to us in her loud voice how happy she was to see us, it would immediately seem as if a more sensitive sister within her were blushing at this thoughtless, tomboyish remark, which might have made us think she was asking to be invited to our house. Her father would throw a cloak over her shoulders, they would get up into a little cabriolet, which she would drive herself, and the two of them would return to Montjouvain. As for us, since it was Sunday the next day and we would not get up until it was time for High Mass, if there was moonlight and the air was warm, instead of having us go home directly, my father, out of a love of personal glory, would take us by way of the Calvary on a long walk which my mother's little capacity for orienting herself, or knowing what road she was on, made her consider the feat of a strategic genius. Sometimes we would go as far as the viaduct, whose giant strides of stone began at the railway station and represented to me the exile

and distress that lay outside the civilized world, because each year as we came from Paris we were warned to pay careful attention, when Combray came, not to let the station go by, to be ready ahead of time because the train would leave again after two minutes and would set off across the viaduct beyond the Christian countries of which Combray marked for me the farthest limit. We would return by way of the station boulevard, which was lined by the most pleasant houses in the parish. In each garden the moonlight, like Hubert Robert, scattered its broken staircases of white marble, its fountains, its half-open gates. Its light had destroyed the Telegraph Office. All that remained of it was one column, half shattered but still retaining the beauty of an immortal ruin. I would be dragging my feet, I would be ready to drop with sleep, the fragrance of the lindens that perfumed the air would seem to me a reward that one could win only at the cost of the greatest fatigue and that was not worth the trouble. From gates far apart, dogs awakened by our solitary steps would send forth alternating volleys of barks such as I still hear at times in the evening and among which the station boulevard (when the public garden of Combray was created on its site) must have come to take refuge, for, wherever I find myself, as soon as they begin resounding and replying, I see it again, with its lindens and its pavement lit by the moon.

Suddenly my father would stop us and ask my mother: "Where are we?" Exhausted from walking but proud of him, she would admit tenderly that she had absolutely no idea. He would shrug his shoulders and laugh. Then, as if he had taken it out of his jacket pocket along with his key, he would show us the little back gate of our own garden, which stood there before us, having come, along with the corner of the rue du Saint-Esprit, to wait for us at the end of these unfamiliar streets. My mother would say to him with admiration: "You are astonishing!" And from that moment on, I would not have to take another step, the ground would walk for me through that garden where for so long now my actions had ceased to be accompanied by any deliberate attention: Habit had taken me in its arms, and it carried me all the way to my bed like a little child.

If Saturday, which began an hour earlier and deprived her of Françoise, passed more slowly than other days for my aunt, she nonetheless awaited its return with impatience from the beginning of the week, because it contained all the novelty and distraction that her weakened and finical body was still able to endure. And yet this was not to say that she did not now and then aspire to some greater change, that she did not experience those exceptional moments when we thirst for something other than what we have, and when people who from a lack of energy or imagination cannot find a source of renewal in themselves ask the next minute that comes, the postman as he rings, to bring them something new, even if it is something worse, some emotion, some sorrow; when our sensibility, which happiness has silenced like an idle harp, wants to resonate under some hand, even a rough one, and even if it might be broken by it; when the will, which has with such difficulty won the right to surrender unimpeded to its own desires, to its own afflictions, would like to throw the reins into the hands of imperious events, even if they may be cruel. Doubtless, since my aunt's strength, drained by the least fatigue, returned to her only drop by drop deep within her repose, the reservoir was very slow to fill up, and months would go by before she had that slight overflow which others divert into activity and which she was incapable of knowing, and deciding, how to use. I have no doubt that then—just as the desire to replace it by potatoes with béchamel sauce ended after a certain time by being born from the very pleasure she felt at the daily return of the mashed potatoes of which she did not “get tired”—she would derive from the accumulation of those monotonous days which she valued so the expectation of some domestic cataclysm lasting only a moment but forcing her to effect once and for all one of those changes which she recognized would be beneficial to her and to which she could not of her own accord make up her mind. She truly loved us, she would have taken pleasure in mourning us; had it come at a moment when she felt well and was not in a sweat, the news that the house was being consumed by a fire in which all of us had perished already and which would soon leave not a single stone of the

walls standing, but from which she would have ample time to escape without hurrying, so long as she got out of bed right away, must often have lingered among her hopes, since it combined, with the secondary advantages of allowing her to savor all her tenderness for us in an extended grief and to be the cause of stupefaction in the village as she led the funeral procession, courageous and stricken, dying on her feet, that other much more precious advantage of forcing her at the right moment, with no time to lose, no possibility of an enervating hesitation, to go and spend the summer on her pretty farm, Mirougrain, where there was a waterfall. As no event of that sort had ever occurred, the outcome of which she would certainly contemplate when she was alone, absorbed in her innumerable games of patience (and which would have reduced her to despair at the first moment of its realization, at the first of those little unforeseen developments, the first word announcing the bad news, whose accent can never be forgotten afterward, all those things that bear the imprint of real death, so different from its logical, abstract possibility), she would from time to time resort to introducing into her life, to make it more interesting, imaginary incidents which she would follow with passion. She enjoyed suddenly pretending that Françoise was stealing from her, that she herself had been cunning enough to make sure of it, that she had caught her in the act; being in the habit, when she played cards alone, of playing both her own hand and that of her opponent, she would utter out loud to herself Françoise's embarrassed excuses and would answer them with so much fire and indignation that if one of us entered at that moment, we would find her bathed in perspiration, her eyes sparkling, her false hair dislodged and revealing her bald forehead. Françoise would perhaps sometimes hear from the next room mordant pieces of sarcasm addressed to her the invention of which would not have relieved my aunt sufficiently if they had remained in a purely immaterial state and if by murmuring them half aloud she had not given them more reality. Sometimes, even this “theater in bed”²⁹ was not enough for my aunt, she wanted to have her plays performed. And so, on a Sunday, all doors mysteriously closed, she

would confide to Eulalie her doubts about Françoise's honesty, her intention of getting rid of her, and another time, to Françoise, her suspicions about the faithlessness of Eulalie, to whom the door would very soon be closed; a few days later, she would be disgusted with her confidante of the day before and once again consort with the traitor, though for the next performance the two of them would exchange roles yet again. But the suspicions that Eulalie was at times able to inspire in her amounted only to a straw fire and died down quickly, for lack of fuel, since Eulalie did not live in the house. It was not the same for those that concerned Françoise, of whose presence under the same roof my aunt was perpetually conscious, though for fear of catching cold if she left her bed, she did not dare go down to the kitchen to verify whether they were well founded. Gradually her mind would come to be occupied entirely by attempting to guess what, at each moment, Françoise could be doing and trying to hide from her. She would notice the most furtive movements of Françoise's features, a contradiction in something she said, a desire that she seemed to be concealing. And she would show Françoise that she had unmasked her, with a single word that would make Françoise turn pale and that my aunt seemed to find a cruel amusement in driving deep into the heart of the unfortunate woman. And the following Sunday, a revelation of Eulalie's—like those discoveries that suddenly open an unsuspected field to a young science that has got into something of a rut—would prove to my aunt that her own suppositions were far short of the truth. "But Françoise ought to know that, now that you've given her a carriage." "Given her a carriage!" my aunt would cry. "Oh, well, I don't know really. I thought, well, I saw her passing just a short time ago in a calash, proud as Artaban,³⁰ going to the market at Rous-sainville. I thought it was Mme. Octave who gave it to her." And so by degrees Françoise and my aunt, like quarry and hunter, would reach the point of constantly trying to anticipate each other's ruses. My mother was afraid Françoise would develop a real hatred for my aunt, who insulted her as brutally as she could. Certainly Françoise came more and more to pay an extraordinary attention to the least of

my aunt's remarks, to the least of her gestures. When she had to ask her something, she would hesitate for a long time over how she should go about it. And when she had tendered her request, she would observe my aunt covertly, trying to guess from the look on her face what she thought and what she would decide. And so—while some artist who reads the memoirs of the seventeenth century and wants to be like the great King, and thinks he will be making progress in that direction if he fabricates a genealogy for himself that traces his own descent from a historic family or if he carries on a correspondence with one of the current sovereigns of Europe, is actually turning his back on what he mistakenly sought in forms that were identical and consequently dead—an old lady from the provinces who was simply yielding to irresistible manias and to a malice born of idleness, saw, without ever thinking of Louis XIV, the most insignificant occupations of her day, those concerned with her rising, her lunch, her afternoon rest, acquire, because of their despotic singularity, some of the interest of what Saint-Simon called the "mechanics" of life at Versailles,³¹ and could also believe that her silences, a nuance of good humor or disdain in her features, were for Françoise the object of a commentary as passionate, as fearful as were the silence, the good humor, the disdain of the King when a courtier, or even his greatest lords, handed him a petition at the bend of an avenue at Versailles.

One Sunday when my aunt had had a visit from the curé and Eulalie at the same time and had afterward rested, we all went up to say good evening to her, and Mama offered her her condolences on the bad luck that always brought her visitors at the same hour:

"I know that things turned out poorly again this afternoon, Léonie," she said to her gently, "you had all your company here at the same time."

Which my great-aunt interrupted with: "Too much of a good thing can do no harm . . ." because, ever since her daughter had become ill, she had believed it was her duty to cheer her up by consistently showing her the bright side of everything. But now my father spoke:

"I would like to take advantage," he said, "of the fact that the whole

family is together to tell you all about something without having to begin all over again with each of you separately. I'm afraid we've had a falling-out with Legrandin: he barely said hello to me this morning."

I did not stay to hear my father's story, because I had actually been with him after Mass when we met M. Legrandin, and I went down to the kitchen to ask about the menu for our dinner, which diverted me every day like the news in the paper and excited me like the program for some festivity. When M. Legrandin had passed near us as he was coming out of the church, walking by the side of a lady from a neighboring château whom we knew only by sight, my father had greeted him in a way that was at once friendly and reserved, though we had not stopped; M. Legrandin had barely responded, with a surprised look, as if he did not recognize us, and with that perspective in his gaze peculiar to people who do not want to be friendly and who, from the suddenly extended depths of their eyes, seem to perceive you at the end of an interminable road and at so great a distance that they confine themselves to addressing to you a minuscule nod in order to give it the proportions of your puppetlike dimensions.

Now the lady Legrandin was accompanying was a virtuous and esteemed person; it was quite out of the question that he was having an affair and embarrassed at being found out, and my father wondered how he might have annoyed Legrandin. "I would be especially sorry to know he is vexed," said my father, "because of the fact that among all those people dressed up in their Sunday best there is something about him, with his little straight jacket, his loose tie, that is so uncontrived, so truly simple, an air of ingenuousness, almost, that is extremely likable." But the family council was unanimously of the opinion that my father was imagining things, or that Legrandin, at that particular moment, was absorbed in some other thought. And in fact my father's apprehension was dispelled the very next evening. As we were returning from a long walk, near the Pont-Vieux we saw Legrandin, who because of the holidays was staying in Combray for a few days. He came up to us with his hand outstretched: "My young bookworm," he asked me, "do you know this line by Paul Desjardins:

The woods are dark, the sky still blue.³²

Isn't that a fine rendering of this hour of the day? Perhaps you've never read Paul Desjardins. Read him, my child; today he is transforming himself, they tell me, into a sermonizing friar, but for a long time he was a limpid watercolorist . . .

The woods are dark, the sky still blue.

May the sky remain forever blue for you, my young friend; and even at the hour which is now approaching for me, when the woods are dark already, when night is falling fast, you will console yourself as I do by looking up at the sky." He took a cigarette out of his pocket, remained for a long time with his eyes on the horizon. "Good-bye, friends," he said suddenly, and he left us.

At the hour when I usually went downstairs to find out what the menu was, dinner would already have been started, and Françoise, commanding the forces of nature, which were now her assistants, as in fairy plays where giants hire themselves out as cooks, would strike the coal, entrust the steam with some potatoes to cook, and make the fire finish to perfection the culinary masterpieces first prepared in potters' vessels that ranged from great vats, casseroles, cauldrons, and fishkettles to terrines for game, molds for pastry, and little jugs for cream, and included a complete collection of pans of every shape and size. I would stop by the table, where the kitchen maid had just shelled them, to see the peas lined up and tallied like green marbles in a game; but what delighted me were the asparagus, steeped in ultramarine and pink, whose tips, delicately painted with little strokes of mauve and azure, shade off imperceptibly down to their feet—still soiled though they are from the dirt of their garden bed—with an iridescence that is not of this earth. It seemed to me that these celestial hues revealed the delicious creatures who had merrily metamorphosed themselves into vegetables and who, through the disguise of their firm, edible flesh, disclosed in these early tints of dawn, in these beginnings of rainbows, in this extinction of blue evenings, the precious essence that I recognized again when, all

night long following a dinner at which I had eaten them, they played, in farces as crude and poetic as a fairy play by Shakespeare, at changing my chamber pot into a jar of perfume.

Poor Giotto's Charity, as Swann called her, instructed by Françoise to "scrape" them, would have them beside her in a basket, her expression as mournful as though she were suffering all the misfortunes of the earth; and the light crowns of azure that girded the asparagus stalks above their tunics of pink were delicately drawn, star by star, as, in the fresco, are the flowers bound around the forehead or tucked into the basket of Virtue at Padua. And meanwhile, Françoise would be turning on the spit one of those chickens, such as she alone knew how to roast, which had carried the fragrance of her merits through the far reaches of Combray and which, while she was serving them to us at the table, would cause the quality of gentleness to predominate in my particular conception of her character, the aroma of that flesh which she knew how to render so unctuous and so tender being for me only the specific perfume of one of her virtues.

But the day on which, while my father consulted the family council about the encounter with Legrandin, I went down to the kitchen, was one of those on which Giotto's Charity, very ill from her recent confinement, could not get out of bed; Françoise, having no help now, was late. When I arrived downstairs she was busy in the scullery that opened onto the poultry yard, killing a chicken which, by its desperate and quite natural resistance, but accompanied by Françoise, beside herself as she tried to split its neck under the ear, with cries of "Vile creature! Vile creature!," put the saintly gentleness and unction of our servant a little less in evidence than it would, at dinner the next day, by its skin embroidered with gold like a chasuble and its precious juice drained from a ciborium. When it was dead, Françoise collected the blood, which flowed without drowning her resentment, had another fit of anger, and looking at her enemy's cadaver, said one last time: "Vile creature!" I went back upstairs trembling all over; I wanted them to dismiss Françoise immediately. But who would have prepared me such cozy hot-water bottles, such fragrant coffee, and even . . . those chick-

ens? . . . And in fact, everyone had had to make this cowardly calculation, just as I had. For my aunt Léonie knew—as I did not yet know—that Françoise, who would for her daughter, for her nephews, have given her life without a murmur, was singularly hard-hearted toward other people. Despite this my aunt had kept her, for if she was aware of her cruelty, she valued her service. I gradually came to see that the gentleness, the compunction, the virtues of Françoise concealed scullery tragedies, just as history reveals that the reigns of the kings and queens who are portrayed with their hands joined in church windows were marked by bloody incidents. I realized that, apart from her own relatives, human beings inspired her with more pity for their afflictions the farther away from her they lived. The torrents of tears she shed while reading in the newspaper about the misfortunes of strangers would dry up quickly if she could picture to herself at all precisely the person concerned. On one of the nights following her confinement, the kitchen maid was seized by appalling cramps: Mama heard her moaning, got up, and woke Françoise, who, quite indifferent, declared that all this wailing was a sham, that the girl wanted "to be the center of attention." The doctor, who had been afraid of this sort of attack, had put a marker in a medical book we had, at the page on which the symptoms are described, and told us to consult it in order to find out what kind of first aid to give. My mother sent Françoise to get the book, warning her not to let the bookmark fall out. After an hour, Françoise had not returned; my mother, indignant, thought she had gone back to bed and told me to go to the library myself and see. There I found Françoise, who, having wanted to look at what the marker showed, was reading the clinical description of the attack and sobbing, now that the patient was a hypothetical one whom she did not know. At each painful symptom mentioned by the author of the article, she would exclaim: "Oh dear, Holy Virgin, is it possible that the good Lord would want a wretched human creature to suffer so? Oh, the poor girl!"

But as soon as I called her and she came back to the bedside of Giotto's Charity, her tears immediately stopped flowing; she could recognize neither the agreeable sensation of pity and tenderness

which she knew so well and had so often derived from reading the newspapers, nor any pleasure of the same sort, in the boredom and irritation of having had to get up in the middle of the night for her kitchen maid; and, at the sight of the same sufferings whose description had made her cry, she now produced nothing more than some bad-tempered mutterings, even some nasty, sarcastic remarks, saying, when she thought we had gone and could not hear her: "She had only to stop herself from doing what you do to get this way! I'm certain she enjoyed it well enough! So she needn't make a fuss now! Anyways, the boy must have to be quite forsaken by the good Lord to want to go with *this* one. Oh dear! It's just as they used to say in my poor mother's patois:

Fall in love with a dog's bum,
And thou'll think it pretty as a plum."³³

Although, when her grandson had a little cold in the head, she would go off in the night even if she was ill, instead of going to bed, to see if he needed anything, covering four leagues on foot before daybreak in order to be back in time to do her work, this same love of her own people and her desire to ensure the future greatness of her house was expressed, in her policy toward the other servants, by a consistent principle, which was never to let a single one of them become attached to my aunt, whom she took, moreover, a sort of pride in not allowing to be approached by anyone, preferring, when she herself was ill, to get up out of bed in order to give her mistress her Vichy water rather than permit the kitchen maid access to the bedroom. And like the hymenopteran observed by Fabre,³⁴ the burrowing wasp who, so that its young may have fresh meat to eat after its death, summons anatomy in aid of its cruelty and, after capturing a few weevils and spiders, proceeds with a marvelous knowledge and skill to pierce them in the nerve center that governs the movement of their legs but not their other life functions, in such a way that the paralyzed insect near which it deposits its eggs provides the larvae, when they hatch, with prey that is docile, harmless, incapable of flight or resistance, but not in the least tainted, Françoise found, to serve her abiding desire to

make the house intolerable to any other servant, ruses so clever and so merciless that many years later we learned that if we had eaten asparagus almost every day that summer, it was because their smell provoked in the poor kitchen girl who was given the job of scraping them attacks of asthma so violent that she was obliged in the end to leave.

Alas, we had to change our minds definitively about Legrandin. On one of the Sundays following the meeting on the Pont-Vieux after which my father had had to admit his mistake, as Mass was ending and as something so far from holy was entering the church, with the sunlight and the noise from outdoors, that Mme. Goupil, Mme. Percepied (all the people who, just a short time before, when I arrived a little late, had kept their eyes absorbed in prayer so that I would have thought they did not even see me come in if, at the same time, their feet had not gently pushed back the little kneeling bench that was blocking my path to my seat) began to converse with us loudly about quite temporal subjects as if we were already in the square, we saw on the blazing threshold of the porch, looking out over the motley tumult of the market, Legrandin being introduced by the husband of that lady with whom we had just recently encountered him to the wife of another large landowner of the area. Legrandin's face expressed an animation, and a zeal, that were quite extraordinary; he made a deep bow with a secondary recoil that brought his back sharply up past its starting position and that must have been taught him by the husband of his sister, Mme. de Cambremer. This rapid straightening caused Legrandin's bottom, which I had not supposed was so fleshy, to flow back in a sort of ardent muscular wave; and I do not know why that undulation of pure matter, that quite fleshly billow, with no expression of spirituality and whipped into a storm by a fully contemptible alacrity, suddenly awakened in my mind the possibility of a Legrandin quite different from the one we knew. This lady asked him to say something to her coachman, and as he went over to the carriage, the imprint of timid and devoted joy which the introduction had set upon his face persisted there still. He was smiling, enraptured in a sort of dream, then he hurried back to the lady, and since he was walking more quickly than was his habit, his two shoulders oscillated ridiculously to the right and left,

and so entirely did he abandon himself to this, without concern for anything else, that he looked like some inert and mechanical slave of happiness. Meanwhile, we were leaving the porch, we were going to pass right by him, he was too well mannered to turn his head away, but he fastened his gaze, suddenly burdened by a profound reverie, on so distant a point of the horizon that he could not see us and did not have to greet us. His face remained ingenuous above his straight and supple jacket that looked as though it had been led astray against its will into detestably splendid surroundings. And a polka-dotted lavalier bow tie tossed by the wind in the square continued to float in front of Legrandin like the flag of his proud isolation and noble independence. Just as we reached the house, Mama realized that we had forgotten the Saint Honoré cake and asked my father to go back the way we had come, taking me with him, and tell them to bring it immediately. Near the church we met Legrandin, who was coming in the opposite direction escorting the same lady to her carriage. He passed close to us, did not break off his conversation with his neighbor, and from the corner of his blue eye gave us a little sign that was in some way interior to his eyelid and which, not involving the muscles of his face, could go perfectly unnoticed by the lady he was talking to; but seeking to compensate by intensity of feeling for the somewhat narrow field in which he had circumscribed its expression, in the azure corner assigned to us he set sparkling all the liveliness of a grace that exceeded playfulness, bordered on mischievousness; he overrefined the subtleties of amiability into winks of connivance, insinuations, innuendos, the mysteries of complicity; and finally exalted his assurances of friendship into protestations of affection, into a declaration of love, illuminating for us alone, at that moment, with a secret languor invisible to the lady, a love-smitten eye in a face of ice.

He had in fact asked my parents the day before to send me to dine with him that evening: "Come and keep your old friend company," he had said to me. "Like a bouquet sent to us by a traveler from a country to which we will never return, allow me to breathe from the distance of your adolescence those flowers that belong to the spring-times which I too traversed many years ago. Come with the primrose,

the monk's beard, the buttercup, come with the sedum that makes the bouquet of love in Balzac's flora,³⁵ come with the flower of Resurrection Day, the Easter daisy, and the garden snowdrop, which is beginning to perfume your great-aunt's paths even though the last snows dropped by the Easter showers have not yet melted. Come with the glorious silk raiment of the lily worthy of Solomon himself, and with the polychrome enamel of the pansies, but above all come with the breeze still cool from the last frosts, that will open the petals, for the two butterflies that have waited at its door since morning, of the first Jerusalem rose."

At home they wondered if they still ought to send me to have dinner with M. Legrandin even so. But my grandmother refused to believe he had been impolite. "Even you admit that he goes about dressed in very simple clothes, hardly those of a man of high society." She declared that in any case, and at the very worst, if he had been, it was better to appear not to have noticed. In fact, my father himself, though he was the one most irritated by Legrandin's attitude, may still have harbored a last doubt as to what it meant. It was like any attitude or action that reveals a person's deep and hidden character: it has no connection with anything he has said before, we cannot seek confirmation from the culprit's testimony for he will not confess; we are reduced to the testimony of our own senses concerning which we wonder, confronting this isolated and incoherent memory, if they were not the victims of an illusion; so that these attitudes, the only ones of any importance, often leave us with some doubts.

I had dinner with Legrandin on his terrace; the moon was shining: "This silence has a nice quality, does it not?" he said to me; "for wounded hearts such as mine, a novelist whom you will read later asserts that the only fit companions are shadow and silence.³⁶ And you know, my child, in life there comes a time, still quite remote for you, when our weary eyes can tolerate only one light, that which a lovely night like this prepares and distills from the darkness, when our ears cannot listen to any other music but that which is played by the moonlight on the flute of silence." I was listening to M. Legrandin's words, which always seemed to me so pleasant; but disturbed by the memory

of a woman I had seen recently for the first time, and thinking, now that I knew Legrandin was friends with several of the prominent local aristocracy, that perhaps he knew this one, plucking up my courage I said to him: "Monsieur, do you know the lady . . . the ladies of Guermantes?," happy too that in pronouncing this name I was assuming a sort of power over it, by the mere fact of bringing it out of my day-dreams and giving it an objective existence in the world of sound.

But at the name of Guermantes, I saw a little brown notch appear in the center of each of our friend's blue eyes as if they had been stabbed by invisible pinpoints, while the rest of the pupil reacted by secreting floods of azure. The arc of his eyelids darkened and drooped. And his mouth, marked by a bitter fold, but recovering more quickly, smiled while his eyes remained sorrowful, like the eyes of a handsome martyr whose body bristles with arrows: "No, I don't know them," he said, but instead of giving so simple a piece of information, so unsurprising an answer in the natural, everyday tone that would have been appropriate, he declaimed it stressing each word, bending forward, nodding his head, with the insistence one imparts, so as to be believed, to an improbable statement—as though the fact that he did not know the Guermantes could be due only to a curious accident of fate—and also with the expressive force of a person who, unable to keep silent about a situation that is painful to him, prefers to proclaim it so as to give others the idea that the confession he is making is one that causes him no embarrassment, is easy, pleasant, spontaneous, that the situation itself—the absence of relations with the Guermantes—could well have been, not suffered, but desired by him, could result from some family tradition, moral principle, or mystical vow specifically forbidding him any association with the Guermantes. "No," he went on, explaining his own intonation by what he said, "no, I don't know them, I've never wanted to, I've always made a point of safeguarding my complete independence; deep down I'm a Jacobin⁷ in my thinking, you know. Many people have tried to save me, they told me I was wrong not to go to Guermantes, that I was making myself look like a savage, an old bear. But that's not the sort of reputation that dismays me, it's

so very true! Deep down, I care for nothing in the world now but a few churches, two or three books, scarcely more paintings, and the light of the moon when the breeze of your youth brings me the fragrance of the flower beds that my old eyes can no longer distinguish." I did not understand very clearly why, in order not to go to the houses of people whom one did not know, it was necessary to cling to one's independence, or how this might make one look like a savage or a bear. But what I did understand was that Legrandin was not being completely truthful when he said he cared only for churches, moonlight, and youth; he cared very much for the people from the châteaux and in their presence was overcome by so great a fear of displeasing them that he did not dare let them see that some of his friends were bourgeois people, sons of notaries or stockbrokers, preferring, if the truth was to be revealed, that it be revealed in his absence, far away from him and "by default"; he was a snob. Certainly he never said any of this in the language my family and I loved so much. And if I asked: "Do you know the Guermantes?," Legrandin the talker would answer: "No, I have never wanted to know them." Unfortunately, he was not the first Legrandin to answer, but the second, because another Legrandin whom he kept carefully concealed deep inside himself, whom he did not exhibit because that Legrandin knew some compromising stories about our own, about his snobbishness, had already answered by the wound in his eyes, by the rictus of his mouth, by the excessive gravity in the tone of his answer, by the thousand arrows with which our own Legrandin had been instantly larded, languishing like a Saint Sebastian of snobbishness: "Alas! How you hurt me! No, I don't know the Guermantes, do not reawaken the great sorrow of my life." And since this troublemaker Legrandin, this blackmailer Legrandin, though he did not have the other's pretty language, had the infinitely quicker speech consisting of what are called "reflexes," when Legrandin the talker wished to impose silence on him, the other had already spoken, and though our friend might grieve over the poor impression that his *alter ego's* revelations must have produced, he could only attempt to mitigate it.

And this certainly does not mean that M. Legrandin was not sincere when he ranted against snobs. He could not be aware, at least from his own knowledge, that he was one, since we are familiar only with the passions of others, and what we come to know about our own, we have been able to learn only from them. Upon ourselves they act only secondarily, by way of our imagination, which substitutes for our primary motives alternative motives that are more seemly. It was never Legrandin's snobbishness that advised him to pay frequent visits to a duchess. It would instruct Legrandin's imagination to make that duchess appear to him as being endowed with all the graces. Legrandin would become acquainted with the duchess, filled with esteem for himself because he was yielding to attractions of wit and virtue unknown to vile snobs. Only other people were aware that he was one himself; for, because they were incapable of understanding the intermediary work of his imagination, they saw, coupled together, Legrandin's social activity and its primary cause.

Now we at home no longer had any illusions about M. Legrandin, and our contacts with him became less frequent. Mama was infinitely amused each time she caught Legrandin in flagrante delicto in the sin that he would not confess, that he continued to call the sin without forgiveness, snobbishness. My father, on the other hand, had trouble accepting Legrandin's manifestations of disdain with such detachment and good humor; and when, one year, they thought of sending me to spend my summer vacation at Balbec with my grandmother, he said: "I absolutely must let Legrandin know that you'll be going to Balbec, to see if he offers to put you in touch with his sister. He probably doesn't remember telling us she lives only a mile from there." My grandmother, who believed that when staying at a seaside resort one should be on the beach from morning to evening inhaling the salt and that one ought not to know anyone thereabouts because visits and excursions were only so much time taken from the sea air, asked on the contrary that we not speak about our plans to Legrandin, as she could already see his sister, Mme. de Cambremer, arriving at the hotel just when we were about to go fishing and forcing us to remain confined indoors entertaining her. But Mama laughed at her fears,

thinking privately that the danger was not so great, that Legrandin would not be in such a hurry to put us in touch with his sister. Yet no one had to mention Balbec to him, it was Legrandin himself who, never suspecting that we had any intention of going to those parts, walked into the trap of his own accord one evening when we met him on the banks of the Vivonne.

"There are very lovely violets and blues in the clouds this evening, are there not, my friend," he said to my father, "a blue, especially, more flowery than airy, the blue of a cineraria, which is surprising in the sky. And that little pink cloud, too, has it not the tint of some flower, a sweet william or hydrangea? Nowhere, perhaps, but on the Channel, between Normandy and Brittany, have I made richer observations of this sort of plant kingdom of the atmosphere. There, near Balbec, near those wild areas, there is a little bay, charmingly gentle, where the sunsets of the Auge country, the red and gold sunsets which I do not in the least disdain, let it be said, are characterless, insignificant; but in that damp and mild atmosphere, in the evening, you will see blooming in the space of a few instants celestial bouquets of blue and pink which are incomparable and often last for hours before they fade. There are others that lose their blossoms immediately, and then it is even lovelier to see the entire sky strewn with the scattering of their countless petals, sulfur or pink. In this bay, which they call Opal Bay, the golden beaches seem gentler still because they are chained like blond Andromedas³⁸ to those terrible rocks of the nearby coast, to that gloomy shore, famed for the number of its wrecks, where every winter many a vessel is lost to the perils of the sea. Balbec! The most ancient geological skeleton of our soil, truly Ar-mor, the Sea,³⁹ the land's end, the accursed region which Anatole France⁴⁰—an enchanter whom our little friend here ought to read—has painted so well, under its eternal fogs, like the veritable country of the Cimmerians in the *Odyssey*.⁴¹ From Balbec especially, where they are already building hotels, superimposing them upon the ancient and charming soil which they cannot change, what a delight it is to go for excursions just a step or two away through regions so primitive and so lovely!"

"Oh, do you know someone in Balbec?" asked my father. "As it

happens, this boy of ours will be spending two months there with his grandmother, and my wife, too, perhaps."

Legrandin, caught unprepared by this question at a moment when he was looking directly at my father, could not turn his eyes away, but fastening them more intensely second by second—and at the same time smiling sadly—to the eyes of his questioner, with an expression of friendliness and frankness and of not being afraid to look him full in the face, he seemed to have gone right through that face as though it had become transparent, and to be seeing at that moment, far beyond and behind it, a bright and colorful cloud that created a mental alibi for him and would allow him to prove that at the moment when he had been asked if he knew someone at Balbec, he was thinking of something else and had not heard the question. Usually, such an expression makes the other person say: "What are you thinking about?" But my father, curious, irritated, and cruel, said again:

"You know Balbec so well—do you have friends in the area?"

In a last desperate effort, Legrandin's smiling gaze reached its highest degree of tenderness, vagueness, sincerity, and distraction, but, no doubt thinking there was nothing else he could do but answer, he said to us:

"I have friends wherever there are companies of trees, wounded but not vanquished, which huddle together with touching obstinacy to implore an inclement and pitiless sky."

"That was not what I meant," interrupted my father, as obstinate as the trees and as pitiless as the sky. "In case something should happen to my mother-in-law and she needed to feel she was not all alone in an out-of-the-way place, I was asking if you knew anyone there?"

"There as everywhere, I know everyone and I know no one," answered Legrandin, who was not going to give in so quickly; "I know a great deal about things and very little about people. But in that place the very things themselves seem to be people, rare people, delicate in their very essence, disappointed by life. Sometimes it is a manor house that you encounter on a cliff, by the side of a road, where it has stopped to point its sorrow toward the still pink evening where the golden moon rises while the returning boats, fluting the dappled

water, hoist the flame of evening on their masts and carry its colors; sometimes it is a simple solitary house, rather ugly, its expression shy but romantic, which conceals from all eyes some imperishable secret of happiness and disenchantment. This country which is so unreal," he added with a Machiavellian delicacy, "this country of pure fiction makes bad reading for a child, and would certainly not be what I would select and recommend for my little friend, already so inclined to sadness, for his heart, already so predisposed. A climate of amorous confession or vain regret may be suitable for a disillusioned old man like me, but they are always unhealthy for a temperament as yet unformed. Please believe me," he went on insistently, "the waters of that bay, already half Breton, may act as a sedative, though a questionable one, on a heart like mine that is no longer undamaged, on a heart for whose wounds there is no longer any compensation. They are contraindicated at your age, my boy. Good night, neighbors," he added, leaving us with that evasive abruptness which was his habit and, turning back toward us with a doctor's raised finger, he summed up his advice: "No Balbec before the age of fifty, and even then it must depend on the state of the heart," he called to us.

Although my father talked to him about this again in our subsequent encounters, torturing him with questions, it was a useless effort: like that erudite crook⁴² who used to employ, in fabricating false palimpsests, a labor and a scholarship a hundredth part of which would have been enough to guarantee him a more lucrative, but honorable position, M. Legrandin, had we insisted further, would have ended by constructing a whole system of landscape ethics and a celestial geography of Lower Normandy, sooner than admit to us that his own sister lived a mile from Balbec and be obliged to offer us a letter of introduction which would not have been such an object of terror for him had he been absolutely certain—as in fact he should have been given his experience of my grandmother's character—that we would not have taken advantage of it.

We always returned in good time from our walks so that we could pay a visit to my aunt Léonie before dinner. At the beginning of the season,

when the days ended early, when we reached the rue du Saint-Esprit there was still a reflection of the sunset on the windowpanes of the house and a band of crimson deep in the timbers of the Calvary, which was reflected farther off in the pool, a red which, often accompanied by a rather brisk chill, was associated in my mind with the red of the fire over which was roasting the chicken that would allow the poetic pleasure given me by the walk to be succeeded by the pleasure of good eating, warmth, and rest. But in the summer, when we returned, the sun was not yet setting; and during the visit we made to my aunt Léonie, its light, lowering and touching the window, had stopped between the great curtains and the curtain loops, divided, ramified, filtered, and, encrusting the lemon wood of the chest of drawers with little pieces of gold, illuminated the room obliquely with the delicacy it acquires in the forest undergrowth. But on certain very rare days, when we returned, the chest had lost its momentary encrustations long before, when we reached the rue du Saint-Esprit there was no reflection of the sunset spread over the windowpanes, and the pool at the foot of the Calvary had lost its red, sometimes it was already the color of opal and a long ray of moonlight that grew broader and broader and broke over all the wrinkles of the water traversed it entirely. Then, as we came near the house, we would see a figure on the doorstep and Mama would say to me:

"Dear me! There's Françoise, watching for us. Your aunt must be worried; that means we're late."

And, without taking the time to remove our things, we would quickly go up to my aunt Léonie's room to reassure her and show her that, contrary to what she was already imagining, nothing had happened to us, but that we had gone the "Guermantes way" and, bless us, when one took that walk, my aunt knew very well one could never be sure what time one would be back.

"There, Françoise," said my aunt, "what did I tell you? Didn't I say they must have gone the Guermantes way? Heavens! How hungry they must be! And your leg of lamb all dried up after waiting so long. What a time to be getting back! Well, imagine that, you went the Guermantes way!"

"But I thought you knew, Léonie," said Mama. "I thought Françoise saw us go out the little gate from the kitchen garden."

For in the environs of Combray there were two "ways" which one could go for a walk, in such opposite directions that in fact we left our house by different doors when we wanted to go one way or the other: the Méséglise-la-Vineuse way, which we also called the way by Swann's because we passed in front of M. Swann's estate when we went in that direction, and the Guermantes way. About Méséglise-la-Vineuse, to tell the truth, I never knew anything but the "way" and some strangers who used to come and stroll around Combray on a Sunday, people whom, this time, even my aunt, along with all the rest of us, "did not know at all" and whom because of this we assumed to be "people who must have come from Méséglise." As for Guermantes, I was to know more about it one day, but only much later; and during the whole of my adolescence, if for me Méséglise was something as inaccessible as the horizon, concealed from view, however far we went, by the folds of a landscape that already no longer resembled the landscape of Combray, Guermantes, on the other hand, appeared to me only as the terminus, more ideal than real, of its own "way," a sort of abstract geographical expression like the line of the equator, like the pole, like the Orient. So, "to set off toward Guermantes" in order to go to Méséglise, or the opposite, would have seemed to me an expression as devoid of meaning as to set off toward the east in order to go west. Since my father always talked about the Méséglise way as the most beautiful view of the plain that he knew and about the Guermantes way as a typical river landscape, I gave them, conceiving of them thus as two entities, the cohesion, the unity that belong only to the creations of our mind; the smallest part of either of them seemed to me precious and to manifest their particular excellence, while compared to them, before one reached the sacred ground of one or the other, the purely material paths in the midst of which they were set down as the ideal view of the plain and the ideal river landscape were no more worth the trouble of looking at than, for the spectator infatuated with the art of drama, the little streets next to a theater. But most importantly I set between them, much

more than their distances in miles, the distance that lay between the two parts of my brain where I thought about them, one of those distances of the mind which not only moves things away from each other, but separates them and puts them on different planes. And that demarcation was made even more absolute because our habit of never going both ways on the same day, in a single walk, but one time the Méséglise way, one time the Guermantes way, shut them off, so to speak, far apart from each other, unknowable by each other, in the sealed and uncommunicating vessels of different afternoons.

When we wanted to go in the direction of Méséglise, we would go out (not too early, and even if the sky was overcast, because the walk was not very long and did not take us too far away) as though we were going anywhere at all, through the front door of my aunt's house on the rue du Saint-Esprit. We would be greeted by the gunsmith, we would drop our letters in the box, we would tell Théodore, from Françoise, as we passed, that she had no more oil or coffee, and we would leave town by the lane that ran along the white gate of M. Swann's park. Before reaching it, we would meet the smell of his lilacs, coming out to greet the strangers. From among the fresh green little hearts of their leaves, the flowers would curiously lift above the gate of the park their tufts of mauve or white feathers, glazed, even in the shade, by the sun in which they had bathed. A few, half hidden by the little tiled lodge called the Archers' House, where the caretaker lived, overtopped its Gothic gable with their pink minarets. The Nymphs of Spring would have seemed vulgar compared to these young houris, which preserved within this French garden the pure and vivid tones of Persian miniatures. Despite my desire to entwine their supple waists and draw down to me the starry curls of their fragrant heads, we would pass by without stopping because my parents had ceased to visit Tansonville since Swann's marriage, and, so as not to appear to be looking into the park, instead of taking the lane that goes along its fence and climbs directly up to the fields, we would take another that leads to the same place, but obliquely, and that brought us out too far away. One day, my grandfather said to my father:

"Don't you remember Swann's telling us yesterday that his wife and daughter were going off to Rheims and that he would take the opportunity to spend a day in Paris? We could go along by the park, since the ladies aren't there; it would make the walk that much shorter for us."

We stopped for a moment in front of the gate. Lilac time was nearly over; a few, still, poured forth in tall mauve chandeliers the delicate bubbles of their flowers, but in many places among the leaves where only a week before they had still been breaking in waves of fragrant foam, a hollow scum now withered, shrunken and dark, dry and odorless. My grandfather pointed out to my father how the look of the place had remained the same, and how it had changed, since the walk he had taken with M. Swann the day of his wife's death, and he used the occasion to tell the story of that walk one more time.

In front of us, an avenue bordered by nasturtiums climbed in full sun toward the house. To the right, the park extended over level ground. Darkened by the shade of the tall trees that surrounded it, an ornamental pond had been dug by Swann's parents; but even in his most artificial creations, man is still working upon nature; certain places will always impose their own particular empire on their surroundings, sport their immemorial insignia in the middle of a park just as they would have done far from any human intervention, in a solitude which returns to surround them wherever they are, arising from the exigencies of the position they occupy and superimposed on the work of human hands. So it was that, at the foot of the path that overlooked the artificial pond, there might be seen in its two rows woven of forget-me-nots and periwinkles, a natural crown, delicate and blue, encircling the chiaroscuro brow of water, and so it was that the sword lily, bending its blades with a regal abandon, extended over the eupatorium and wet-footed frogbit the ragged fleurs-de-lis, violet and yellow, of its lacustrine scepter.

Mlle. Swann's departure, which—by taking from me the terrible chance that I might see her appear on a path, that I might be recognized and scorned by the privileged little girl who had Bergotte for a

friend and went to visit cathedrals with him—made the contemplation of Tansonville a matter of indifference to me the first time it was allowed me, seemed on the contrary to add to that estate, in the eyes of my grandfather and my father, certain accommodations, a transitory charm, and, as does for an excursion into mountain country the absence of any cloud, to make that day exceptionally favorable for a walk in that direction; I would have liked their calculations to be foiled, a miracle to make Mlle. Swann appear with her father, so close to us that we would not have time to avoid her and would be obliged to make her acquaintance. And so, when suddenly I saw on the grass, like a sign of her possible presence, a creel sitting forgotten next to a line whose bob was floating on the water, I hastened to turn my father's and grandfather's eyes away in another direction. In any case, since Swann had told us it was bad of him to go off because he had family at the house just now, the line could belong to one of his guests. We heard no sound of steps on the avenues. Dividing the height of an unknown tree, an invisible bird, contriving to make the day seem short, explored the surrounding solitude with one prolonged note, but received from it a retort so unanimous, a repercussion so redoubled by silence and immobility, that one felt it had arrested forever that moment which it had been trying to make pass more quickly. The light fell so implacably from the still sky that one would have wanted to elude its attention, and the dormant water itself, whose sleep was perpetually irritated by insects, dreaming no doubt of some imaginary maelstrom, increased the disturbance into which I had been plunged by the sight of the cork float, by appearing to draw it at full speed over the silent reaches of the reflected sky; almost vertical, it seemed about to dive and I was already wondering if, quite beyond my desire to know her and my fear of knowing her, I did not have a duty to warn Mlle. Swann that the fish was biting—when I had to run to rejoin my father and grandfather, who were calling me, surprised that I had not followed them along the little lane they had already entered which leads up to the fields. I found it all humming with the smell of the hawthorns. The hedge formed a series of chapels that disappeared under the litter of their flowers, heaped

into wayside altars; below them, the sun was laying down a grid of brightness on the ground as if it had just passed through a stained-glass window; their perfume spread as unctuous, as delimited in its form as if I were standing before the altar of the Virgin, and the flowers, themselves adorned also, each held out with a distracted air its sparkling bunch of stamens, delicate radiating ribs in the flamboyant style like those which, in the church, perforated the balustrade of the rood screen or the mullions of the window and blossomed out into the white flesh of a strawberry flower. How naive and folksy by comparison would seem the sweetbriers which, in a few weeks' time, would also climb in full sun the same country lane, in the smooth silk of their blushing bodices undone by a breath.

But though I remained there in front of the hawthorns, breathing in, bringing into the presence of my thoughts, which did not know what to do with it, then losing and finding again their invisible and unchanging smell, absorbing myself in the rhythm that tossed their flowers here and there with youthful high spirits and at unexpected intervals like certain intervals in music, they offered me the same charm endlessly and with an inexhaustible profusion, but without letting me study it more deeply, like the melodies you replay a hundred times in succession without descending further into their secrets. I turned away from them for a moment, to accost them again with renewed strength. I pursued, all the way onto the embankment behind the hedge that rose steeply toward the fields, some lost poppy, a few cornflowers which had lazily stayed behind, which decorated it here and there with their flower heads like the border of a tapestry on which there appears, thinly scattered, the rustic motif that will dominate the panel; infrequent still, spaced apart like the isolated houses that announce the approach of a village, they announced to me the immense expanse where the wheat breaks in waves, where the clouds fleece, and the sight of a single poppy hoisting its red flame to the top of its ropes and whipping it in the wind above its greasy black buoy made my heart pound like the heart of a traveler who spies on a lowland a first beached boat being repaired by a caulker and, before catching sight of it, cries out: "The Sea!"

Then I came back to stand in front of the hawthorns as you do in front of those masterpieces which, you think, you will be able to see more clearly when you have stopped looking at them for a moment, but although I formed a screen for myself with my hands so that I would have only them before my eyes, the feeling they awakened in me remained obscure and vague, seeking in vain to detach itself, to come and adhere to their flowers. They did not help me to clarify it, and I could not ask other flowers to satisfy it. Then, filling me with the joy we feel when we see a work by our favorite painter that is different from the ones we knew, or if someone takes us up to a painting of which we had until then seen only a pencil sketch, if a piece heard only on the piano appears to us later clothed in the colors of the orchestra, my grandfather, calling me and pointing to the Tansonville hedge, said to me: "You love hawthorns—just look at this pink one. Isn't it lovely!" Indeed it was a hawthorn, but a pink hawthorn, even more beautiful than the white ones. It, too, wore finery for a holiday—for the only true holidays, which are the religious holidays, since they are not assigned by some fortuitous whim, as are the secular holidays, to an ordinary day that is not especially intended for them, that has nothing essentially festal about it—but their finery was even more opulent, for the flowers, attached to the branch one above another, in such a way as to leave no spot that was not decorated, like pom-poms garlanding a rococo shepherd's crook, were "in color," and consequently of a superior quality according to the aesthetics of Combray, if one judged it by the scale of prices in "the store" in the square, or at Camus's, where the more expensive sponge cakes were the pink ones. Even I preferred cream cheese when it was pink, when I had been allowed to crush strawberries in it. And these flowers had chosen precisely the color of an edible thing, or of a delicate embellishment to an outfit for an important holiday, one of those colors which, because they offer children the reason for their superiority, seem most obviously beautiful to the eyes of children, and for that reason will always seem more vivid and more natural to them than the other tints, even after the children have learned that they did not promise anything for the appetite and had not been chosen by the dressmaker. And cer-

tainly, I had felt at once, as I had felt in front of the white hawthorns but with more wonder, that it was in no artificial manner, by no device of human fabrication that the festive intention of the flowers was expressed, but that nature had spontaneously expressed it with the naïveté of a village shopkeeper laboring over her wayside altar, by overloading the shrub with these rosettes which were too delicate in their color and provincially pompadour in their style. At the tops of the branches, like those little rosebushes, their pots hidden in lace paper, whose thin spindles radiated from the altar on the major feast days, teemed à thousand little buds of a paler tint which revealed, when they began to open, as though at the bottom of a cup of pink marble, reds of a bloody tinge, and expressed even more than the flowers the particular, irresistible essence of the hawthorn which, wherever it budded, wherever it was about to flower, could do so only in pink. Inserted into the hedge, but as different from it as a young girl in a party dress among people in everyday clothes who are staying at home, the shrub was all ready for Mary's month, and seemed to form a part of it already, shining there, smiling in its fresh pink outfit, catholic and delicious.

Through the hedge we could see within the park an avenue edged with jasmines, pansies, and verbenas between which stocks opened their fresh purses, of a pink as fragrant and faded as an old piece of cordovan leather, while a long green-painted watering hose, uncoiling its loops over the gravel, sent up at each of the points where it was punctured, over the flowers whose fragrances it imbibed, the prismatic vertical fan of its multicolored droplets. Suddenly I stopped, I could not move, as happens when something we see does not merely address our eyes, but requires a deeper kind of perception and possesses our entire being. A little girl with reddish-blond hair, who appeared to be coming back from a walk and held a gardening spade in her hand, was looking at us, lifting toward us a face scattered with pink freckles. Her dark eyes shone, and since I did not know then, nor have I learned since, how to reduce a strong impression to its objective elements, since I did not have enough "power of observation," as they say, to isolate the notion of their color, for a long time afterward,

whenever I thought of her again, the memory of their brilliance would immediately present itself to me as that of a vivid azure, since she was blonde: so that, perhaps if she had not had such dark eyes—which struck one so the first time one saw her—I would not have been, as I was, in love most particularly with her blue eyes.

(I looked at her, at first with the sort of gaze that is not merely the messenger of the eyes, but a window at which all the senses lean out, anxious and petrified, a gaze that would like to touch the body it is looking at, capture it, take it away and the soul along with it; then, so afraid was I that at any second my grandfather and my father, noticing the girl, would send me off, telling me to run on a little ahead of them, with a second sort of gaze, one that was unconsciously supplicating, that tried to force her to pay attention to me, to know me! She cast her eyes forward and sideways in order to take stock of my grandfather and father, and no doubt the impression she formed of them was that we were absurd, for she turned away, and, with an indifferent and disdainful look, placed herself at an angle to spare her face from being in their field of vision; and while they, continuing to walk on without noticing her, passed beyond me, she allowed her glances to stream out at full length in my direction, without any particular expression, without appearing to see me, but with a concentration and a secret smile that I could only interpret, according to the notions of good breeding instilled in me, as a sign of insulting contempt; and at the same time her hand sketched an indecent gesture for which, when it was directed in public at a person one did not know, the little dictionary of manners I carried inside me supplied only one meaning, that of intentional insolence.)

“Gilberte, come here! What are you doing?” came the piercing, authoritarian cry of a lady in white whom I had not seen, while, at some distance from her, a gentleman dressed in twill whom I did not know stared at me with eyes that started from his head; the girl abruptly stopped smiling, took her spade, and went away without turning back toward me, with an air that was submissive, inscrutable, and sly.

So it was that this name, Gilberte, passed by close to me, given

like a talisman that might one day enable me to find this girl again whom it had just turned into a person and who, a moment before, had been merely an uncertain image. Thus it passed, spoken over the jasmines and the stocks, as sour and as cool as the drops from the green watering hose; impregnating, coloring the portion of pure air that it had crossed—and that it isolated—with the mystery of the life of the girl it designated for the happy creatures who lived, who traveled in her company; deploying under the pink thicket, at the height of my shoulder, the quintessence of their familiarity, for me so painful, with her and with the unknown territory of her life which I would never be able to enter.

For a moment (as we moved away, my grandfather murmuring: “Poor Swann, what a role they make him play: they make him leave so that she can stay there alone with her Charlus—because it was him, I recognized him! (And the little girl, mixed up in that disgraceful business!)”) the impression left in me by the despotic tone with which Gilberte’s mother had spoken to her without her answering back, by presenting her to me as someone obliged to obey another person, as not being superior to everything in the world, calmed my suffering a little, restored some of my hope, and diminished my love. But very soon that love welled up in me again like a reaction by which my humiliated heart was trying to put itself on the same level as Gilberte or bring her down to its own. I loved her, I was sorry I had not had the time or the inspiration to insult her, hurt her, and force her to remember me. I thought her so beautiful that I wished I could retrace my steps and shout at her with a shrug of my shoulders: “I think you’re ugly, I think you’re grotesque, I loathe you!” But I went away, carrying with me forever, as the first example of a type of happiness inaccessible to children of my kind because of certain laws of nature impossible to transgress, the image of a little girl with red hair, her skin scattered with pink freckles, holding a spade and smiling as she cast at me long, cunning, and inexpressive glances. And already the charm with which the incense of her name had imbued that place under the pink hawthorns where it had been heard by her and by me together

was beginning to reach, to overlay, to perfume everything that came near it, her grandparents, whom my own had had the ineffable happiness of knowing, the sublime profession of stockbroker, the harrowing neighborhood of the Champs-Élysées where she lived in Paris.

"Léonie," said my grandfather when we returned, "I wish we had had you with us this afternoon. You would not recognize Tansonville. If I had dared, I would have cut you a branch of those pink hawthorns you used to love so much." And so my grandfather told Aunt Léonie the story of our walk, either to entertain her or because they had not lost all hope of inducing her to go outdoors. For at one time she had liked that estate very much, and, too, Swann's visits had been the last she had received, when she had already closed her door to everyone else. And just as, when he now called to inquire after her (she was the only person in our house he still asked to see), she would tell them to answer him that she was tired, but that she would let him come in the next time, so she said, that evening: "Yes, someday when it's nice out, I'll take the carriage and go as far as the gate of the park." She said it sincerely. She would have liked to see Swann and Tansonville again; but this desire was enough for what strength remained to her; its fulfillment would have exceeded her strength. Sometimes the good weather restored a little of her energy, she would get up, get dressed; the fatigue would set in before she had gone into the other room and she would ask to go back to bed. What had begun for her—earlier, merely, than it usually happens—was the great renunciation which comes with old age as it prepares for death, wraps itself in its chrysalis, and which may be observed at the ends of lives that are at all extended, even in old lovers who have loved each other the most, even between friends bound by the closest ties of mutual sympathy, who, after a certain year, stop making the necessary journey or outing to see each other, stop writing to each other and know they will not communicate again in this world. My aunt must have known perfectly well that she would not see Swann again, that she would never again leave the house, but this final seclusion must have been made fairly comfortable to her for the very reason that, in our eyes, ought

to have made it more painful for her: it was that this seclusion was required of her by the diminution in her strength which she could observe each day and which, making each action, each movement, a cause of fatigue, if not pain, in her eyes gave inaction, isolation, silence, the restorative and blessed sweetness of repose.

My aunt did not go to see the hedge of pink hawthorns, but again and again I asked my parents if she would not go, if at one time she had often gone to Tansonville, trying to make them talk about Mlle. Swann's parents and grandparents, who seemed to me as great as gods. When I was talking with my parents, I pined from the need to hear them say that name, Swann, which had become almost mythological for me, I did not dare pronounce it myself, but I drew them onto subjects that were close to Gilberte and her family, that concerned them, in which I did not feel I was exiled too far from them; and I would suddenly compel my father, by pretending to believe, for instance, that my grandfather's official appointment had been in our family before his time, or that the hedge of pink hawthorns which my aunt Léonie wanted to see was on communal land, to correct what I had said, to say to me, as though in opposition to me, as though of his own accord: "No, that appointment belonged to *Swann's* father, that hedge is part of *Swann's* park." Then I had to catch my breath, so effectively did that name, coming to rest as it did on the spot where it was always written inside me, oppress me to the point of suffocation, that name which, at the moment I heard it, seemed to me more massive than any other name because it was heavy with all the times I had uttered it beforehand in my mind. It gave me a pleasure that I was embarrassed at having dared to demand from my parents, because that pleasure was so great that it must have required considerable effort on their part to procure it for me, and without compensation, since it was not a pleasure for them. And so I would turn the conversation in another direction out of discretion. Out of compunction, too. All the odd allurements that I invested in this name Swann I would hear in it again when they pronounced it. Then it would suddenly seem to me that my parents could not fail to experience these

allurements, that they must share my point of view, that they in their turn perceived, forgave, embraced my dreams, and I was unhappy, as if I had defeated them and corrupted them.

That year, when my parents had decided which day we would be returning to Paris, a little earlier than usual, on the morning of our departure, after they had had my hair curled for a photograph, and carefully placed on my head a hat I had never worn before and dressed me in a quilted velvet coat, after looking for me everywhere, my mother found me in tears on the steep little path beside Tansonville, saying good-bye to the hawthorns, putting my arms around the prickly branches, and, like the princess in the tragedy burdened by vain ornaments, ungrateful to the importunate hand that with such care had gathered up my hair in curls across my brow,⁴³ trampling underfoot my torn-out curl papers and my new hat. My mother was not moved by my tears, but she could not suppress a cry at the sight of my crushed hat and ruined coat. I did not hear it: "Oh, my poor little hawthorns," I said, weeping, "you're not the ones trying to make me unhappy, you aren't forcing me to leave. You've never hurt me! So I will always love you." And drying my tears, I promised them that when I was grown up I would not let my life be like the senseless lives of other men and that even in Paris, on spring days, instead of paying calls and listening to silly talk, I would go out into the countryside to see the first hawthorns.

Once in the fields, we did not leave them again during the rest of our walk toward Méséglise. They were perpetually crossed, as though by an invisible vagabond, by the wind that was for me the presiding spirit of Combray. Each year, the day we arrived, in order to feel that I was really in Combray, I would go up to find it again where it ran along the furrows and made me run after it. We always had the wind beside us when we went the Méséglise way, over that cambered plain where for miles it encounters no rise or fall in the land. I knew that Mlle. Swann often went to Laon to spend a few days, and even though it was several miles away, since the distance was compensated for by the absence of any obstacle, when, on hot afternoons, I saw a

single gust of wind, coming from the farthest horizon, first bend the most distant wheat, then roll like a wave through all that vast expanse and come to lie down murmuring and warm among the sainfoin and clover at my feet, this plain which was shared by us both seemed to bring us together, join us, and I would imagine that this breath of wind had passed close beside her, that what it whispered to me was some message from her though I could not understand it, and I would kiss it as it went by. On the left was a village called Champieu (*Campus pagani*, according to the curé). To the right, you could see beyond the wheat the two chiseled rustic spires of Saint-André-des-Champs, themselves as tapering, scaly, imbricated, checkered, yellowing, and granulose as two spikes of wheat.

At symmetrical intervals, in the midst of the inimitable ornamentation of their leaves, which cannot be confused with the leaves of any other fruit tree, the apple trees opened their broad petals of white satin or dangled the timid bouquets of their reddening buds. It was on the Méséglise way that I first noticed the round shadow that apple trees make on the sunny earth and those silks of impalpable gold which the sunset weaves obliquely under the leaves, and which I saw my father interrupt with his stick without ever deflecting them.

Sometimes in the afternoon sky the moon would pass white as a cloud, furtive, lusterless, like an actress who does not have to perform yet and who, from the audience, in street clothes, watches the other actors for a moment, making herself inconspicuous, not wanting anyone to pay attention to her. I liked finding its image again in paintings and books, but these works of art were quite different—at least during the early years, before Bloch accustomed my eyes and my mind to subtler harmonies—from those in which the moon would seem beautiful to me today and in which I would not have recognized it then. It might be, for example, some novel by Saintine,⁴⁴ some landscape by Gleyre⁴⁵ in which it stands out distinctly against the sky in the form of a silver sickle, one of those works which were naively incomplete, like my own impressions, and which it angered my grandmother's sisters to see me enjoy. They thought that one ought to present to children, and that

children showed good taste in enjoying right from the start, those works of art which, once one has reached maturity, one will admire forever after. The fact is that they probably regarded aesthetic merits as material objects which an open eye could not help perceiving, without one's needing to ripen equivalents of them slowly in one's own heart.

It was along the Méséglise way, at Montjouvain, a house situated at the edge of a large pond and backed up against a brush-covered hillock, that M. Vinteuil lived. And so we often met his daughter on the road driving a cabriolet at top speed. One year, she was not alone when we met her, and from then on she was always accompanied by an older friend, a woman who had a bad reputation in the area and who one day moved permanently into Montjouvain. People said: "Poor M. Vinteuil must be blind with love not to realize what kind of rumors are going around—a man who is shocked by a single remark *out of place* letting his daughter bring a woman like that to live under his roof. He says she's a most superior woman, with a good heart, and that she would have had an extraordinary aptitude for music if she had cultivated it. He can be sure she's not dabbling in music when she's with his daughter." M. Vinteuil did say this; and in fact it is remarkable how a person always inspires admiration for her moral qualities in the family of the person with whom she is having carnal relations. Physical love, so unfairly disparaged, compels people to manifest the very smallest particles they possess of goodness, of self-abnegation, so much so that these particles glow even in the eyes of those immediately surrounding them. Dr. Percepied, whose loud voice and thick eyebrows permitted him to play to his heart's content the role of the villain to which his general appearance was not suited, without in the least compromising his unshakable and undeserved reputation as a kindly old curmudgeon, was capable of making the curé and everyone else laugh until they cried by saying gruffly: "Well, now! It seems young Mlle. Vinteuil is making music with her friend. You seem surprised. Now I don't know. It was old Vinteuil who told me just yesterday. After all, the girl certainly has a right to enjoy her music. It's not for me to go against a child's artistic vocation. Nor Vinteuil either, it seems. And then he himself plays music with his

daughter's friend, as well. Heaven help us! There's certainly a good deal of music-making going on in that establishment. Well, why are you laughing? They play too much music, those people. The other day I met old Vinteuil near the cemetery. He was ready to drop."

For those like us who saw M. Vinteuil at that time avoiding people he knew, turning away when he saw them, aging in a few months, immersing himself in his sorrow, becoming incapable of any effort whose direct goal was not his daughter's happiness, spending whole days before the grave of his wife—it would have been difficult not to realize that he was dying of sorrow, or to imagine that he was not aware of the talk that was going around. He knew about it, maybe he even believed it. Perhaps there exists no one, however virtuous he may be, who may not be led one day by the complexity of his circumstances to live on familiar terms with the vice he condemns most expressly—without his fully recognizing it, moreover, in the disguise of particular details that it assumes in order to come into contact with him in that way and make him suffer: strange remarks, an inexplicable attitude, one evening, on the part of someone whom he has otherwise so many reasons for liking. But a man like M. Vinteuil must have suffered much more than most in resigning himself to one of those situations which are wrongly believed to be the exclusive prerogative of the bohemian life: they occur whenever a vice which nature itself plants in a child, like the color of its eyes, sometimes merely by mingling the virtues of its father and mother, needs to reserve for itself the space and the security it requires. But the fact that M. Vinteuil perhaps knew about his daughter's behavior does not imply that his worship of her would thereby be diminished. Facts do not find their way into the world in which our beliefs reside; they did not produce our beliefs, they do not destroy them; they may inflict on them the most constant refutations without weakening them, and an avalanche of afflictions or ailments succeeding one another without interruption in a family will not make it doubt the goodness of its God or the talent of its doctor. But when M. Vinteuil thought about his daughter and himself from the point of view of society, from the point of view of their reputation, when he attempted to place himself with her in the rank

which they occupied in the general esteem, then he made this social judgment exactly as it would have been made by the most hostile inhabitant of Combray, he saw himself and his daughter in the lowest depths, and because of this his manner had recently acquired that humility, that respect for those who were above him and whom he saw from below (even if they had been well below him until then), that tendency to seek to climb back up to them, which is an almost automatic result of any downfall. One day as we were walking with Swann down a street in Combray, M. Vinteuil, who was emerging from another, found himself face-to-face with us too suddenly to have time to avoid us; and Swann, with the proud charity of a man of the world who, amid the dissolution of all his own moral prejudices, finds in another man's disgrace merely a reason for showing him a kindness whose manifestations are all the more gratifying to the self-regard of the one offering them because he feels they are so precious to the one receiving them, had conversed with M. Vinteuil for a long time, although he had never spoken to him before then, and before leaving us had asked him if he would not send his daughter to play at Tansonville someday. This was an invitation which two years before would have incensed M. Vinteuil, but which now filled him with such feelings of gratitude that he believed he was obliged by them not to have the indiscretion of accepting it. Swann's friendliness toward his daughter seemed to him in itself so honorable and so delightful a support that he thought it would perhaps be better not to make use of it, so as to have the wholly platonic pleasure of preserving it.

"What a charming man," he said, when Swann had left us, with the same enthusiastic veneration that causes bright and pretty middle-class women to be awed and entranced by a duchess, even if she is ugly and foolish. "What a charming man! How unfortunate that he should have made such an entirely inappropriate marriage!"

And then, since even the most sincere people have a streak of hypocrisy in them which makes them put to one side their opinion of a person while they are talking to him, and express it as soon as he is no longer present, my parents deplored Swann's marriage along

with M. Vinteuil in the name of principles and conventions which (by the very fact that they joined him in invoking them, as decent people of the same stamp) they seemed to be implying he had not violated at Montjouvain. M. Vinteuil did not send his daughter to Swann's house. And Swann was the first to regret it. For each time he left M. Vinteuil, he remembered that for some time now he had had a question to ask him about a person who bore the same name, a relative of his, he believed. And this time he had truly promised himself not to forget what he wanted to tell him when M. Vinteuil sent his daughter to Tansonville.

Since the walk along the Méséglise way was the shorter of the two that we took out of Combray and since, because of that, we saved it for uncertain weather, the climate along the Méséglise way was quite rainy and we would never lose sight of the skirt of the Roussainville woods, in the thickness of which we could take cover.

Often the sun would hide behind a storm cloud, distorting its oval, yellowing the edges of the cloud. The brilliance, though not the brightness, would be withdrawn from the countryside, where all life seemed suspended, while the little village of Roussainville sculpted its white rooftops in relief against the sky with an unbearable precision and finish. Nudged by a gust of wind, a crow flew up and dropped down again in the distance, and, against the whitening sky, the distant parts of the woods appeared bluer, as though painted in one of those monochromes that decorate the pier glasses of old houses.

But at other times the rain with which we had been threatened by the little hooded monk in the optician's window⁴⁶ would begin to fall; the drops of water, like migrating birds which take flight all at the same time, would descend in close ranks from the sky. They do not separate at all, they do not wander away during their rapid course, but each one keeps to its place, drawing along the one that comes after it, and the sky is more darkened by them than when the swallows leave. We would take refuge in the woods. When their flight seemed to be over, a few of them, feebler, slower, would still be arriving. But we would come back out of our shelter, because raindrops delight in

leafy branches, and, when the earth was already nearly dry again, more than one would still linger to play on the ribs of a leaf and, hanging from the tip, tranquil and sparkling in the sun, would suddenly let go, slip off, and drop from the entire height of the branch onto one's nose.

Often, too, we would go and take shelter all crowded in together with the stone saints and patriarchs in the porch of Saint-André-des-Champs. How French that church was! Above the door, the saints, the knight-kings with fleurs-de-lis in their hands, wedding and funeral scenes, were depicted as they might have been in Françoise's soul. The sculptor had also narrated certain anecdotes involving Aristotle and Virgil just as Françoise in her kitchen was apt to talk about Saint Louis as if she had known him personally, usually in order to put my grandparents to shame by comparison since they were less "fair-minded." One felt that the notions which the medieval artist and the medieval countrywoman (living on into the nineteenth century) had acquired of ancient or Christian history, and which were distinguished by containing as much inaccuracy as simple good-heartedness, were derived not from books, but from a tradition that was at once very old and very direct, uninterrupted, oral, deformed, hardly recognizable, and alive. Another Combray character whom I also recognized, potential and prophesied, in the Gothic sculpture of Saint-André-des-Champs, was young Théodore, the delivery boy from Camus's grocery. Françoise, in fact, felt so clearly that he was a fellow countryman and a contemporary that when my aunt Léonie was too sick for Françoise by herself to turn her over in bed, or carry her to the armchair, instead of letting the kitchen maid come up and get into my aunt's "good books" she would send for Théodore. Now this boy, who was taken, and rightly, for such a ne'er-do-well, was so filled with the same spirit that had decorated Saint-André-des-Champs and especially with the feelings of respect that Françoise believed were owed to "poor sick folk," to "her poor mistress," that as he raised my aunt's head on her pillow he had the same naive and zealous expression as the little angels in the bas-reliefs, crowding around the fainting Virgin with tapers in their hands, as if the faces of sculpted stone, bare and gray as the woods in winter, were only

a deep sleep, a reserve, about to blossom into life again in numberless common faces, reverent and crafty like Théodore's, illuminated with the redness of a ripe apple. No longer affixed to the stone like those little angels, but detached from the porch, of larger than human size, standing on a pedestal as though on a stool that spared her putting her feet on the damp ground, one saint had the full cheeks, the firm breast swelling the folds of the cloth like a cluster of ripe grapes in a bag, the narrow forehead, the short and saucy nose, the deep-set eyes, the able-bodied, impassive, and courageous demeanor of the countrywomen of the region. This resemblance, which insinuated into the statue a sweetness I had not looked for in it, was often authenticated by some girl from the fields, who, like us, had come to take cover, and whose presence, like the presence of the leaves of a climbing plant that has grown up next to some sculpted leaves, seemed intended to allow us, by confronting it with nature, to judge the truthfulness of the work of art. Before us in the distance, a promised land or an accursed one, Roussainville, within whose walls I never penetrated, was now, when the rain had already stopped for us, continuing to be punished like a biblical village by all the cudgels of the storm, which beat down obliquely on the dwellings of its inhabitants, or else had already been pardoned by God the Father, who caused to descend upon it, unequal in length, like the rays of an altar monstrance, the frayed golden shafts of his reappearing sun.

Sometimes the weather was completely spoiled, we had to go back home and stay shut up in the house. Here and there, far off in the countryside, which because of the dark and the wet resembled the sea, a few isolated houses, clinging to the side of a hill plunged in watery night, shone forth like little boats that have folded their sails and stand motionless out at sea all night long. But what did the rain matter, what did the storm matter! In summer, bad weather is only a passing, superficial mood on the part of the steady, underlying good weather, which is very different from the fluid and unstable good weather of winter, and having settled on the earth, where it has taken solid form in dense branches of leaves on which the rain may drip without compromising the resistance of their permanent joy, has

hoisted for the whole season, even in the streets of the village, on the walls of the houses and gardens, its flags of white or violet silk. Sitting in the little drawing room, where I waited for the dinner hour while I read, I would hear the water dripping from our chestnut trees, but I knew that the downpour was only varnishing their leaves and that they would promise to stay there, like pledges of summer, all the rainy night, ensuring that the good weather would continue; that rain as it might, tomorrow little heart-shaped leaves would undulate just as numerous above the white gate of Tansonville; and it was without sadness that I saw the poplar in the rue des Perchamps meet the storm praying and bowing in despair; it was without sadness that I heard at the back of the garden the last rolls of thunder warbling among the lilacs.

If the weather was bad in the morning, my parents would give up the walk and I would not go out. But I later acquired the habit of going out to walk alone on those days along the Méséglise-la-Vineuse way, during the autumn in which we had to come to Combray to settle my aunt Léonie's estate, because she had at last died, proving correct both those who had claimed that her enfeebling regimen would end by killing her, and those who had always maintained that she suffered from an illness that was not imaginary but organic, to the evidence of which the skeptics would certainly be obliged to yield when she succumbed to it; and causing no great suffering by her death except to a single person, but to that one, a grief that was savage. During the two weeks of my aunt's final illness, Françoise did not leave her for an instant, did not undress, did not allow anyone else to care for her in any way, and did not leave her body until it was buried. Then we realized that the kind of dread in which Françoise had lived, of my aunt's ill-natured remarks, suspicions, angry moods, had developed a feeling in her that we had taken for hatred and that was actually veneration and love. Her true mistress, whose decisions were impossible to foresee, whose ruses were difficult to foil, whose good heart was easy to touch, her sovereign, her mysterious and all-powerful monarch, was no more. Next to her we counted for very little. The time was by now far in the past when, as we began coming to

spend our holidays at Combray, we possessed as much prestige as my aunt in Françoise's eyes. That autumn, completely occupied as they were with the formalities that had to be observed, the interviews with notaries and tenants, my parents, having scarcely any time to go on excursions, which the weather frustrated in any case, fell into the habit of letting me go for walks without them along the Méséglise way, wrapped in a great plaid that protected me from the rain and that I threw over my shoulders all the more readily because I sensed that its Scottish patterning scandalized Françoise, into whose mind one could not have introduced the idea that the color of one's clothes had nothing to do with mourning and to whom, in any case, the sorrow that we felt over the death of my aunt was not very satisfactory, because we had not offered a large funeral dinner, because we did not adopt a special tone of voice in speaking of her, because I even hummed to myself now and then. I am sure that in a book—and in this I was actually quite like Françoise—such a conception of mourning, in the manner of the *Chanson de Roland*⁴⁷ and the portal of Saint-André-des-Champs, would have appealed to me. But as soon as Françoise came near me, some demon would goad me to try to make her angry, I would seize the slightest pretext to tell her that I missed my aunt because she was a good woman despite her ridiculous ways, but not in the least because she was my aunt, that she might have been my aunt and still seemed odious to me, and then her death would not have caused me any pain, remarks that would have seemed to me absurd in a book.

If Françoise then, filled like a poet with a flood of confused thoughts about bereavement, about family memories, excused herself for not knowing how to answer my theories and said: "I don't know how to *espress* myself," I would gloat over that admission with a harsh and ironic common sense worthy of Dr. Percepied; and if she added: "All the same, she was your own kith and kindred,⁴⁸ and there's a proper respect we owe to our kith and kindred, you know," I would shrug my shoulders and say to myself: "Look at me, arguing with an illiterate woman who makes such blunders," adopting, in judging Françoise, the mean-spirited attitude of men whose behavior those

people who despise them the most when contemplating them impartially are quite capable of adopting, when actually playing one of life's vulgar scenes.

My walks that autumn were all the more pleasant because I took them after long hours spent over a book. When I was tired from reading all morning in the parlor, throwing my plaid over my shoulders I would go out: my body, which had had to keep still for so long, but which had accumulated, as it sat, a reserve of animation and speed, now needed, like a top that has been released, to expend them in all directions. The walls of the houses, the Tansonville hedge, the trees of the Roussainville woods, the thickets at the back of Montjouvain, submitted to the blows of my umbrella or walking stick, heard my shouts of joy, these being both merely confused ideas that exhilarated me and found no repose in the light of understanding, because they had preferred, instead of a slow and difficult clarification, the pleasure of an easier diversion toward an immediate outcome. Most of the supposed expressions of our feelings merely relieve us of them in this way by drawing them out of us in an indistinct form that does not teach us to know them. When I try to count up what I owe to the *Méséglise* way, the humble discoveries for which it was the fortuitous setting or the necessary inspiration, I recall that it was that autumn, on one of those walks, near the bushy hillock that protects Montjouvain, that I was struck for the first time by this discord between our impressions and their habitual expression. After an hour of rain and wind which I had fought cheerfully, as I came to the edge of the Montjouvain pond, beside a little hut covered in tiles where M. Vinteuil's gardener stowed his gardening tools, the sun had just reappeared, and its gildings, washed by the downpour, glistened freshly in the sky, on the trees, on the wall of the hut, on its still-wet tile roof along the crest of which a hen was walking. The wind that was blowing tugged at the wild grass growing in the side of the wall and the downy plumage of the hen, the one and the other streaming out at full length horizontally before its breath, with the abandon of things that are weightless and inert. In the pond, reflective again under the sun, the tile roof made a pink marbling to which I had never before

given any attention. And seeing on the water and on the face of the wall a pale smile answering the smile of the sky, I cried out to myself in my enthusiasm, brandishing my furled umbrella: "Damn, damn, damn, damn." But at the same time I felt I was in duty bound not to stop at these opaque words, but to try to see more clearly into my rapture.

And it was at that moment, too—because of a countryman who was passing by, who seemed rather cross already and was more so when my umbrella nearly went in his face, and who responded without warmth to my "fine weather, isn't it, perfect for a walk"—that I learned that the same emotions do not arise simultaneously, in a preestablished order, in all men. Later, each time a rather prolonged session of reading had put me in a mood to chat, the friend I was so eager to talk to would himself have just been indulging in the pleasure of conversation and now wanted to be left to read in peace. If I had just been thinking tenderly about my parents and making the wisest decisions, those most likely to please them, they would have been employing the same time in discovering some peccadillo I had forgotten, and they would reproach me severely for it just at the moment I bounded toward them to give them a hug.

Sometimes the exhilaration I felt at being alone was joined by another kind that I was not able to separate distinctly from it, and that came from my desire to see a peasant girl appear in front of me whom I could clasp in my arms. Born suddenly, and without my having had time to identify exactly what had caused it, from among very different thoughts, the pleasure which accompanied it seemed to me only one degree higher than that which those other thoughts had given me. Everything that was in my mind at that moment acquired an even greater value, the pink reflection of the tile roof, the wild grass, the village of Roussainville to which I had been wanting to go for so long now, the trees of its woods, the steeple of its church, as a result of this new emotion which made them appear more desirable only because I thought it was they that had provoked it, and which seemed only to wish to carry me toward them more rapidly when it filled my sail with a powerful, mysterious, and propitious wind. But if, for me, this desire

that a woman should appear added something more exhilarating to the charms of nature, the charms of nature, in return, broadened what would have been too narrow in the woman's charm. It seemed to me that the beauty of the trees was also hers and that the soul of those horizons, of the village of Roussainville, of the books I was reading that year, would be given to me by her kiss; and as my imagination drew strength from contact with my sensuality, as my sensuality spread through all the domains of my imagination, my desire grew boundless. And, too—just as during those moments of reverie in the midst of nature when, the effect of habit being suspended, and our abstract notions of things set aside, we believe with a profound faith in the originality, in the individual life of the place in which we happen to be—the passing woman summoned by my desire seemed to be, not an ordinary exemplar of that general type—woman—but a necessary and natural product of this particular soil. For at that time everything which was not I, the earth and other people, seemed to me more precious, more important, endowed with a more real existence than they would have appeared to a grown man. And I made no distinction between earth and people. I desired a peasant girl from Méséglise or Roussainville, a fisherwoman from Balbec, just as I desired Méséglise and Balbec. The pleasure they might give me would have appeared less real to me, I would no longer have believed in it, if I had modified its conditions as I pleased. To meet a fisherwoman from Balbec or a countrywoman from Méséglise in Paris would have been like receiving a seashell I could not have seen on the beach, a fern I could not have found in the woods, it would have subtracted from the pleasure which the woman would give me all those pleasures in which my imagination had enveloped her. But to wander through the woods of Roussainville without a peasant girl to hold in my arms was to see these woods and yet know nothing of their hidden treasure, their profound beauty. For me that girl, whom I could only envisage dappled with leaves, was herself like a local plant, merely of a higher species than the rest and whose structure enabled one to approach more closely than one could in the others the essential flavor of the country. I could believe this all the more readily (and also that the caresses by which she would allow

me to reach that flavor would themselves be of a special kind, whose pleasure I would not have been able to experience through anyone else but her) because I was, and would be for a long time to come, at an age when one has not yet abstracted this pleasure from the possession of the different women with whom one has tasted it, when one has not reduced it to a general notion that makes one regard them from then on as the interchangeable instruments of a pleasure that is always the same. This pleasure does not even exist, isolated, distinct and formulated in the mind, as the aim we are pursuing when we approach a woman, as the cause of the previous disturbance that we feel. We scarcely even contemplate it as a pleasure which we will enjoy; rather, we call it her charm; for we do not think of ourselves, we think only of leaving ourselves. Obscurely awaited, immanent and hidden, it merely rouses to such a paroxysm, at the moment of its realization, the other pleasures we find in the soft gazes, the kisses of the woman close to us, that it seems to us, more than anything else, a sort of transport of our gratitude for our companion's goodness of heart and for her touching predilection for us, which we measure by the blessings, by the beatitude she showers upon us.

Alas, it was in vain that I implored the castle keep of Roussainville, that I asked it to have some child from its village come to me, appealing to it as to the only confidant I had had of my earliest desires, when at the top of our house in Combray in the little room smelling of orris root, I could see nothing but its tower in the middle of the pane of the half-open window, while with the heroic hesitations of a traveler embarking on an exploration or of a desperate man killing himself, with a feeling of faintness, I would clear an unknown and I thought fatal path within myself, until the moment when a natural trail like that left by a snail added itself to the leaves of the wild black currant that leaned in toward me. In vain did I appeal to it now. In vain did I hold the whole expanse of the country before me within the field of my vision, draining it with my eyes which tried to extract a woman from it. I would go as far as the porch of Saint-André-des-Champs; there I would never find the countrywoman I would inevitably have met had I been with my grandfather

and therefore prevented from striking up a conversation with her. I would stare endlessly at the trunk of a distant tree from behind which she was going to appear and come to me; the scanned horizon would remain uninhabited, night would fall, hopelessly my attention would attach itself, as though to aspirate the creatures they might harbor, to that sterile ground, to that exhausted earth; and it was no longer with a light heart, but with rage, that I struck the trees of the Roussainville woods, from among which no more living creatures emerged than if they had been trees painted on the canvas background of a panorama, when, unable to resign myself to going back to the house without having held in my arms the woman I had so desired, I was nevertheless obliged to continue along the road to Combray admitting to myself that there was less and less chance that she had been placed in my path. And if she had been there, would I have dared talk to her? It seemed to me she would have thought I was mad; I no longer believed that the desires which I formed during my walks, and which were not fulfilled, were shared by other people, that they had any reality outside of me. They now seemed to me no more than the purely subjective, impotent, illusory creations of my temperament. They no longer had any attachment to nature, to reality, which from then on lost all its charm and significance and was no more than a conventional framework for my life, as is, for the fiction of a novel, the railway carriage on the seat of which a traveler reads it in order to kill time.

It was perhaps from an impression I received, also near Montjouvain, a few years later, an impression that remained obscure to me at the time, that there emerged, well after, the idea which I formed of sadism. As will be seen later, for quite other reasons the memory of this impression was to play an important part in my life. It was during a spell of very hot weather; my parents, who had had to leave for the whole day, had told me to return home as late as I pleased; and having gone as far as the Montjouvain pond, where I liked to look at the reflections of the tile roof again, I had lain down in the shade and fallen asleep among the bushes of the hillock that overlooks the house, in the same spot where I had once waited for my father on a

day when he had gone to see M. Vinteuil. It was almost night when I awoke, I wanted to stand up, but I saw Mlle. Vinteuil (insofar as I actually recognized her, because I had not seen her very often in Combray, and only when she was still a child, whereas now she was growing into a young woman), who had probably just come home, opposite me, a few inches from me, in the room in which her father had entertained my father and which she had made into her own little drawing room. The window was half open, the lamp was lit, I could see her every movement without her seeing me, but if I had gone away I would have made rustling sounds among the bushes, she would have heard me, and she might have thought I had hidden there to spy on her.

She was in deep mourning, because her father had died a short time before. We had not gone to see her, my mother had not wanted to because of a virtue of hers which alone limited the effects of her goodness: her sense of decency; but she pitied her deeply. My mother recalled the sad end of M. Vinteuil's life, completely absorbed as it was first in giving his daughter the care of a mother or a nursemaid, then in the suffering his daughter had caused him; she could still see the tormented expression on the old man's face during that last period; she knew he had entirely given up completing the task of transcribing in clean copies all his work of the last few years, insignificant pieces by an old piano teacher, by a former village organist, which we could well imagine had scarcely any value in themselves, but which we did not disdain because they had so much value for him, having been his reason for living before he sacrificed them for his daughter, and which, for the most part not even written down, preserved only in his memory, a few jotted on scattered sheets of paper, unreadable, would remain unknown; my mother thought of that other, even crueler renunciation which had been forced upon M. Vinteuil, the renunciation of a future of decent and respectable happiness for his daughter; when she remembered all this extreme distress on the part of my aunts' old piano teacher, she was moved by real sorrow and thought with horror of the far more bitter sorrow that Mlle. Vinteuil must be feeling, mingled as it was with remorse at having more or less

killed her father. "Poor M. Vinteuil," my mother would say, "he lived and died for his daughter, without getting any reward for it. Will he get it after his death, and in what form? It could only come to him from her."

At the back of Mlle. Vinteuil's drawing room, on the mantelpiece, stood a small portrait of her father which she quickly went to get at the moment when the rattle of a carriage could be heard from the road outside, then she threw herself down on a couch, drew a little table close to her, and set the portrait on it, just as M. Vinteuil had once placed beside him the piece that he wanted to play for my parents. Soon her friend came in. Mlle. Vinteuil greeted her without standing up, both hands behind her head, and moved to the end of the sofa as though to make room for her. But immediately she felt that by doing this she seemed to be forcing her friend into a position that might be annoying to her. She thought her friend might prefer to be some distance away from her on a chair, she thought she had been indiscreet, her tactful heart grew alarmed; moving so that she now occupied all the space on the sofa again, she closed her eyes and began yawning to imply that she had only stretched out like that because she was sleepy. Despite the crude and overweening familiarity with which she treated her friend, I recognized her father's obsequious and reticent gestures, his sudden qualms. Soon she stood up and pretended to be trying to close the shutters without success.

"No, leave them open, I'm hot," said her friend.

"But it's a nuisance, someone will see us," answered Mlle. Vinteuil.

But she must have guessed that her friend would think she had said these words only to goad her into answering with certain others that she in fact wanted to hear, but that out of discretion she wanted to leave her friend the initiative of uttering. And so her face, which I could not see, must have assumed the expression that my grandmother liked so much, as she quickly added:

"When I say see us, I mean see us reading; it's such a nuisance to think that whatever insignificant thing you may be doing, other eyes are watching you."

Out of an instinctive generosity and an involuntary courtesy she did not speak the premeditated words that she had felt were indispensable to the full realization of her desire. And time and again, deep inside her, a timid and supplicant virgin entreated and forced back a rough and swaggering brawler.

"Yes, I'm sure people are watching us at this hour, in this densely populated countryside," her friend said ironically. "And what if they are?" she added (thinking she had to give a mischievous, tender wink as she uttered these words, which she recited good-naturedly like a text she knew Mlle. Vinteuil liked, in a tone that she tried to make cynical). "If someone saw us, so much the better."

Mlle. Vinteuil shuddered and stood up. Her scrupulous and sensitive heart did not know what words ought to come to her spontaneously to suit the scene that her senses demanded. She searched as far away from her true moral nature as she could to find a language that would fit the depraved girl she wanted to be, but the words she thought that girl would have uttered sincerely seemed false on her own lips. And the little she allowed herself to say was said in a stiff tone of voice in which her habitual shyness paralyzed her inclinations toward boldness, and was interlarded with: "You're not too cold, are you, you're not too warm, would you rather be alone and read?"

"Mademoiselle seems to be having rather libidinous thoughts this evening," she said at last, probably repeating a phrase she had heard before on her friend's lips.

Mlle. Vinteuil felt her friend plant a kiss in the opening of her crepe blouse, she gave a little cry, broke free, and they began chasing each other, leaping, fluttering their wide sleeves like wings, and clucking and cheeping like two amorous birds. At last Mlle. Vinteuil collapsed on the couch, with her friend's body covering her. But the friend had her back turned to the little table on which the old piano teacher's picture was placed. Mlle. Vinteuil realized that her friend would not see it if her attention was not drawn to it, and she said to her, as if she had only just noticed it:

"Oh! That picture of my father is looking at us. I don't know who

could have put it there. I've told them a dozen times that it doesn't belong there."

I remembered that these were the same words M. Vinteuil had spoken to my father in connection with the piece of music. They were probably in the habit of using the portrait for ritual profanations, because her friend answered her in words which must have been part of her liturgical response:

"Oh, leave him where he is. He's not here to bother us anymore. Just think how he would start whining and try to make you put your coat on if he could see you there with the window open, the ugly old monkey."

With words of gentle reproach Mlle. Vinteuil answered: "Come, come," which proved the goodness of her nature, not because they were dictated by the indignation she might have felt at this way of referring to her father (evidently this was a feeling that she had grown used to silencing in herself at these times, with the help of who knows what sophistical reasonings), but because they were a sort of curb that she herself, so as not to seem selfish, was applying to the pleasure that her friend was trying to give her. And, too, such smiling forbearance in response to these blasphemies, such a tender, hypocritical reproach, may have appeared to her frank and generous good nature a particularly unspeakable form, a saccharine form of the wickedness she was trying to emulate. But she could not resist the attraction of the pleasure she would feel at being treated with such tenderness by a woman so implacable toward a defenseless dead man; she jumped on her friend's knees, and chastely presented her forehead for a kiss, as a daughter might have done, with the delightful sensation that the two of them were achieving an extreme of cruelty by robbing M. Vinteuil, even in his grave, of his fatherhood. Her friend took her head in her hands and set a kiss on her forehead with a docility that came easily to her because of her great affection for Mlle. Vinteuil and her desire to bring some amusement into the orphan's life, now so sad.

"Do you know what I would like to do to him—that old horror?" she said, picking up the portrait.

And she murmured in Mlle. Vinteuil's ear something I could not hear.

"Oh, you wouldn't dare!"

"I wouldn't dare spit on him? On *that old thing*?" said her friend with deliberate savagery.

I did not hear any more, because Mlle. Vinteuil, with a manner that was weary, awkward, fussy, honest, and sad, came and closed the shutters and the window, but now I knew that for all the suffering which M. Vinteuil had endured on his daughter's account during his lifetime, this was what he had received from her as his reward after his death.

And yet I have thought, since then, that if M. Vinteuil had been able to witness this scene, he still might not have lost his faith in his daughter's good heart, and perhaps he would not even have been entirely wrong in that. It was true that in Mlle. Vinteuil's habits, the appearance of evil was so complete that it would have been hard to find it so perfectly represented in anyone other than a sadist; it is behind the footlights of a popular theater rather than in the lamplight of an actual country house that one expects to see a girl encouraging her friend to spit on the portrait of a father who lived only for her; and almost nothing else but sadism provides a basis in real life for the aesthetics of melodrama. In reality, even when she is not a sadist, a girl might perhaps have failings as cruel as those of Mlle. Vinteuil with regard to the memory and wishes of her dead father, but she would not deliberately express them in an act of such rudimentary and naive symbolism; what was criminal about her behavior would be more veiled from the eyes of others and even from her own, and she would do evil without admitting it to herself. But, beyond appearances, even in Mlle. Vinteuil's heart, the evil, in the beginning at least, was probably not unmixed. A sadist of her sort is an artist of evil, something that an entirely bad creature could not be, for then evil would not be exterior to her, it would seem to her quite natural, would not even be distinguishable from her; and as for virtue, memory of the dead, and filial tenderness, since she would not be devoutly attached to them

she would take no sacrilegious pleasure in profaning them. Sadists of Mlle. Vinteuil's kind are creatures so purely sentimental, so naturally virtuous that even sensual pleasure seems to them something bad, the privilege of the wicked. And when they allow themselves to yield to it for a moment, they are trying to step into the skin of the wicked and to make their partner do so as well, so as to have the illusion, for a moment, of escaping from their scrupulous and tender soul into the inhuman world of pleasure. And I understood how much she longed for it when I saw how impossible it was for her to succeed in it. At the very moment when she wanted to be so different from her father, what she at once suggested to me were the old piano teacher's ways of thinking, of speaking. Far more than his photograph, what she really desecrated, what she was really using for her pleasures, though it remained between them and her and kept her from enjoying them directly, was the resemblance between her face and his, his own mother's blue eyes which he had handed down to her like a family jewel, those kind gestures which interposed between Mlle. Vinteuil's vice and herself a style of talking, a mentality that was not made for it and that prevented her from recognizing it as something very different from the numberless obligatory courtesies to which she usually devoted herself. It was not evil which gave her the idea of pleasure, which seemed agreeable to her; it was pleasure that seemed to her malign. And since each time she indulged in it, it was accompanied by these bad thoughts which were absent the rest of the time from her virtuous soul, she came to see pleasure as something diabolical, to identify it with Evil. Perhaps Mlle. Vinteuil felt that her friend was not fundamentally bad and was not really sincere when she talked to her in this blasphemous way. At least she had the pleasure of kissing her friend's face with its smiles and glances that might have been feigned but were similar in their depraved and base expression to the smiles and glances of, not a kind, suffering person, but one given to cruelty and pleasure. She could imagine for a moment that she was really playing the games that would have been played, with so unnatural a confederate, by a girl who actually had these barbaric feelings toward her father's memory. Perhaps she would not have thought that

evil was a state so rare, so extraordinary, so disorienting, and to which it was so restful to emigrate, if she had been able to discern in herself, as in everyone else, that indifference to the sufferings one causes which, whatever other names one gives it, is the terrible and lasting form assumed by cruelty.

If it was fairly simple to go the Méséglise way, it was another matter to go the Guermantes way, because the walk was long and we wanted to be sure what sort of weather we would be having. When we seemed to be entering a succession of fine days; when Françoise, desperate because not a single drop of water had fallen on the "poor crops," and seeing only rare white clouds swimming on the calm blue surface of the sky, exclaimed with a moan: "Why, they look just like a lot of dogfishes swimming about up yonder showing us their muzzles! Ah, they never think to make it rain a little for the poor farmers! And then as soon as the wheat is well up, that's when the rain will begin to fall pit-a-pat pit-a-pat without a break, and think no more of where it's falling than if 'twas falling on the sea"; when my father had been given the same unvarying favorable responses by both the gardener and the barometer, then we would say over dinner: "Tomorrow, if the weather's the same, we'll go the Guermantes way." We would leave right after lunch by the little garden gate and we would tumble out into the rue des Perchamps, narrow and bent at a sharp angle and filled with different varieties of grasses among which two or three wasps would spend the day botanizing, a street as odd as its name, which it seemed to me was the source of its curious peculiarities and its cantankerous personality, a street one would seek in vain in Combray now, for on its old path the school now stands. But in my daydreams (like those architects, pupils of Viollet-le-Duc,⁴⁹ who, thinking they will find under a Renaissance rood screen or a seventeenth-century altar the traces of a Romanesque choir, restore the whole edifice to the state in which it must have been in the twelfth century) I do not leave one stone of the new structure standing, I break through it and "reinstate" the rue des Perchamps. And for these reconstructions I also have more precise data than restorers generally have: a few

pictures preserved by my memory, perhaps the last still in existence now, and destined soon to be obliterated, of what Combray was during the time of my childhood; and, because Combray itself drew them in me before disappearing, they are as moving—if one may compare an obscure portrait to those glorious representations of which my grandmother liked to give me reproductions—as those old engravings of the Last Supper or that painting by Gentile Bellini, in which one sees, in a state in which they no longer exist, da Vinci's masterpiece and the portal of Saint Mark's.⁵⁰

In the rue de l'Oiseau we would pass in front of the old Hôtellerie de Oiseau Flesché, which in the seventeenth century had sometimes seen in its great courtyard the coaches of the Duchesses de Montpensier, de Guermantes, and de Montmorency when they had to come to Combray for some dispute with their tenants or to accept their homage. We would reach the mall, among whose trees the Saint-Hilaire steeple would appear. And I would have liked to be able to sit down and stay there the whole day reading while I listened to the bells; because it was so lovely and tranquil that, when the hour rang, you would have said not that it broke the calm of the day, but that it relieved the day of what it contained and that the steeple, with the indolent, painstaking precision of a person who has nothing else to do, had merely—in order to squeeze out and let fall the few golden drops slowly and naturally amassed there by the heat—pressed at the proper moment the fullness of the silence.

The greatest charm of the Guermantes way was that we had next to us, almost the whole time, the course of the Vivonne. We crossed it first, ten minutes after leaving the house, on a footbridge called the Pont-Vieux. The day after we arrived, following the sermon on Easter Sunday, if the weather was fine, I would run there to see, amid all the disorder that prevails on the morning of a great festival, when the sumptuous preparations make the household utensils that are still lying about appear more sordid than usual, the river already promenading along dressed in sky blue between lands still black and bare, accompanied only by a flock of cuckoo-flowers that had arrived early and primroses ahead of their time, while here and there a violet with a

blue beak bowed its stem under the weight of the drop of fragrance it held in its throat. The Pont-Vieux led to a towpath which at this spot would be draped in summer with the blue foliage of a hazel under which a fisherman in a straw hat had taken root. In Combray, where I knew which particular farrier or grocer's boy was concealed within the verger's uniform or choirboy's surplice, this fisherman is the only person whose identity I never discovered. He must have known my parents, because he would raise his hat when we passed; I would then try to ask his name, but they would signal me to keep quiet so as not to frighten the fish. We would enter the towpath, which ran along an embankment a few feet above the stream; on the other side the bank was low, extending in vast meadows to the village and to the train station far away. They were strewn with the remains, half buried in the grass, of the château of the old counts of Combray, who during the Middle Ages had had the stream of the Vivonne as defense on this side against the attacks of the lords of Guermantes and the abbots of Martinville. These remains were now no more than a few fragments of towers embossing the grassland, barely apparent, a few battlements from which in the old days the crossbowman would hurl stones, from which the watchman would keep an eye on Novepont, Clairefontaine, Martinville-le-Sec, Bailleau-l'Exempt, all of them vassal lands of Guermantes among which Combray was enclosed, today level with the grass, gazed down upon by the children of the friars' school, who came here to learn their lessons or play at recreation time—a past that had almost descended into the earth, lying by the edge of the water like some hiker enjoying the cool air, but giving me a great deal to think about, making me add to the little town of today, under the name of Combray, a very different town, captivating my thoughts with its incomprehensible face of long ago, which it half concealed under the buttercups. There were a great many of them in this spot, which they had chosen for their games on the grass, solitary, in couples, in groups, yellow as the yellow of an egg, shining all the more, it seemed to me, because, since I could not channel the pleasure which the sight of them gave me into any impulse to taste them, I would let it accumulate in their golden surface, until it became potent enough

to produce some useless beauty; and I did this starting from my earliest childhood, when I would stretch my arms out toward them from the towpath though I could not yet correctly spell their pretty name,¹¹ the name of some prince from a French fairy tale, whereas perhaps they had come from Asia many centuries ago, but were now naturalized for good in the village, content with the modest horizon, liking the sun and the water's edge, faithful to the little view of the station, but still retaining, like some of our old paintings in their folksy simplicity, a poetic luster of the Orient.

I liked to look at the bottles which the boys put in the Vivonne to catch little fish, and which were filled by the river that in turn surrounded them, so that they became at once a "container" with transparent sides like hardened water and a "content" immersed in a larger container of flowing liquid crystal, and evoked the image of freshness more deliciously and vexingly than they would have done on a table laid for dinner, by showing it only in perpetual flight between the water without consistency in which my hands could not capture it and the glass without fluidity in which my palate could not enjoy it. I promised myself I would return there later with some fishing lines; I persuaded them to take out a bit of bread from the provisions for our tea; I threw it into the Vivonne in pellets that seemed enough to provoke a phenomenon of supersaturation, for the water immediately solidified around them in ovoid clusters of starving tadpoles which until then it had no doubt been holding in solution, invisible, on the point of beginning to crystallize.

Soon the course of the Vivonne is obstructed by water plants. First they appear singly, like this water lily, for instance, which was allowed so little rest by the current in the midst of which it was unfortunately placed that, like a mechanically activated ferry boat, it would approach one bank only to return to the one from which it had come, eternally crossing back and forth again. Pushed toward the bank, its peduncle would unfold, lengthen, flow out, reach the extreme limit of its tension at the edge where the current would pick it up again, then the green cord would fold up on itself and bring the poor plant back to what may all the more properly be called its point of depar-

ture because it did not stay there a second without starting off from it again in a repetition of the same maneuver. I would find it again, walk after walk, always in the same situation, reminding me of certain neurasthenics among whose number my grandfather would count my aunt Léonie, who present year after year the unchanging spectacle of the bizarre habits they believe, each time, they are about to shake off and which they retain forever; caught in the machinery of their maladies and their manias, the efforts with which they struggle uselessly to abandon them only guarantee the functioning and activate the triggers of their strange, unavoidable, and morose regimes. This water lily was the same, and it was also like one of those miserable creatures whose singular torment, repeated indefinitely throughout eternity, aroused the curiosity of Dante, who would have asked the tormented creature himself to recount its cause and its particularities at greater length had Virgil, striding on ahead, not forced him to hurry after immediately, as my parents did me.

But farther on, the current slows down and crosses an estate opened to the public by its owner, who at this spot had made a hobby of creating works of aquatic horticulture, turning the little pools formed by the Vivonne into true flowering gardens of white water lilies. Because the banks were heavily wooded here, the trees' great shadows gave the water a depth that was usually dark green although sometimes, when we came home on an evening that was calm again after a stormy afternoon, I saw that it was a light, raw blue verging on violet, cloisonné in appearance and Japanese in style. Here and there on the surface, the flower of a water lily blushed like a strawberry, with a scarlet heart, white on its edges. Farther off, the more numerous flowers were paler, less smooth, coarser-grained, creased, and grouped by chance in coils so graceful that one thought one saw, floating adrift as after the melancholy dismantling of some gay party, loosened garlands of moss roses. In another place one corner seemed reserved for the various common species, of a tidy white or pink like dame's rocket, washed clean like porcelain with housewifely care, while a little farther off, others, pressed against one another in a true floating flower border, suggested garden pansies that had come like

butterflies to rest their glossy blue-tinged wings on the transparent obliquity of that watery bed; of that celestial bed as well: for it gave the flowers a soil of a color more precious, more affecting than the color of the flowers themselves; and, whether it sparkled beneath the water lilies in the afternoon in a kaleidoscope of silent, watchful, and mobile contentment, or whether toward evening it filled, like some distant port, with the rose and reverie of the sunset, ceaselessly changing so as to remain in harmony, around the more fixed colors of the corollas themselves, with all that is most profound, most fleeting, most mysterious—all that is infinite—in the hour, it seemed to have caused them to flower in the middle of the sky itself.

As it left this park, the Vivonne flowed freely again. How often did I see, and want to imitate, as soon as I should be at liberty to live as I chose, a rower who, having let go of his oars, had lain flat on his back, his head down, in the bottom of his boat, and allowing it to drift, seeing only the sky gliding slowly above him, bore on his face a foretaste of happiness and peace!

We would sit down among the irises at the edge of the water. One idle cloud would linger in the holiday sky. Now and then, oppressed by boredom, a carp would stand up out of the water with an anxious gasp. It was time for tea. Before starting off again we would remain there on the grass for a long time eating fruit, bread, and chocolate, and we would hear, coming all the way to us, horizontal, weakened, but still dense and metallic, the peals of the Saint Hilaire bell which had not melted into the air they had been traversing for so long and which, ribbed by the successive palpitation of all their waves of sound, vibrated as they brushed over the flowers, at our feet.

Sometimes, at the edge of the water and surrounded by woods, we would come upon what is called a "vacation house,"²² isolated and secluded, seeing nothing of the world but the river that bathed its feet. A young woman whose pensive face and elegant veils did not belong to this region and who had probably come to "bury herself" here, as the expression has it, to taste the bitter sweetness of knowing that her name, and more importantly the name of the man whose heart she had not been able to hold on to, were unknown here, stood framed in

a window that did not allow her to look farther than the boat moored near the door. She would absently lift her eyes as she heard, behind the trees along the riverbank, the voices of people passing of whom, even before she glimpsed their faces, she could be certain that they had never known the faithless one nor ever would know him, that nothing in their past bore his imprint, that nothing in their future would have occasion to receive it. One sensed that, in her renunciation, she had deliberately withdrawn from places where she might at least have glimpsed the man she loved, in favor of these places which had never seen him. And I watched her, as she came back from some walk on a path along which she knew he would not pass, drawing from her resigned hands long gloves of a useless grace.

Never, in our walk along the Guermantes way, could we go as far as the sources of the Vivonne, of which I had often thought and which had in my mind an existence so abstract, so ideal, that I had been as surprised when I was told they could be found within the *département*, at a certain distance in miles from Combray, as I was the day I learned there was another precise spot on the earth where the opening lay, in ancient times, of the entrance to the Underworld. Never, either, could we go all the way to the end point that I would so much have liked to reach, all the way to Guermantes. I knew this was where the castellans, the Duc and Duchesse de Guermantes, lived, I knew they were real and presently existing figures, but when I thought about them, I pictured them to myself sometimes made of tapestry, like the Comtesse de Guermantes in our church's *Coronation of Esther*, sometimes in changing colors, like Gilbert the Bad in the stained-glass window where he turned from cabbage green to plum blue, depending on whether I was still in front of the holy water or was reaching our seats, sometimes completely impalpable like the image of Geneviève de Brabant, ancestor of the Guermantes family, which our magic lantern sent wandering over the curtains of my room or up to the ceiling—but always wrapped in the mystery of Merovingian times and bathing as though in a sunset in the orange light emanating from that syllable *antes*. But if despite this they were, as duke and duchess, real human beings for me, even if strange ones, on the other hand

their ducal person was inordinately distended, became immaterial, in order to contain within itself this Guermantes of which they were duke and duchess, all this sunlit "Guermantes way," the course of the Vivonne, its water lilies and its tall trees, and so many lovely afternoons. And I knew that they did not merely bear the title of Duc and Duchesse de Guermantes, but that since the fourteenth century when, after uselessly trying to defeat its former lords, they had formed an alliance with them through marriages, they were also Comtes de Combray, and thus the foremost citizens of Combray, and yet the only ones who did not live there. Comtes de Combray, possessing Combray in the midst of their name, of their person, and no doubt actually having within them that strange and pious sadness that was special to Combray; proprietors in the town, but not of a private house, probably dwelling outdoors, in the street, between sky and earth, like Gilbert de Guermantes, of whom I could see, in the windows of the apse of Saint-Hilaire, only the reverse side, of black lake, if I raised my head as I went to get salt at Camus's.

And along the Guermantes way I would sometimes pass damp little enclosures over which climbed clusters of dark flowers. I would stop, thinking I was about to acquire some precious idea, because it seemed to me that there before my eyes I possessed a fragment of that fluvial region I had so much wanted to know ever since I had seen it described by one of my favorite writers. And it was with this, with its imaginary ground traversed by currents of seething water, that Guermantes, changing its appearance in my mind, was identified when I heard Dr. Percepied talk to us about the flowers and beautiful spring waters that could be seen in the park of their country house. I dreamed that Mme. de Guermantes had summoned me there, smitten with a sudden fancy for me; all day long she would fish for trout with me. And in the evening, holding me by the hand as we walked past the little gardens of her vassals, she would show me the flowers that leaned their violet and red stems along the low walls, and would teach me their names. She would make me tell her the subjects of the poems that I intended to compose. And these dreams warned me that since I wanted to be a writer someday, it was time to find out what I

meant to write. But as soon as I asked myself this, trying to find a subject in which I could anchor some infinite philosophical meaning, my mind would stop functioning, I could no longer see anything but empty space before my attentive eyes, I felt that I had no talent or perhaps a disease of the brain kept it from being born. Sometimes I counted on my father to make it all come out right. He was so powerful, in such favor with people in office, that he had succeeded in having us transgress the laws that Françoise had taught me to consider more ineluctable than the laws of life and death, to procure for our house alone, in the whole neighborhood, a year's postponement of the work of "replastering," to obtain permission from the minister for Mme. Sazerat's son, who wanted to go take the waters, to pass his *baccalauréat* two months ahead of time, in the series of candidates whose names began with *A*, instead of waiting for the turn of the *Ss*. If I had fallen seriously ill, if I had been captured by bandits, convinced that my father was in too close communication with the supreme powers, had letters of recommendation to the Good Lord too irresistible for my illness or captivity to be anything but empty simulacra that posed no danger to me, I would have waited calmly for the inevitable hour of my return to the correct reality, the hour of my rescue or recovery; perhaps my lack of talent, the black hole that opened in my mind when I looked for the subject of my future writings, was also merely an illusion without substance, and this illusion would cease through the intervention of my father, who must have agreed with the government and Providence that I would be the foremost writer of the day. But at other times, as my parents grew impatient at the sight of me lingering behind and not following them, my present life, instead of seeming to me an artificial creation of my father's that he could modify as he liked, appeared to me on the contrary to be included in a reality that had not been made for me, against which there was no recourse, within which I had no ally, which concealed nothing beyond itself. At those times it seemed to me that I existed the same way other men did, that I would grow old, that I would die like them, and that among them I was simply one of those who have no aptitude for writing. And so, discouraged, I would give up literature forever,

despite the encouragement I had been given by Bloch. This intimate, immediate awareness I had of the worthlessness of my ideas prevailed against all the praise that might be heaped on me, as do, in a wicked man whose good deeds are universally commended, the qualms of his conscience.

One day my mother said to me: "You're always talking about Mme. de Guermantes. Well, because Dr. Percepied took such good care of her four years ago she's coming to Combray to attend his daughter's wedding. You'll be able to see her at the ceremony." It was from Dr. Percepied, in fact, that I had heard the most talk about Mme. de Guermantes, and he had even shown us an issue of an illustrated magazine in which she was depicted in the costume she wore to a fancy-dress ball at the home of the Princesse de Léon.

Suddenly during the wedding service, a movement made by the verger as he shifted his position allowed me to see, sitting in a chapel, a blond lady with a large nose, piercing blue eyes, a full tie of smooth, shiny, new mauve silk, and a little pimple at the corner of her nose. And because on the surface of her face, which was red, as though she were very warm, I could distinguish bits of resemblance, diluted and barely perceptible, to the picture I had been shown, especially because the particular features that I observed in her, if I tried to enunciate them, were formulated in exactly the same words—a large nose, blue eyes—which Dr. Percepied had used when he described the Duchesse de Guermantes in my presence, I said to myself: "That lady looks like Mme. de Guermantes"; now the chapel where she was attending Mass was that of Gilbert the Bad, under the flat tombstones of which, golden and distended like cells of honey, rested the former counts of Brabant, and which, I recalled, was reserved, according to what I had been told, for the Guermantes family when any one of its members came to Combray for a ceremony; there probably could not be more than one woman who resembled Mme. de Guermantes's picture, who on that day, the very day when she was in fact supposed to come, was in that chapel: it was she! I was very disappointed. My disappointment came from the fact that I had never noticed, when I thought of Mme. de Guermantes, that I was picturing her to myself in

the colors of a tapestry or a stained-glass window, in another century, of a material different from that of other living people. I had never realized that she might have a red face, a mauve tie like Mme. Sazerat, and the oval of her cheeks reminded me so much of people I had seen at our house that the suspicion touched me, dissipating immediately, however, that this lady, in her generative principle, in all her molecules, was perhaps not essentially the Duchesse de Guermantes, that instead, her body, unaware of the name applied to it, belonged to a certain female type that also included the wives of doctors and shopkeepers. "So that's Mme. de Guermantes—that's what she is, that's all she is!" said the attentive and astonished expression with which I contemplated an image of course quite unrelated to those which under the same name of Mme. de Guermantes had appeared so many times in my daydreams, since this one, this particular one, had not like the others been arbitrarily created by me, but had leaped to my eyes for the first time just a moment before, in the church; an image which was not of the same kind, was not colorable at will like those which had so readily absorbed the orange tint of a syllable, but was so real that everything, even the little pimple flaring up at the corner of her nose, attested to its subjection to the laws of life, just as, in a transformation scene in a theater, a fold of the fairy's dress, a trembling of her little finger, betray the physical presence of a living actress, whereas we had not been sure if we were not looking at a simple projection of light.

But at the same time, I was trying to apply to this image, which the prominent nose, the piercing eyes pinned into my vision (perhaps because it was they that had first reached it, that had made the first notch in it, at a moment when I had not yet had time to imagine that the woman who appeared before me could be Mme. de Guermantes), to this entirely recent, unchangeable image, the idea: "It's Mme. de Guermantes," without managing to do more than maneuver it in front of the image, like two disks separated by a gap. But this Mme. de Guermantes of whom I had so often dreamed, now that I could see that she actually existed outside of me, acquired from this an even greater power over my imagination, which, paralyzed for a moment

by this contact with a reality so different from what it had expected, began to react and say to me: "Glorious since before Charlemagne, the Guermantes had the right of life and death over their vassals; the Duchesse de Guermantes is a descendant of Geneviève de Brabant. She does not know, nor would she consent to know, any of the people here."

And—oh, the marvelous independence of the human gaze, tied to the face by a cord so lax, so long, so extensible that it can travel out alone far away from it—while Mme. de Guermantes sat in the chapel above the tombs of her dead, her gaze strolled here and there, climbed up the pillars, paused even on me like a ray of sunlight wandering through the nave, but a ray of sunlight which, at the moment I received its caress, seemed to me conscious. As for Mme. de Guermantes herself, since she remained motionless, sitting there like a mother who does not appear to see the bold pranks and indiscreet enterprises of her children, who play and call out to people she does not know, it was impossible for me to tell if she approved or disapproved, in the idleness of her soul, of the vagabondage of her gaze.

I felt it was important that she not leave before I had looked at her enough, because I remembered that for years now I had considered the sight of her eminently desirable, and I did not detach my eyes from her, as if each gaze could physically carry away, and put in reserve inside me, the memory of that prominent nose, those red cheeks, all the particular details that seemed to me so many precious, authentic, and singular pieces of information about her face. Now that I was impelled to consider it beautiful by all the thoughts I had brought to bear on it—and perhaps most of all by what is a kind of instinct to preserve the best parts of ourselves, by the desire we always have not to be disappointed—placing her once again (since she and that Duchesse de Guermantes whom I had evoked until then were one and the same) above the rest of humanity among whom the pure and simple sight of her body had for a moment made me confound her, I was irritated to hear people around me say: "She's better looking than Mme. Sazerat, she's better looking than Mlle. Vinteuil," as if she were comparable to them. And as my gaze stopped at her blond hair,

her blue eyes, the fastening of her collar, and omitted the features that might have reminded me of other faces, I exclaimed in front of this sketch, deliberately incomplete: "How beautiful she is! How noble! What I see before me is indeed a proud Guermantes and a descendant of Geneviève de Brabant!" And the attention with which I illuminated her face isolated her to such an extent that today, if I think back to that ceremony, it is impossible for me to see a single one of the people who were present except for her and the verger who responded affirmatively when I asked him if that lady was really Mme. de Guermantes. But I can still see her, especially at the moment when the procession entered the sacristy, which was lit by the hot and intermittent sun of a day of wind and storm, and in which Mme. de Guermantes found herself surrounded by all those people of Combray whose names she did not even know, but whose inferiority too loudly proclaimed her supremacy for her not to feel a sincere benevolence toward them, and whom, besides, she hoped to impress even more by her good grace and simplicity. Thus, not being able to bestow those deliberate gazes charged with specific meaning which we address to someone we know, but only to allow her distracted thoughts to break free incessantly before her in a wave of blue light which she could not contain, she did not want that wave to disturb or appear to disdain those common people whom it encountered in passing, whom it touched again and again. I can still see, above her silky, swelling mauve tie, the gentle surprise in her eyes, to which she had added, without daring to intend it for anyone but so that all might take their share of it, the slightly shy smile of a sovereign who looks as though she is apologizing to her vassals and loves them. That smile fell on me, who had not taken my eyes off her. Recalling, then, the gaze she had rested on me during the Mass, as blue as a ray of sunlight passing through Gilbert the Bad's window, I said to myself: "Why, she's actually paying attention to me." I believed that she liked me, that she would still be thinking of me after she had left the church, that because of me perhaps she would be sad that evening at Guermantes. And immediately I loved her, because if it may sometimes be enough for us to fall in love with a woman if she looks at us with contempt, as

I had thought Mlle. Swann had done, and if we think she will never belong to us, sometimes, too, it may be enough if she looks at us with kindness, as Mme. de Guermantes was doing, and if we think she may someday belong to us. Her eyes turned as blue as a periwinkle which was impossible to pick, yet which she had dedicated to me; and the sun, threatened by a cloud but still beating down with all its strength on the square and in the sacristy, gave a geranium flesh tint to the red carpets that had been laid on the ground for the solemnities and over which Mme. de Guermantes advanced smiling, and added to their woolly weave a rosy velvet, an epidermis of light, the sort of tenderness, the sort of grave sweetness amid pomp and joy that characterize certain pages of *Lohengrin*,⁵³ certain paintings by Carpaccio,⁵⁴ and that explain why Baudelaire⁵⁵ was able to apply to the sound of the trumpet the epithet *delicious*.

How much more distressing still, after that day, during my walks along the Guermantes way, did it seem to me than it had seemed before to have no aptitude for literature, and to have to give up all hope of ever being a famous writer! The sorrow I felt over this, as I day-dreamed alone, a little apart from the others, made me suffer so much that in order not to feel it anymore, my mind of its own accord, by a sort of inhibition in the face of pain, would stop thinking altogether about poems, novels, a poetic future on which my lack of talent forbade me to depend. Then, quite apart from all these literary preoccupations and not connected to them in any way, suddenly a roof, a glimmer of sun on a stone, the smell of the road would stop me because of a particular pleasure they gave me, and also because they seemed to be concealing, beyond what I could see, something which they were inviting me to come take and which despite my efforts I could not manage to discover. Since I felt that it could be found within them, I would stay there, motionless, looking, breathing, trying to go with my thoughts beyond the image or the smell. And if I had to catch up with my grandfather, continue on my way, I would try to find them again by closing my eyes; I would concentrate on recalling precisely the line of the roof, the shade of the stone which, without my being able to understand why, had seemed to me so full,

so ready to open, to yield me the thing for which they themselves were merely a cover. Of course it was not impressions of this kind that could give me back the hope I had lost, of succeeding in becoming a writer and a poet someday, because they were always tied to a particular object with no intellectual value and no reference to any abstract truth. But at least they gave me an unreasoning pleasure, the illusion of a sort of fecundity, and so distracted me from the tedium, from the sense of my own impotence which I had felt each time I looked for a philosophical subject for a great literary work. But the moral duty imposed on me by the impressions I received from form, fragrance, or color was so arduous—to try to perceive what was concealed behind them—that I would soon look for excuses that would allow me to save myself from this effort and spare myself this fatigue. Fortunately, my parents would call me, I would feel I did not have the tranquillity I needed at the moment for pursuing my search in a useful way, and that it would be better not to think about it anymore until I was back at home, and not to fatigue myself beforehand to no purpose. And so I would stop concerning myself with this unknown thing that was enveloped in a form or a fragrance, feeling quite easy in my mind since I was bringing it back to the house protected by the covering of images under which I would find it alive, like the fish that, on days when I had been allowed to go fishing, I would carry home in my creel covered by a layer of grass that kept them fresh. Once I was back at the house I would think about other things, and so there would accumulate in my mind (as in my room the flowers I had gathered on my walks or objects I had been given) a stone on which a glimmer of light played, a roof, the sound of a bell, a smell of leaves, many different images beneath which the reality I sensed but did not have enough determination to discover had died long before. Once, however—when our walk had extended far beyond its usual duration and we were very happy to encounter halfway home, as the afternoon was ending, Dr. Percepied, who, going past at full speed in his carriage, recognized us and invited us to climb in with him—I had an impression of this kind and did not abandon it without studying it a little. They had had me climb up next to the coachman, we were going like

the wind because, before returning to Combray, the doctor still had to stop at Martinville-le-Sec to see a patient at whose door it had been agreed that we would wait for him. At the bend of a road I suddenly experienced that special pleasure which was unlike any other, when I saw the two steeples of Martinville, shining in the setting sun and appearing to change position with the motion of our carriage and the windings of the road, and then the steeple of Vieuxvicq, which, though separated from them by a hill and a valley and situated on a higher plateau in the distance, seemed to be right next to them.

As I observed, as I noted the shape of their spires, the shifting of their lines, the sunlight on their surfaces, I felt that I was not reaching the full depth of my impression, that something was behind that motion, that brightness, something which they seemed at once to contain and conceal.

The steeples appeared so distant, and we seemed to approach them so slowly, that I was surprised when we stopped a few moments later in front of the Martinville church. I did not know why I had taken such pleasure in the sight of them on the horizon and the obligation to try to discover the reason seemed to me quite painful; I wanted to hold in reserve in my head those lines moving in the sun, and not think about them anymore now. And it is quite likely that had I done so, the two steeples would have gone forever to join the many trees, rooftops, fragrances, sounds, that I had distinguished from others because of the obscure pleasure they gave me which I never thoroughly studied. I got down to talk to my parents while we waited for the doctor. Then we set off again, I was back in my place on the seat, I turned my head to see the steeples again, a little later glimpsing them one last time at a bend in the road. Since the coachman, who did not seem inclined to talk, had hardly answered anything I said, I was obliged, for lack of other company, to fall back on my own and try to recall my steeples. Soon their lines and their sunlit surfaces split apart, as if they were a sort of bark, a little of what was hidden from me inside them appeared to me, I had a thought which had not existed a moment before, which took shape in words in my head, and the pleasure I had just recently experienced at the sight of

them was so increased by this that, seized by a sort of drunkenness, I could no longer think of anything else. At that moment, as we were already far away from Martinville, turning my head I caught sight of them again, quite black this time, for the sun had already set. At moments the bends of the road would hide them from me, then they showed themselves one last time, and finally I did not see them again.

Without saying to myself that what was hidden behind the steeples of Martinville had to be something analogous to a pretty sentence, since it had appeared to me in the form of words that gave me pleasure, I asked the doctor for a pencil and some paper and I composed, despite the jolts of the carriage, and in order to ease my conscience and yield to my enthusiasm, the following little piece that I have since found again and that I have not had to submit to more than a few changes:

"Alone, rising from the level of the plain, and appearing lost in the open country, the two steeples of Martinville ascended toward the sky. Soon we saw three: wheeling around boldly to position itself opposite them, the laggard steeple of Vieuxvicq had come along to join them. The minutes were passing, we were going fast, and yet the three steeples were still far away ahead of us, like three birds poised on the plain, motionless, distinguishable in the sunlight. Then the steeple of Vieuxvicq moved away, receded into the distance, and the steeples of Martinville remained alone, illuminated by the light of the setting sun, which even at that distance I saw playing and smiling on their sloping sides. We had taken so long approaching them that I was thinking about the time we would still need in order to reach them, when suddenly the carriage turned and set us down at their feet; and they had flung themselves so roughly in front of us that we had only just time to stop in order not to run into the porch. We continued on our way; we had already left Martinville a little while before, and the village, after accompanying us for a few seconds, had disappeared, when, lingering alone on the horizon to watch us flee, its steeples and that of Vieuxvicq still waved good-bye with their sunlit tops. At times one of them would draw aside so that the other two could glimpse us again for an instant; but the road changed direction, they swung

around in the light like three golden pivots and disappeared from my gaze. But a little later, when we were already close to Combray, and the sun had set, I caught sight of them one last time from very far away, seeming now no more than three flowers painted on the sky above the low line of the fields. They reminded me, too, of the three young girls in a legend, abandoned in a solitary place where darkness was already falling; and while we moved off at a gallop, I saw them timidly seek their way and, after some awkward stumbling of their noble silhouettes, press against one another, slip behind one another, now forming, against the still pink sky, no more than a single black shape, charming and resigned, and fade away into the night." I never thought of this page again, but at that moment, when in the corner of the seat where the doctor's coachman usually placed in a basket the poultry he had bought at the market in Martinville, I had finished writing it, I was so happy, I felt it had so perfectly relieved me of those steeples and what they had been hiding behind them, that, as if I myself were a hen and had just laid an egg, I began to sing at the top of my voice.

All day long, during those walks, I had been able to dream about what a pleasure it would be to be a friend of the Duchesse de Guermantes, to fish for trout, to go out in a boat on the Vivonne, and, greedy for happiness, ask no more from life in those moments than for it always to be made up of a succession of happy afternoons. But when on the way back I saw on the left a farm which was fairly distant from two others very close to each other, and from which, in order to enter Combray, one had only to go down an avenue of oaks bordered on one side by meadows, each of which was part of a little enclosure and was planted at equal intervals with apple trees that wore, when they were lit by the setting sun, the Japanese design of their shadows, my heart would abruptly begin to beat faster, I would know that within half an hour we would be home and that, as was the rule on the days when we had gone the Guermantes way and dinner was served later, they would send me to bed as soon as I had had my soup, so that my mother, kept at the table as though there were company for dinner, would not come up to say goodnight to me in my bed.

The region of sadness I had just entered was as distinct from the region into which I had hurled myself with such joy only a moment before, as in certain skies a band of pink is separated as though by a line from a band of green or black. One sees a bird fly into the pink, it is about to reach the end of it, it is nearly touching the black, then it has entered it. The desires that had surrounded me a short time ago, to go to Guermantes, to travel, to be happy, were so far behind me now that their fulfillment would not have brought me any pleasure. How I would have given all that up in order to be able to cry all night in Mama's arms! I was trembling, I did not take my anguished eyes off my mother's face, which would not be appearing that evening in the room where I could already see myself in my thoughts, I wanted to die. And that state of mind would continue until the following day, when the morning rays, like the gardener, would lean their bars against the wall clothed in nasturtiums that climbed up to my window, and I would jump out of bed to hurry down into the garden, without remembering, now, that evening would ever bring back with it the hour for leaving my mother. And so it was from the Guermantes way that I learned to distinguish those states of mind that follow one another in me, during certain periods, and that even go so far as to share out each day among them, one returning to drive out the other, with the punctuality of a fever; contiguous, but so exterior to one another, so lacking in means of communication among them, that I can no longer comprehend, no longer even picture to myself in one, what I desired, or feared, or accomplished in the other.

And so the Méséglise way and the Guermantes way remain for me linked to many of the little events of that life which, of all the various lives we lead concurrently, is the most abundant in sudden reversals of fortune, the richest in episodes, I mean our intellectual life. No doubt it progresses within us imperceptibly, and the truths that have changed its meaning and its appearance for us, that have opened new paths to us, we had been preparing to discover for a long time; but we did so without knowing it; and for us they date only from the day, from the minute in which they became visible. The flowers that played on the grass then, the water that flowed past in the sunlight,

the whole landscape that surrounded their appearance continues to accompany the memory of them with its unconscious or abstracted face; and certainly when they were slowly studied by that humble passerby, that child dreaming—as a king is studied by a memorialist lost in the crowd—that corner of nature, that bit of garden could not have believed it would be thanks to him that they would be elected to survive in all their most ephemeral details; and yet the fragrance of hawthorn that forages along the hedge where the sweetbriars will soon replace it, a sound of echoless steps on the gravel of a path, a bubble formed against a water plant by the current of the stream and bursting immediately—my exaltation has borne them along with it and managed to carry them across so many years in succession, while the paths round about have disappeared and those who walked on them have died, and the memory of those who walked on them. At times the piece of landscape thus transported into the present detaches itself in such isolation from everything else that it floats uncertain in my mind like a flowery Delos,⁶ while I cannot say from which country, which time—perhaps quite simply which dream—it comes. But it is most especially as deep layers of my mental soil, as the firm ground on which I still stand, that I must think of the Méséglise way and the Guermantes way. It is because I believed in things and in people while I walked along them, that the things and people they revealed to me are the only ones that I still take seriously today and that still bring me joy. Whether it is that the faith which creates has dried up in me, or that reality takes shape in memory alone, the flowers I am shown today for the first time do not seem to me to be real flowers. The Méséglise way with its lilacs, its hawthorns, its cornflowers, its poppies, its apple trees, the Guermantes way with its river full of tadpoles, its water lilies and buttercups, formed for me for all time the contours of the countrysides where I would like to live, where I demand above all else that I may go fishing, drift about in a boat, see ruins of Gothic fortifications, and find among the wheat fields a church, like Saint-André-des-Champs, monumental, rustic, and golden as a haystack; and the cornflowers, the hawthorns, the apple trees that I still happen, when traveling, to come upon in the fields, because they are situated

at the same depth, on the level of my past, communicate immediately with my heart. And yet, because places have something individual about them, when I am seized by the desire to see the Guermantes way again, you would not satisfy it by taking me to the bank of a river where the water lilies were just as beautiful, more beautiful than in the Vivonne, any more than on my return home in the evening—at the hour when there awakened in me that anguish which later emigrates into love, and may become forever inseparable from it—I would have wished that the mother who came to say goodnight to me would be one more beautiful and more intelligent than my own. No; just as what I needed so that I could go to sleep happy, with that untroubled peace which no mistress has been able to give me since that time because one doubts them even at the moment one believes in them, and can never possess their hearts as I received in a kiss my mother's heart, complete, without the reservation of an afterthought, without the residue of an intention that was not for me—was that it should be her, that she should incline over me that face marked below the eye by something which was, it seems, a blemish, and which I loved as much as the rest, so what I want to see again is the Guermantes way that I knew, with the farm that is not very far from the two that come after pressed so close together, at the entrance to the avenue of oaks; those meadows on which, when the sun turns them reflective as a pond, the leaves of the apple trees are sketched, that landscape whose individuality sometimes, at night in my dreams, clasps me with an almost uncanny power and which I can no longer recover when I wake up. No doubt, by virtue of having forever indissolubly united in me different impressions merely because they had made me experience them at the same time, the Méséglise way and the Guermantes way exposed me, for the future, to many disappointments and even to many mistakes. For often I have wanted to see a person again without discerning that it was simply because she reminded me of a hedge of hawthorns, and I have been led to believe, to make someone else believe, in a revival of affection, by what was simply a desire to travel. But because of that very fact, too, and by persisting in those of my impressions of today to which they may be connected, they give them foundations, depth,

a dimension lacking from the others. They add to them, too, a charm, a meaning that is for me alone. When on summer evenings the melodious sky growls like a wild animal and everyone grumbles at the storm, it is because of the Méséglise way that I am the only one in ecstasy inhaling, through the noise of the falling rain, the smell of invisible, enduring lilacs.

Thus I would often lie until morning thinking back to the time at Combray, to my sad sleepless evenings, to the many days, too, whose image had been restored to me more recently by the taste—what they would have called at Combray the “fragrance”—of a cup of tea, and, by an association of memories, to what, many years after leaving that little town, I had learned, about a love affair Swann had had before I was born, with that precision of detail which is sometimes easier to obtain for the lives of people who died centuries ago than for the lives of our best friends, and which seems as impossible as it once seemed impossible to speak from one town to another—as long as we do not know about the expedient by which that impossibility was circumvented. All these memories added to one another now formed a single mass, but one could still distinguish between them—between the oldest, and those that were more recent, born of a fragrance, and then those that were only memories belonging to another person from whom I had learned them—if not fissures, if not true faults, at least that veining, that variegation of coloring, which in certain rocks, in certain marbles, reveal differences in origin, in age, in “formation.”

Of course by the time morning approached, the brief uncertainty of my waking would long since have dissipated. I knew which room I was actually in, I had reconstructed it around me in the darkness and—either by orienting myself with memory alone, or by making use, as a clue, of a faint glimmer that I perceived, under which I placed the casement curtains—I had reconstructed it entirely and furnished it like an architect and a decorator who retain the original openings of the windows and doors, I had put back the mirrors and restored the chest of drawers to its usual place. But scarcely had the daylight—and no longer the reflection of a last ember on the brass cur-

tain rod which I had mistaken for it—traced on the darkness, as though in chalk, its first white, correcting ray, than the window along with its curtains would leave the doorframe in which I had mistakenly placed it, while, to make room for it, the desk which my memory had clumsily moved there would fly off at top speed, pushing the fireplace before it and thrusting aside the wall of the passageway; a small courtyard would extend in the spot where only a moment before the dressing room had been, and the dwelling I had rebuilt in the darkness would have gone off to join the dwellings glimpsed in the maelstrom of my awakening, put to flight by the pale sign traced above the curtains by the raised finger of the dawn.

PART I: *Combray* 2

1. **ten leagues:** One league is equal to two to three miles. Proust refers to both leagues and kilometers.

2. **King Charles VI:** Charles VI *le Bien-Aimé* (1328–1422), King of France (1380–1422), experienced alternating periods of lucidity and madness. A tarot game was invented to entertain him.

3. **Saint Eloi:** (c. 588–660) Treasurer and goldsmith of Clotaire II and Dagobert I, King of the Franks in 632.

4. **Louis the Germanic:** King of the Franks (817–43). He had three sons who conspired constantly against him. The tomb of the sons of Louis in the church at Combray is a fiction.

5. **Sigebert's:** Sigebert was the name of three early kings of Austrasia—a part of the Merovingian kingdom of the Franks—in the sixth and seventh centuries.

6. **Second Empire:** The empire of Napoleon III, 1852–70, a period of financial and industrial expansion; its positivist and materialistic spirit was reflected in the pursuit of money and pleasure and its brilliant social life.

7. **Morris column:** The name given to columns on Paris streets on which plays and other entertainments are advertised. Named for the printer, Morris, who was the first concession holder.

8. *Le Testament de César Girodot . . . Le Domino Noir: Le Testament de César Girodot* was a comedy by A. Belot and E. Villetard. *Oedipe-Roi* was the French translation by Jules Lacroix of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*. *Les Diamants de la Couronne* and *Le Domino Noir* were comic operas with lyrics by Eugène Scribe and music by Daniel Auber.

9. **gentleman:** "Gentleman" is in English in the original, as is "a cup of tea."

10. **"blue":** *Bleu*, an express letter transmitted by pneumatic tube within Paris. (See note 20, p. 461.)

11. **Vaulabelle:** Achille de Vaulabelle (1799–1879), a French journalist and historian.

12. **Virtues and Vices of Padua:** Frescoes by Giotto in the Arena Chapel in Padua; seven virtues—Prudence, Fortitude, Temperance, Justice, Faith, Charity, Hope—face seven vices—Folly, Inconstancy, Anger, Injustice, Infidelity, Envy, Despair.

13. **"La Nuit d'Octobre":** *October* (1837), Poem by Alfred de Musset (1810–57), one of the series entitled *Les Nuits* (*Nights*).

14. **"The white Oloossone" . . . 'The daughter of Minos and Pasiphaë':** The first line is *La blanche Oloossone et la blanche Camyre*. The actual line, from

- "La Nuit de Mai," is *La blanche Oloossonne à la blanche Camyre*. The second line is *La fille de Minos et de Pasiphaë*. From Racine's *Phèdre*, act I, scene 1, line 36.
15. "Bhagavat" and "Le Lévrier de Magnus": Both poems by Leconte de Lisle. "Bhagavat" is from the collection *Poèmes antiques* (1852), and "Le Lévrier de Magnus" from *Poèmes tragiques* (1884).
16. *La Juive*: Opera by Fromental Halévy first performed in 1835 at the Paris Opéra.
17. "Israel, break thy bond": A line from the opera *Samson et Dalila* by Saint-Saëns.
18. Archers . . . without sound: In the original, *Archers, faites bonne garde! / Veillez sans trêve et sans bruit*.
19. Let you . . . Israelite: In the original, *De ce timide Israelite / Quoi, vous guidez ici les pas!*
20. Fields of our fathers . . . Hebron: In the original, *Champs paternels, Hébron, douce vallée*.
21. Yes, I am of the chosen race: In the original, *Oui je suis de la race élue*.
22. Malay kris: A dagger with a ridged serpentine blade.
23. *Athalie* or *Phèdre*: Dramas by Jean Racine (1639–99). Their dates are respectively 1691 and 1677.
24. *dolce . . . lento*: Musical indications in Italian meaning "sweet and soft" and "slow."
25. portrait of Mohammed II by Bellini: Mohammed II, Sultan of the Ottoman empire from 1451 to 1481, was painted in Constantinople by the Venetian painter Gentile Bellini (c. 1429–1507).
26. *Le Cid*: 1636 tragedy by Pierre Corneille (1606–84), part of the classic repertory of the Comédie-Française.
27. "the Queens of Chartres": Statues on the western portal of Chartres Cathedral, for a long time assumed to be kings and queens of France but in fact representing characters from the Bible.
28. The happiness . . . stream: Racine, *Athalie*, act II, scene 7, line 688. The actual line is *Le bonheur des méchants comme un torrent s'écoule*.
29. "theater in bed": Allusion to Alfred de Musset's *Theater in an Armchair*, i.e., a play meant to be read to oneself from a book.
30. proud as Artaban: Expression derived from the novel *Cléopâtre* by Gauthier de la Calprenède (1614–63). The character Artaban has become proverbial for his pride.
31. the "mechanics" of life at Versailles: The phrase recurs several times in Saint-Simon's *Mémoires*.

32. **The woods are dark, the sky still blue:** *Les bois sont déjà noirs, le ciel est encor bleu.* A line by Paul Desjardins (1859–1940), French writer and thinker.
33. **Fall in love . . . plum:** In the original, *Qui du cul d'un chien s'amourose, Il lui parait une rose.* Literally, "He who falls in love with a dog's bottom/Will think it's a rose."
34. **Fabre:** Jean-Henri Fabre (1823–1915), French teacher and entomologist who retired in 1871 to devote himself to the study of insect life, one of his special interests being the Hymenoptera. He published ten volumes of studies, *Souvenirs entomologiques*, from 1879 to 1907.
35. **Balzac's flora:** The plant, sedum, appears in at least two of the novels in Balzac's *La Comédie humaine*.
36. **"for wounded hearts . . . shadow and silence":** *Aux coeurs blessés l'ombre et le silence.* Epigraph from a novel by Balzac, *Le Médecin de campagne* (The Country Doctor).
37. **Jacobin:** Member of a society of revolutionary democrats in France during the Revolution of 1789; hence, a political radical.
38. **Andromedas:** In Greek mythology, Andromeda was the daughter of Cassiopeia, who boasted that Andromeda was more beautiful than the daughter of Nereus, the Sea God. The daughter was punished for the mother's arrogance and, chained to a rocky cliff by the sea, was rescued by Perseus.
39. **Ar-mor, the Sea:** Ar-mor is the Celtic name for Brittany, meaning "on the sea."
40. **Anatole France:** French novelist, critic, and literary figure (1844–1924). He wrote about the Cimmerians in *Pierre Nozière* (1899).
41. **country of the Cimmerians in the *Odyssey*:** The Cimmerians were an ancient people from the north shore of the Black Sea who invaded Lydia in Asia Minor in the seventh century. In the *Odyssey*, Homer describes them as living in darkness.
42. **that erudite crook:** The crook in question is most likely Vrain-Lucas, who forged signatures which he attributed to Rabelais, Pascal, Joan of Arc, Julius Caesar, and Cleopatra. His story was told by Alphonse Daudet in *L'Immortel* (1888).
43. **burdened . . . across my brow:** Indirect quotation from Racine's *Phèdre*, act I, scene 3: *Que ces vains ornements, que ces voiles me pèsent! / Quelle impertune main en formant tous ces noeuds / A pris soin sur mon front d'assembler mes cheveux?*

44. **some novel by Saintine:** Joseph Xavier Boniface, known as Saintine (1798–1865), French novelist best known for his novel *Picciola*.
45. **some landscape by Gleyre:** Charles-Gabriel Gleyre (1806–74), Swiss academic painter.
46. **the little hooded monk in the optician's window:** A figure in a box that predicted weather changes.
47. ***Chanson de Roland:*** *Song of Roland*, most famous of the *chansons de geste* of the Middle Ages.
48. **kith and kindred:** The humor of Françoise's mistake is more evident in the original. Instead of *parenté*, "family," "relations," she says *parentèse*, "parenthesis."
49. **Viollet-le-Duc:** Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc (1814–79), French architect and writer who restored many monuments of the Middle Ages, including the Sainte-Chapelle, Notre-Dame, and the feudal château of Pierrefonds.
50. **that painting by Gentile Bellini . . . Saint Mark's:** The reference must be to Gentile Bellini's *Procession in St. Mark's Square*, valued especially for its quality as documentary evidence of the appearance of St. Mark's Cathedral in the fifteenth century.
51. **their pretty name:** *Boutons d'or*, or "gold buttons."
52. **"vacation house":** The irony is lost in translation, since the French *maison de plaisance*, though it means "country house," translates literally as "pleasure house" (as in "pleasure boat").
53. ***Lobengrin:*** Opera by Richard Wagner (1813–83), who was immensely popular in Europe in the late nineteenth century.
54. **Carpaccio:** Vittore Carpaccio (c. 1455–1525), Venetian painter.
55. **Baudelaire:** Charles Baudelaire (1821–67), French poet and critic.
56. **flowery Delos:** Greek island; in Greek mythology, the birthplace of Apollo and Artemis.

PART II: *Swann in Love*

1. **Planté:** Francis Planté (1839–1934), a French pianist and composer whose concerts were very successful beginning in 1872.
2. **Rubinstein:** Anton Grigorievitch Rubinstein (1829–94) was, along with Liszt, the most illustrious pianist of his time.
3. **Potain:** Pierre-Charles-Édouard Potain was elected to the Académie de Médecine in 1882, and to the Institute in 1893.