

## THE FUTURE CITY

*What new Jerusalem  
emerges from the depths of the desert... ?<sup>1</sup>*

*(This book is presumed to have been written at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.)*

### I

As everyone knows, the celebrations held throughout France on the occasion of the first centenary of the Revolution of 1789 excited an extraordinary enthusiasm. In large cities and small towns, public manifestations took on a double character of patriotism and fraternity such as had not been seen since the previous century's celebration of the Federation.

It was evident, from that time on, that France had been definitely conquered by what are nowadays called "modern" ideas. All the inhabitants of the country, even the most blinkered, had a very clear perception of it, and it was a fact recognized by the whole world. Nevertheless, many people remained on the nation's soil who stood aside from the general current and were firmly decided to stay there permanently. They had been called, at various times, legitimists, aristocrats, reactionaries or clericalists. They were then known, if we are not mistaken, by the simple title of "dissidents."

They were, for the most part, people faithfully adherent to the former religion of the nation, who suffered with bitterness a social organization conceived outside their essential dogmas: the divinity of Christ and the certainty of a second life. These details had been conformed over the generations in their sentiments of opposition, thanks to the political liberties that had already begun to be manifest in France, at least at intervals, during the 19th century.

In addition to them, but in smaller numbers, a few other parties, similarly on the defensive, were still fond of privilege and superiority. They could not reconcile themselves to laws and mores whose primary purpose was to establish and maintain civic equality. To tell the truth, the dissidents had finished up by taking their stand almost exclusively on religious terrain, in the Catholic camp.

As enthusiasm and joy usually provoke sentiments of tolerant good will, the majority of French citizens could not help, in the midst of the solemnities by which they were celebrating their political emancipation, considering with a particular interest the class of their compatriots who thus remained aside, draped in a noble and respectable intransigence.

The latter, for their part, understood at that same moment that all hope of a Christian Restoration had gone. They wondered what would become of them, in the beloved land of France, if they and their children were condemned to live there as strangers.

What usually occurs when complications have arrived at their sharpest point happened then. The solution that had remained veiled thus far, scarcely glimpsed by a few far-seeing minds, appeared in all its clarity and became imposing.

The dissidents would emigrate. The government would facilitate their emigration.

That double idea first saw the light of day in the Republican press, and was soon accepted by the entire Conservative press.

The religious part recalled, as an example worthy to be followed, the heroic resolution of the Scottish puritans fleeing the intolerance of their compatriots with William Penn and going to found a new fatherland in America.

For several months the project agitated the country.

In the same era Parliament was occupied in extending the system of Protectorates on the island of Madagascar. It had appealed to the inhabitants of the neighboring island of La Réunion to colonize that immense territory, and the latter, enticed the considerable advantages conceded to them, and

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<sup>1</sup> The quotation is from Racine's Old Testament-based tragedy *Athalie* (1691).

deserted their domicile en masse, to the extent that the former Île de Bourbon was effectively abandoned.

The government let it be known through official channels that it would not be averse to putting that old French possession at the exclusive disposal of the dissidents, and that it would even take responsibility for transporting them there in State vessels.

Immediately, lists of signatures were circulated throughout France by an action committee, composed of renowned prelates, a few parliamentarians of the far right and a certain number of journalists.

At the same time, means were put in place of liquidating, without undue losses, the fortunes of those who were thus expatriating themselves. On that point too the Nation showed generosity. The government, supported by a movement of popular opinion that left no room for uncertainty, offered to buy back at their real and present value, all the property, movable or immovable, that would be abandoned by the emigrants, in order to restore it to circulation at an opportune time, in such a manner as to avoid a crisis in the market.

In a few months, the preparations were made, and in 1891, at the opening of the annual session of Parliament, the lists of signatures were appended to a petition, by which several thousand major citizens requested, in their names and those of their families, that the nation's representatives sanction the promises made by the central administration.

The debate did not give rise to any difficulty. The ratification of the governmental advances was decided by acclamation, and for the second time, the "émigrés' billion" was inscribed in our budget.<sup>2</sup> The Frenchmen who were about to separate themselves forever from their native land were not enemy brothers. The divorce took place by mutual consent, on the grounds of a duly established incompatibility of beliefs and principles.

A short time afterwards, the first departure took place at Marseilles. A fleet fitted out in La Joliette harbor took away, as a first step, the general staff of the emigration. The included a general proudly bearing a heroic name, a preacher of Notre-Dame, a considerable number of bishops bearing miters and croziers, all the survivors of the pontifical zouaves, and monks and nuns of every order. In their midst was the heir of the Spanish Bourbons, a new Joas,<sup>3</sup> who was going out there to retrieve a crown. The pope had sent the voyagers his blessing.

They raised anchor while singing hymns and saluting the land of their ancestors with long farewells. The white flag floated at the top of every mainmast.

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<sup>2</sup> There had, of course, been a mass emigration of aristocrats and Churchmen after the Revolution of 1789, initially facilitated by the new government, albeit on less generous terms than these—a fact that adds considerably to the plausibility of the author's fundamental narrative device.

<sup>3</sup> This reference is unclear; the King of Spain in the late 1880s was the exceedingly young Alfonso XIII (born in 1886), whose mother served as regent, so there was no heir apparent; the rival claimant to the throne was Carlos, Duke of Madrid. The subsequent revelation that the King of Bourbon's name is Jaime does not help to clarify the issue.

## II

Among the emigrants who left with the second convoy was the Norman family of the Martinvast.<sup>4</sup>

At the time of which we speak, that family, which had lived for more than a hundred years near Saint-Lo, consisted of a father, a mother and four young households. It was connected to the aristocracy as much as to the bourgeoisie by its relationships and alliances. Madame Martinvast, the mother, was one of the Val Saint-Jacques, one of the oldest stocks of the region of Valogne. The eldest daughter had married the Vicomte de Rimbart, a former cavalry officer domiciled in the vicinity.

Placed in the middle of verdant countryside, the Martinvast abode consisted of a modest and comfortable country house to which were attached a farm and a sugar-factory. Louis, the eldest son, was primarily occupied in agricultural endeavors. André, the second, was responsible for the industry.

The younger daughter lived in the town of Saint-Lo, where she had married a functionary from the ill-fated Broglie-Fortou ministry.<sup>5</sup> The functionary had been removed from office after a matter of months, but he had continued nevertheless to live in the neighborhood, precisely because of his attachments to the Martinvast family.

Everyone had decided, for various motives, to leave for the Île de Bourbon. Monsieur Martinvast père had once held an important political position in the département. At present, nothing of that remained to him—not even a shadow of influence. Instead of increasing, and in spite of his good administration, his fortune was diminishing. New taxes, on the one hand, and the mediocre returns of the land and the factory on the other, were threatening to create embarrassments.

His sons were working without courage or success, mingling their recriminations every day with those of their step-brothers, whom idleness rendered bitter and morose.

The women attributed the responsibility for the difficulties that surrounded them on the prevailing irreligion. Harking back to the times of the Terror, they believed that they glimpsed before them the greatest dangers: persecution, confiscation and death. In their opinion, the only possible salvation was a general return to the practices of piety, the faith retaking the place in social direction that it had had in the finest epochs of our history.

A few years before, the head of the family had considered the possibility of adopting the new ideas; he had been pushed in that direction fairly strongly by his younger brother, Dr. Martinvast, a senator and leader of the Republican party in the département.

The latter had separated from his family in his youth and had taken a separate path. Driven by sincere convictions, he had taken, from the political and religious viewpoints, a direction opposite to the opinions of his relatives. How had that happened? How had the exceedingly Catholic family of Martinvast found itself suddenly impregnated with incredulity and paganism? No one could say. Everyone, however, had respected a dissent developed solely by reason and the right of independence. Relations between the two brothers, although rare, had nevertheless remained imprinted with trust and affection.

At a certain time, therefore, the doctor took advantage, as we have just said, of that mutually sympathetic disposition to try to take his brother with him. He preached and sought by all means to convert him, making him see a future closed to him and his children if he persevered in his illusions. The head of the Martinvast hesitated momentarily, as if out of deference, but eventually recoiled before the practical impossibility of such a change.

As soon as the project of departure had been decided, everyone around him had set courageously to work making the necessary preparations. It had, however, been difficult to take the decision. Many things would, in fact, be lost: the charms of the patrimonial dwelling, familiar horizons, friendly gazes, and the soft light of their native sun. And what would they find out there? It was not easy to reply to

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<sup>4</sup> Martinvast is a commune in Normandy not far from Cherbourg; in the mid-19th century the owner of the Château de Martinvast, the scientist Théodose du Moncel (1821-1884)—a pioneer of electrical lighting and telephony and anticipator of television—established a model farm there, but the château was sold in 1867 to a Prussian banker.

<sup>5</sup> A reactionary contingent took control of the Third Republic for some while in the 1870s, initially installing Duc Albert de Broglie as prime minister in 1873-74, and then Oscar Bardi de Fortou from 1874-78.

that question—but they did not linger long over these considerations. All of them, without distinction of sex or age, were going, as in the crusades, moved by a supernatural attraction, to the cry of “God wills it!” In search of what? A Christian atmosphere—. That atmosphere, to which they were accustomed, to which they were bound by all the fibers of their being, by which they had, so to speak, been formed, they could no longer breathe in France.

Well, they would go in search of it and reconstitute it elsewhere.

It was thus that the entire Norman family gathered on the first of October 1891 on the docks at Marseilles, surrounded by an enormous accumulation of boxes and objects of every kind, each of them clutching some particularly precious object or animal. The men had dogs on leads; each of the children—there were several in each household—carried a bird, a flower, a doll or some other plaything. It was a curious and heart-warming spectacle.