

THE ALBIGENSIAN TREASURE

INVOCATION

By the four marvels of Toulouse,¹ by the beauty of its bell-towers and the youth of its gardens;

By the Comtes Raymond Bertrand, Pons and Taillefer who are sleeping in the three stone tombs of Saint Sernin but wake up every night, it is said, and stroll around the Basilica, chatting;

By the wisdom of the eight Capitouls, by the memory of the Knights Hospitallers full of courage, by the presents of human Saints, those who are revered in the churches and those who were called heretics and burned in the Place Saint-Georges;

By the Garonne, blue daughter of the mountain of Aran, by its song and by its shingle;

By Clémence Isaure, the virginal and the protective, by Pierre Goudoulin of the beautiful songs, by the Hôtel d'Assésat with the beautiful sculptures;²

By the melancholy of the cloisters, the curves of the bridges, the doors of the leprosaria;

By the purity, by the resignation, by the solitude;

I, Michel de Bramevaque, declare that I shall only write veridical things in the delectation of words and the love of beautiful thoughts. Having accomplished actions that appear insensate to men, I am content now to watch the sun set while elevating my soul toward the unknowable world.

I live in a house with a cloister and a garden, which are the vestiges of an ancient abbey. They belong to Isaac Andréa, a man of great wisdom, who welcomed me when I was a wanderer. Thus, I have realized simultaneously the vow to have no possessions and that of knowing the constant amity that gives more joy than the light of the stars over the Garonne.

Amid the box-trees and the ivy and under very old cypresses, there are the tombstones of unknown dead people. Isaac Andréa has told me that those dead people date from an era anterior to the abbey, anterior to Christianity. The monks only came here because it was a place of predilection for meditation and prayer. And it is, I believe, those ancient dead who have advised me, in the very subtle manner in which such advice is given, to put in writing the things that have happened to me.

I am not writing in order to provoke admiration. I prefer not to be admired. I am not writing in order to be useful to my neighbor. My experience has taught me that all work accomplished by human beings is immediately denatured. Separations are also set in stone. The love of ignorance is profound and everyone is content with it, like a pig in filth.

I am writing in gratitude for the grace that had penetrated me. I am tracing characters on parchment in order to perpetuate a praise that is in my heart. Having lived in darkness, light has come to me. I have had the experience of that which is veritable, as one touches the blade of a sword. I have felt the chill of an unalterable metal that has traversed my breast. And that is why I am evoking the episodes of my life before they are effaced, like the towers of a city in the mist.

May the invisible powers guide my trembling hand! I call to my aid the spirit of the ancient Druids and the ancient Minerva to whom the Tectosages erected a temple with seven columns on the sunlit hill that overlooks the Garonne! I call upon Abbé Saturnin, who was dragged by the bull, and Marie the

¹ Author's note: "At the end of the sixteenth century, the four marvels of Toulouse, for the inhabitants of the Languedoc, were the Church of Saint Sernin, la belle Paule de Viguié, the mill of Bazacle and the violinist Mathali." The list appears to be quoted from an 1844 *Recueil de l'Académie des jeux floraux*, where the nickname of the violinist Gailhard Tailhasson, usually rendered Mathelin, is given in that form. Paule Viguié, who was reputedly called "la Belle Paule" by François I, became legendary in consequence.

² Clémence Isaure was the legendary founder of the annual Toulousan poetry competition held by the Academy of Floral Games mentioned in the previous note. Pierre Godolin (1580-1649) was an Occitan poet born in the city.

Golden, who is also known as La Daurade!³ I call upon the Albigensian⁴ saints who received the wisdom of the Orient and the inspired Troubadours who were initiated by the birds of the Pyrenees! I call upon the Pure and the Perfecti, those whose names are unknown because they remained voluntarily obscure, those who died silently as everyone ought to die, face to face with their invisible star!

May they give my words the rapidity of well-launched arrows, the savor of ripe fruits, the warmth of blazing embers, the music of singing trees! May they sow golden spangles in the water of the story! May they spread there, like a dust of the light of the setting sun, a little of the winged, celestial, ineffable beauty that one sometimes glimpses in dreams.

³ Although the name of Notre-Dame de la Daurade does derive from the Latin word for gold, the Marie whose icon was displayed there before being stolen in the 15th century was a “Black Madonna.”

⁴ Author’s note: “There is often mention of the Albigensians in the course of this book. I have abstained from developments on Albigensianism, given in other works. I shall content myself with recalling, in a few words, what everyone knows. The Albigensians were heretics who, in the thirteenth century, professed in the Languedoc a wisdom of Oriental origin that had close links with Buddhism. The last Albigensians were exterminated in the Château de Montségur, in the Ariège, where they had taken refuge. The sect then became very secret. There were still traces of it in the sixteenth century, since the Papacy became sufficiently anxious to carry out an investigation in its regard.” The most significant of the “other works” to which Magre refers are, of course, *Le Sang de Toulouse* and the essay reproduced as an appendix to it in volume 8.

THE SUMMONS OF THE VOICE

It was more imperative than a trumpet of the Last Judgment, than an order given by Jesus Christ in person to someone designated by his finger of light.

In the nocturnal silence, between the columns of my bed, I heard my name pronounced three times.

“Michel de Bramevaque, get up!”

Once would have been sufficient. But the gods are doubtless like old men and children; they like to repeat themselves.

The voice then said: “Walk in the Toulousan lands. Find the Grail that is hidden there, and men will be saved!”

That happened one night in September, in Toulouse, not far from the Porte Arnaud Bernard, while the moon as still adolescent, and there was a favorable wind that orientated the weathervane of my natal house southwards.

I call it that not because I saw the light there in the form of a child, by the complicated mystery of generation, but because many dreams with white wings were born there under the old beams, charmed me with their presence and then flew away.

That house had only one story, but it was a great marvel of form and comfort. The beauty of dwellings diminishes with the stories and there is already a heavy weight on the back a house that has a single upper story with its oak doors and its furniture with somber panels.

And I said to my wife with the swan-like neck and the incredulous face: “Give me my long staff, the one with copper nails that is slightly curved like a crosier and possesses a certain magical power.”

She laughed at the idea of that power, because she did not believe in it. I refrained from talking to her about the voice that had just resonated; she would have laughed even louder, and laughing at a divine voice is something other than laughing at a magic staff.

“I want to go far into the Toulousan lands to study people and living creatures.” And I lowered my voice to add: “I sense their dolor in me and I want to share it by knowing them better.”

She laughed again, and I thought that a precious porcelain had fallen and broken. I had often formulated projects of a chimerical and humanitarian order that I had not put into execution.

“Give me that maroon cape too, which has a hood for the rain and makes me resemble a monk of a mysterious Order that does not accept the Pope. It will be useful to me when I go to the Château de Bramevaque in the mountains.”

There was something like a crystalline rain around me. The Château de Bramevaque had fallen into runs in the Pyrenees and I had said a thousand times that I wanted to go to meditate there and rediscover the thoughts of my ancestors.

I looked at the Bible printed by Gutenberg that my grandfather had acquired, the Ortelius Atlas that was generating much talk in the world, the Latin and Greek books and the Arabic manuscripts that I had from my master Isaac Andréa and in which there were secrets related to the body and the soul. I looked at the parchments attesting to the Capitoulat of my father, an honest and wise man. I had no regret in me, and a surge of delight penetrated me at the thought of the mission with which an Invisible Power had charged me, by means of a curt—and, in truth, rather vague—order.

In the distance, beyond the ramparts, the bell of the Minimes chimed twelve times. I heard the footsteps of the soldiers of the watch. They were marching with precaution, for thieves were numerous and redoubtable. The lantern of the Porte Arnaud Bernard cast a ruddy light.

How silent and inanimate the dolor of creatures was! And yet, that dolor was not asleep. It never rested. I was marching toward it but I did not perceive its breath. I knew that it was present, however, ever present and living in all the places inhabited by human beings.

TORNEBUT

Tornebut was a carpenter by profession, in the Saint Cyprien district, and he possessed a great treasure, the extent of which he was unaware. It was his faith in everything. And most of all, he believed in me. He carried out petty tasks for the people of his neighborhood, but he did not like work much. He preferred listening to people talk and giving his approval. But for him, words were all the more beautiful when he did not understand their meaning.

One never accomplishes a great deed if one has not created it first in the mind by recounting it to someone who believes; for a point of support is necessary for any realization, and faith is the most solid.

I therefore went to find Tornebut.

I found him on his doorstep, as he was getting ready to go and fetch water. The sun had scarcely risen. A little dew was moistening my hair. The waves of the Garonne could be heard recounting the beauty of the forests of firs on the Pyrenean slopes to the shingle of its banks. The air was filled by an odor of freshly-sawn wood.

Tornebut had never heard mention of the Holy Grail, but he nearly fell to his knees when that phrase struck his ears. When I told him that I was going away to search for it, he looked by turns at his empty bucket, his workshop, where his tools were shining, and me, leaning on my staff in the form of a crosier, and he said:

“Every morning, I went to fetch my water from the fountain near the ramparts. I found all the local housewives there because, no one knows why, women have the specialty of water. Water is for women; stone and wood are for men. They made fun of me because of my square shoulders and my hairy chest. But my solitude was light. What does it matter if the day goes by in material labor, if the spirit rises in the evening with the beauty of conversation, and rises very high? O my master, what will become of me if you leave?”

And as I knew the force of consolation that substance conceals in its fibers for a man who manipulates it with his hands, I showed him the wood cut by his saw, the shavings like scattered tresses, and the living planks with their years circularly inscribed, for there is no wood that is dead.

But he shook his head and went to fetch his leather jacket, which he put on, along with a bizarre bonnet with two wings, somewhat similar to a donkey’s bonnet.

“I’m going with you, O my master! Was it not said by the master who walked in Galilee: *You will leave your father and your mother to follow me?*”

“I’m not the Christ, Tornebut, but a sinner.”

“And I have neither father nor mother; I have no one to leave.”

He locked his door with a large key and placed a load of sawn wood on his back.

“An old woman who lives in that low house at the street corner asked me to saw her logs for the fireplace. I’ll put them outside her door and I’ll have finished my work, because it’s a slack time.”

And that was what he did. We walked for a while and he asked: “Today is Friday the thirteenth of September. Do you think it will be the most prosperous of the days of September, and ought to be chosen for the departure?”

I did not reply, and remained perplexed.

“I’ll let the old lady off the six liards she owes me,” Tornebut went on, “So today is prosperous for her in the proportion of six liards. But in what proportion will it be for us?”

“Alas, one can only judge the luck and the prosperous character of days on the last day of one’s life.”

It was then that a flock of birds flew over our heads. A feather was detached from one of them. It descended in a spiral, for feathers are deprived of weight and do not fall as simply as stones. I seized it and I put it in my cap, saying: “It’s a white feather! We shall go in the same direction as those birds.”

THE HANGED MAN OF AVIGNONNET

When we arrived in Avignonnet, the entire town was abuzz because a man had committed suicide.

Oh my God! I thought, immediately. *As long as he's not the man I'm looking for.*

On the threshold of the inn where we were staying, the master of the place was sniggering with men of evil appearance under an extinct lantern; but his face could be distinguished by the light of the interior rooms shining through the windows. He lifted up a pair of shoes, saying: "I made haste to grab his shoes and will burn them in the fire on the spit. When one burns the shoes of a suicide, you all know that a smoke thicker than other smoke escapes, which chases away evil spirits."

And all the listeners affirmed that they were very familiar with the evident power of such smoke. The joker of the assembly permitted himself to say that the roast would stink of suicide's foot, and sketches of laughter put grimaces on the faces, but were quickly effaced, because that was a godly matter about which it was not appropriate to laugh.

And the one who was holding a long pole with a tallow candle at the end said in his turn, with a sideways glance: "I've received an order from the Inquisitor. I won't light the lanterns tonight. It's necessary that a soul in the torment of the wicked has no light to guide it. It will grope its way through the streets, searching for its route without finding it, for who knows how many years!"

And that miser of light lowered his pole and blew out his tallow candle, for fear that it might serve as a reference point for the soul in torment.

"It's a bad augury for the children who are about to be born," said one.

"That's because the Devil has his eye on us," said another.

"The suicide hasn't put a child into the world to bear his sin," said a third.

"I can make out thin ghosts with bald heads outside his house," said a man with big eyes, like flies ready to take off.

The house in question was of modest appearance and radiant with simplicity, by virtue of the mystery that makes edifices resemble their inhabitants.

Then I went forward and said: "Who is the man who had committed suicide?"

The innkeeper replied, with a hideous expression of disgust: "He was an intellectual!"

At that word, a breath of hatred passed through the group.

"He read books! He had them brought by colporteurs. He once said that he understood different meanings of the Bible, and another time that animals have souls like humans."

"How did he commit suicide, then?"

Then everyone spoke at the same time.

He began by fasting on certain days of the week. Then he had stopped eating, and when he was no longer anything but a shadow, a living specter, he hanged himself from a beam in his ceiling. His shadow was seen from the street. He was so thin that the wind was swinging him like a tree branch. His perverse joy in dying was so great that when the rope was cut he seemed to be smiling, and scornful of those who cut him down.

"Where is his body now?"

"The Inquisitor of Avignonnet gave the order that it be suspended from the gallows like a criminal. Big Ferré dragged it there. It didn't give him any trouble, he pulled it one-handed. The body bounced with a rattle of bones."

I was about to ask more questions, but I saw the circle of faces turned toward me angrily. And like a man lost in the mountains standing up to irritated wolves, I held them in respect with my gaze while they questioned me.

"Say, did you know him by any chance, that intellectual?"

"No, I didn't know him."

"You're as pale as those who don't drink wine and don't eat meat. Aren't you one of the band of intellectuals?"

"I'm certainly not!"

“One might think that you resemble him. Aren’t you a member of his family?”

“In truth, I’m not.”

They finally dispersed. The lantern-lighter started singing as he drew away. I walked through the dark streets.

Then I wept bitterly. I had just had news of one of the men I was seeking. He was dead; he had been suspended from the gallows, and I, like the disciple devoid of courage, had denied him three times.