

François-Félix Nogaret: *The Mirror of Present Events, Or, Beauty to the Highest Bidder*
(1790)

If you only want to amuse yourselves, read me. If you want to enlighten people and serve them, skip to the final footnote to this work, read it and follow the advice that I give you. Thus, the blue penitents, the gray penitents, the white penitents, the green penitents and all the masks of that species will have less to fear.

To my Friend M. Lecheveau
Clerk in the Département des Boulets¹

Be the patron of the lovely Orphan of whom there is question in this little erotico-politico-patriotic story, which happened in the year 4400 of the Julian period, or the vulgar year 3790, give or take a year,² which you can verify very easily. You are so modest that you will be very surprised to find yourself the object of a dedication, as if you lacked the entitlement to pretend to such an honor, but I know you have more than one. For a long time you have acquitted, with as much zeal as intelligence, the retail committed to your care, and yet I do not see you figuring in the red book. You are no more inscribed in the green book, although you have been very honorable at all times; apparently, the order is a treasure. Finally, your name is not even found in the provincial ledgers for annual retributions, by virtue of services rendered...or to be rendered. An obliging pen-pusher, without having an entire part in the Proscenium, where you nevertheless figure as one of the principal actors, if you have received, here and there, a few petty trifles, which honesty could not refuse the recognition, you have rapidly rid yourself of them by offering them to your guests. We call that the tax-gatherer's crumbs. Large morsels would have made you blush... You can clearly see, therefore, my old comrade, that, honor always having served you as a guide, it is only just that I should prefer you to so many others I have known.

I have resembled you in my time; I have gloried in it; but in addition, I have told the truth bluntly. My little family has suffered in consequence; my superiors have taken me for an Ammonite and the god Moloch has swallowed my children. On my table, at that time, was displayed the touching letter, the golden letter of the worthy pastor of Sormery,³ well framed under Bohemian glass, in the guise of a prayer or canon, containing the sacramental words that edify me and the same time as they invite me to sobriety. My philosophy is accommodated thereto, and patriotism is honored to serve you the dinner of Democritus in the vessel of Tuberon.⁴

Your friend,

Félix Nogaret

¹ Probably a joke referring to the Ministry of War.

² These dates are inconsistent. The Julian year 4400 would be 313 B.C., while the "vulgar year," counting from Archbishop Ussher's estimate, would be 214 B.C. Neither can be the date in which the story is set, that being after the end of the siege of Syracuse, which concluded in 212 B.C.

³ The curé of Sormery gave up his salary for a year in order to assist the French financial crisis associated with the Revolution, and was held up by the new government as an example to others.

⁴ Tuberon's provision of an unusually lavish serving-dish for a public feast in Rome is recorded in French translations of Livy. Democritus was renowned for his frugality as well as his cheerfulness.

Fortunate are the people who sleep when they do not have bad dreams! While the Camus, the Lameths, the Menous and the Goupils stroll in dreams in the midst of beauties placed by Montesquieu in the bouquets of Gnide, or on the flowery banks of limpid streams that wind through those beautiful places, the de Sezes, the Cazalès, the Maurys and Mirabeau the killer have rendezvous on the bank of the Styx with Alecto, Megaera and Tisiphone. Those latter marriages are lit by the torch of the Erinyes, so the children of one and the other are as different as black and white.

I, whom am invalid before my time, for having made my paradise, do not travel when I sleep with either Montesquieu or Machiavelli. My imagination, less active than in times past, no longer offers me any but dusty books, a table, and paper, with a hundred stupidities and all the intelligence of the world in a cornet; it is up to me to take one or the other. A sad condition!

No matter. You have seen lately that Solon has not disdained to appear to me. I was in bed then. It was a pleasure for him to find me at work this time. "It's going well now," he said to me—and then he maintained a bleak silence...

I, who had scarcely begun to put my thoughts into a beautiful oratory style, in accordance with the advice of the divine revenant, was slightly surprised to see that he was not saying anything to me. I looked him in the eyes; I waited impatiently for some of those sweet speeches to emerge from his mouth that inflates our self-esteem, but my excessive politeness, the result of an old habit of a subordinate courtier, had made me do something stupid, which he was holding against me.

"You appear to me," I said to him, "to have something on your mind..."

"Undoubtedly," he said. "Where have you got the idea that I was something less than a philosopher? What is this ridiculous address in which I find myself seriously or flippantly called Monseigneur? Monseigneur, me! Are you mad? Cato, who wasn't laughing, thought that the letter was for Sardanapalus. Can a man chosen by his fellows to enable them to enjoy the advantages of equality be ambitious for a title destructive of the services that he renders to them? Is there one more flattering for him than that of benefactor of humankind, or servant of the fatherland? Do you not know, then, that Minos, who gave the law to Crete, would have blushed to hear himself called Milord? Lycurgus made that observation to us and said, speaking of himself, that, having lost an eye for the good cause, he would rather have heard himself described as a disreputable villain."⁵

"Forgive me," I said to him. "I thought that a model legislator like you would not be overly concerned with the title I gave you, but I thought I owed it to the descendant of Codrus, the Kings of Pylos and the cousin of Pisistratus."

"Stupidity once again. I could have ruled, but I did not want that. Be without baseness as I was devoid of pride. My address is: Solon, merchant in Elysium. Remember that. Anyway, that subscription is very nearly the only thing that has made us laugh at your expense. It has been found in general that you have spoken well of the conscript Fathers."

"So much the better, for I feared that I might be reproached for not having distinguished Philippe from Jean-François,⁶ since it's true that they're not all friends of the fatherland. But moderation is a good thing, so I applaud the protective guard that is opposed to the ways of action of the monomachites, and which, full of humanity, have preserved the lamp of the Chevalier Sans-Peur, the servant of the God of peace, ever armed, whose conduct in the Senate is, it's said, nothing less than evangelical. The people cried: 'Curtain!' I can't see, though, that there's much for which to reproach him. A philosopher has observed that while one people becomes civilized, another becomes barbaric. Since the Moors are losing their taste for piracy, since they're presently renouncing living at the expense of their enemies, and want to render liberty to slaves, the laws of equilibrium demanded that the most flourishing nation in Europe

⁵ The last remark is an untranslatable pun: *borgne*, whose literal meaning is "one-eyed" is used metaphorically in French to mean disreputable.

⁶ Possibly the dramatist Jean-François de La Harpe (1739-1803) and his august predecessor Philippe Quinault (1633-1688).

should return to slavery, that the divine men who cultivate the arts and the useful men who labor the earth are treated like dogs and that the country's corsairs take possession of all the galleons.

"But let's leave those honest folk to one side and talk about something else. Answer, please, one question that I have to put to you. If a poor people in distress, sighing after liberty, menaced with iron and death, had implored the help of the Athenians in the time when you were their adviser and no one acted without your approval, what would have done?"

"I would immediately have sent them the number of men they had requested."

"Yes, but what if you too had been in such terrible difficulties that you did not have more than enough people to watch over the defense of your hearths?"

"That changes the matter entirely. In such a case my heart would have suffered, because, the first of duties being love of the fatherland, I would not have been able to endanger mine without being criminal. But I would not have wanted the request of my brethren, left without response, to make them presume a murderous indifference on my part. I would probably have done what the Carthaginians did three hundred years after my death."

"And what was that?"

That question, which characterized my ignorance, caused Solon to blush from the base of the chin all the way to the occiput.

"Carthage," he told me, "afflicted by the intrepid Agathocles, was betrayed within by the unworthy Bomilcar, one of its generals. Tyr, besieged by Alexander, informed the Carthaginians of the extremity to which its inhabitants were reduced. Carthage immediately sent them a deputation of thirty of its principal citizens to explain the chagrin it felt in being unable to send them troops. 'At least preserve from the enemy sword,' the Tyrians said, 'that which is most dear to us in the world...'

"That language was understood. Carthage saw its envoys return with a party of women, children and old men from the suppliant city. The Gods did not take long to recompense them for that action. Agathocles withdrew and Bomilcar was crucified."

"Those are fine sentiments on either side," I said to Solon. "I am chagrined to see that that excellent example of centuries past did not offer itself to our memory, but it must be said that for some time, any history of ancient peoples, especially that of republics, has been treated by us virtually as fables. The fine arts have put us to sleep. Now that the sound of the trumpet of war, blown by the Abbé Mably, has succeeded the sweet music of Fontenelle's flageolet, people are generally beginning to think differently."

"I can believe it. At this moment, I have no doubt, you're writing once again about the advantages of livery; one can do nothing better, and I congratulate you for it..."

As I was occupied at that moment in something quite different from which Solon presumed, the good opinion that he had of me rendered me as ashamed as a young woman before whom one speaks of a treasure that she has lost.

"Such a felicitation," I said to him, "would not have found the Camilles and Prudhommes at a loss; as for me..."

"What! What are you doing, then?"

"I'm amusing myself proving that the Earth is an animal. Terentia did not disdain to smile at that philosophical bagatelle, and I'm taking it up."⁷

"Too bad. What's this other scribble?"

"Another tale. You seem very surprised. I'm not, however, the first to have amused himself writing them during public calamities, and even during the horrors of the plague. This one might perhaps have been of some interest; it was taking on a physiognomy not foreign to present circumstances. The intelligent reader would have found analogies therein more flattering to the mind than the raw truth; but I didn't have the courage to continue it."

⁷ Terentia was Cicero's wife, whom he eventually divorced. She features in an eponymous 1775 tragedy by François Tronchin, in which Denis Diderot also had a hand, but I do not know whether the idea of the Earth as an animal features therein. It does, however, feature in Restif de La Bretonne's *La Découverte australe par un homme volant* (1781) (scheduled to be published by Black Coat Press), which Nogaret would surely have read.

“Why not?”

“Because the love of slavery is an epidemic disease among us. Since the goblins, specters, ghosts and all the infernal spirits have not able to prevent my recent writings from reaching you in the realms of Pluto, you know what I have done to cure the idle.”

“Has their number not diminished?”

“I believe, on the contrary, that it’s increasing. It put me in a bad mood; that was what made me set aside that instructive bagatelle.”

Solon put out his hand in order to find out what I meant.

“Excuse me,” I said to him, “the title will not predispose you in its favor. It’s a matter of a virgin who offers herself to the highest bidder. Truly, though, I would be wrong to make a mystery about that article with you; the fair sex was not indifferent to you once. You have composed enough ribald songs, which proves that you loved both women...and wine!”

“Agreed. Both have formed mores by softening the passions; I have only ever criticized excess. You put a woman on the stage? So much the better: the truth will be more pleasant for it.”

It did not take him long to satisfy his curiosity.

“Mores are respected—good!” he said. “Read, reread, correct and yield to the printer.”

Reader, I have obeyed. This is my tale.

BEAUTY UP FOR COMPETITION

I. Aglaonice decides to marry and offers her hand on the conditions to be seen.

Is it a good or a bad thing for a woman to be her own mistress at the age of fifteen? While awaiting the solution to that question, which has its difficulties, by virtue, on the one hand, of the shackles of dependency, and on the other, of the abuses that a young person might make of her liberty, I shall tell you, my brothers, a story of times past, which it is necessary not to regard as apocryphal, for I obtained it from a genuine Traveler, whose great-grandfather heard it recounted by a sage, who had it from his grandfather, who had read it in the Serapeon before the books in that library were employed to heat the baths of Alexandria.⁸

Syracuse, after the memorable siege that it endured on the part of Marcellus, finally enjoyed, although included in the number of lands conquered by the Romans, a liberty submissive to the laws and the benefits of a profound peace. Like the birds of spring who recall verdure after the mortal breath of winter, the arts that the tyrants had frightened away returned to settle in that beautiful abode. The reputation that Archimedes has left behind attracted lovers of the higher sciences from far away, curious to see the debris of the instruments of war that had repelled the enemy for three years in succession, sometimes astonished by such considerable losses.

That city had never seen so many inventors of genius in its bosom, gathered from all the corners of the earth. They were all in an admiration that verged on amazement, all saying that there was no genius comparable with the celebrated Geometer who had defended Syracuse for so long; but that homage was accompanied by a certain discouragement, because none of those men, so lauded elsewhere, took the trouble to give the slightest idea of his talents here. Thus the brilliant light of the torch of day causes the feeble light of the stars of night to disappear.

Aglaonice, a young woman of seventeen, orphaned of her father and mother, having no other relatives than an older sister, whose only wealth was a beauty of which she might be able to take advantage, took it into her head to make all those handsome men of genius do something. All that was

⁸ The Serapeon, or, more usually, Serapion, was the temple of Serapis in Alexandria. The spelling employed by Nogaret is employed in Claude Guyon’s *Histoire des empires et des républiques* (1736), in a passage that records that the building housed a library.

required, in order to succeed in that, was the consent of Marius Cornelius,⁹ a Roman praetor, a worthy man of sixty for whom a pretty young woman was not yet indifferent, but of a probity so recognized that the Senate, interested in capturing the hearts of the Syracusans, were convinced, with reason, that no better choice could have been made.

Aglaonice had seen the Praetor sitting in his curule chair more than once, but his imposing gravity, the ceremony resulting from a large number of Judges placed around him and perhaps also the crowd of the audience, had frightened her a little. There is, however, no way of keeping the magistracy out of the matter of marriage. One morning, therefore, without consulting the pontiffs as to whether or not it was a good day,¹⁰ Aglaonice went to see Cornelius, and, as she found him much less serious and dressed up than with his long robe fringed with purple, she asked him cheerfully whether he would not see with pleasure all those great makers of machines, so long inactive, finally taking flight and leaving some monument to their knowledge in Syracuse.

“Certainly,” Cornelius replied. “I agree that, out of a hundred things imagined by those gentlemen, ninety-nine are almost useless, but in the end, since it’s recognized that one good one might be found among the hundred, it’s an acquisition that is not to be disdained. What are your means, though? It’s not you, presumably, who proposes to set these skillful laborers to work?”

“Excuse me,” said Aglaonice.

The good magistrate started to laugh. He thought he had divined her secret, but that was an error on his part. Aglaonice was virtuous without prudishness; knowing that youth and beauty are inappreciable treasures, she thought of putting them in the balance with lucrative talents, in a way that would enable her to escape criticism.

Whatever the idea was that passed through the Praetor’s head, as it is rare for a man to refuse anything to beauty, he replied: “Do as you please,” and did not forbid himself to kiss her hand amorously.

The following day, Aglaonice, taxed for a long time by a youth as fickle as it was hasty, tormented and persecuted by the choice of a lover, or at least of a husband, had it published by a herald in Epipoli, in Ortygia, in Achradina and Neapolis—in sum, in all the quarters of Syracuse—that she was disposed to listen to proposals of marriage that anyone cared to make to her, but that she would only give her hand to a Mechanician who had invented some machine that would prove not only his skill but that he knew the heart of women well. As for the birth of the individual, that was the least of her concerns. *Nobilitas sub amore jacet.*¹¹

II. Two aspirants present themselves; one offers a mobile tripod, the other a little ivory chariot and ship.

The original proposition of the beauty spread throughout Sicily and passed into Italy and beyond. It was not long before Aglaonice was besieged by visits. All those who believed that they had enough talent

⁹ Author’s note: “*Marcus Cornelius, Praetor peregrinus*. Foreign Praetors governed for two years, one in the quality of Praetor, the other in the quality of Proprætor. They presided over all judgments, but did not judge; judgments were rendered by a certain number of elected citizens drawn from various bodies of State. It was in the Roman year 418 that the Plebeians finally succeeded in winning a victory over the Patricians in also having themselves named to the Praetorate. As I have found in Cornelius the excellent qualities of a good Plebeian, I was curious to know his extraction. Marcellus’ expedition, made in the Roman year 540, more than a hundred and twenty years after that great conquest by the Plebeians, gave me grounds to hope that I might find in him a man of the people. My research has verified my presumption. There are honest people everywhere.” The praetor in Sicily in 211 B.C., which is presumably the year in which the story is set, was Marcus Cornelius Dolabella, about whom very little is known, thus leaving space for Nogaret to improvise.

¹⁰ Author’s note: “The knowledge of that difference of days when one might go to ask for justice was, for a time, a mysterious science, in which the Pontiffs, or ‘makers of bridges,’ makers of religions, had rendered themselves the master, and which they kept carefully hidden in order to appear necessary and oblige litigants to have recourse to them. Learned citizens ended up making fun of that charlatanism.” The untranslatable wordplay derives from the fact that *pont* is French for bridge.

¹¹ Nobility gives way to love; the quotation comes from Ovid’s *Epistles*.

to compete wanted, before anything else, to judge the prize that was offered to them. In addition, however, the same artist appeared ten times a day; the beauty was at risk of being stifled by the crowd of her admirers. She made the decision to go and see the Praetor again, convinced that she would obtain there a lodgment that would be infinitely more secure.

Cornelius did not see without chagrin a beginning that presaged that Aglaonice would soon find a husband, but in the end, rendering justice to the thought that he was past the age of pretensions, he consoled himself with the pleasure of serving as her protector.

“I consent,” he said, “to lodge you in my house and I promise to treat you as my daughter. Have no fear of the influx of a society that I understand the difficulty of keep away from you. They will be able to see you to the extent that you permit, but I shall be present and you shall have guards.”¹²

She did, indeed, and did not go out without being accompanied. It was a further motive for increasing urgency and curiosity. No one was any longer talking about anything but the joy of seeing, and above all of espousing, Aglaonice.

I would never finish if I went into detail about all the things imagined in order to reach that much-desired objective. I shall pass in silence over all those that do not merit a certain attention.

The first one who came, after two long months, to present his masterpiece of Aglaonice was a species of imitator, a native of Pystira, an isle neighboring Smyrna and Petgama, who had constructed, in accordance with known descriptions, a polished steel tripod that walked on its own, so to speak, although it was necessary, beforehand, to set up the mechanisms hidden in each of its three legs.

Aglaonice, who was aiming for the useful, refused the fine present flatly, on the grounds that a tripod that did not flinch when carrying a saucepan is preferable to one that can move away from the fire.

That man was succeeded by a certain Mymecide of Miletus,¹³ who offered the beauty an ivory chariot, wrought with so much artistry and so small that a medium-sized fly could cover it entirely with its wings. That was only half of his tribute; he also presented a pretty ship with three rows of oars, also made of ivory, with all its rigging, every bit as dainty as the chariot.

Aglaonice took great pleasure in considering those two marvels, but when she harnessed the chariot one day to a fly that was a little too big, the insect flew away, transporting the vehicle, through the window.

The ship, for which a font full of water was no less vast than the Atlantic Ocean, could no longer be found one evening when Aglaonice had invited her sister and a few of her friends to come and see it. The Praetor and the ladies were at supper in a room softly lit, not by candles but by the light of the full moon. Aglaonice, asked to show her ship, asked for the vase in which it had been deposited; the surface of the water presented filaments of a greenish hue, which extended from the center to the edges of the bowl, but there was no more ship; it had disappeared.

Aglaonice showed a great deal of ill-humor to the slaves that Cornelius had placed with her to serve her; she accused them of theft with considerable vivacity, adding nevertheless that if they had not stolen the ship, it was probable that they had been clumsy enough to throw it away thoughtlessly, since it was obvious that she was not being presented with the same water.

The Praetor, who was something of a naturalist said to her: “My lady, do not put any of those who are here to serve you on trial. The water you see in the bowl is the same in which you set your pretty trireme afloat a fortnight ago. The green filaments that cover the surface today are nothing but Polyyps, a voracious animal species whose form is infinitely variable, which one tries to destroy but only multiply by chopping them up. It’s a freshwater Polyp, an ogre in miniature, that has swallowed the ship.”¹⁴ He

¹² Author’s note: “This attention on the part of Cornelius was great; it does not, however, offer anything so extraordinary as to expose it to criticism. It is well-known that the Vestals walked preceded by a Lictor when they appeared in public. Aglaonice also had her treasure to guard.”

¹³ The term Mymecide is featured in Guillaume de Saluste du Bartas’ dictionary of arcane words, where it is defined in the 1641 English translation as “a cunning and curious carver in small works.” The etymology invented by Julia Douthwaite in her misleading account of Nogaret’s story is wrong.

¹⁴ The particular freshwater polyp that Cornelius has in mind is presumably a hydra.

added, in a low voice: “Such a misfortune, could surely never happen to the large vessel of prudent Lutetia.”

“Lutetia!” said Aglaonice. “That’s a Gaulish city. Are there polyps in cities?”

Smiling, Cornelius took one of her plump little hands, which he squeezed in both of his, and only said, by way of reply: “Aglaonice, you are charming.”

“I don’t understand all this gibberish,” she said.¹⁵ “At any rate, the Miletian has not found the secret of preventing me from remaining a virgin; let him know, I beg you, that a polyp has swallowed half his hopes and that a fly has flown away with the rest.”

III. The story of Téraois-clouni-ca-law-bar-Cochébas; or, the telescope without lenses.

The slave charged with that commission set out for Mymecide’s house. He was stopped on the way and retraced his steps, announcing a Necromancer whose name was a mixture of Greek and Hebrew. His name was Téréos-clouni-ca-law-bar-Cochébas;¹⁶ he had arrived from Egypt, where he had been initiated into the mysteries of the Great Goddess, and he was asking to speak to Aglaonice.

“Send him in,” said the Praetor.

Meanwhile, the taps on two fountains were turned, which poured an excellent Greek wine into the cups.

“What do you have to show us that is fine and beautiful?” asked Aglaonice.

“I could, my lady,” Bar-Cochébas replied, “talk to you about the secret I have or making gold, but you would doubtless think more of a talent that serves to procure it deservedly and strike good coin. Such as you see me with my long beard and my rather modest accoutrement, I have the right to hope for an alliance to which others have aspired in vain before me. Metals follow me as the trees and rocks once followed the singer of Thrace. You see this long tube of beaten iron; it is my talisman. With the aid of this machine, I can make known to you a host of objects that escape your overly short sight, and of which neither you nor anyone else can have a perfect knowledge without my help. Take, for example, my lady, the moon, from which you are presently receiving such a soft light, which you prefer to the annoying light of a hundred resinous candles, simultaneously wounding to the senses of sight and smell. The moon can serve as proof of what I say. Do you believe it to be inhabited?”

“No, in truth,” said Aglaonice.

“It’s something that it’s necessary to suspect,” said the Praetor. “Pythagoras thought that the moon is a world similar to ours, where there ought to be animals, the nature of which he could not determine.”

“That is true,” replied Bar-Cochébas, “and the necessary instrument that he lacked, I have devised. I will render sensible to you things even less probably than what was suspected by Pythagoras.”

“That may be,” replied Cornelius, whom these magnificent promises did not fail to inspire some interest. “You doubtless intend to talk about the stars, considered as so many suns, and the planetary bodies that are liberally placed around them? I’m a descendant of Anaximenes, who heard it said by Thales, who got it from Heraclitus, who had read it in the verses of Orpheus, that the stars are masses of fire, around which certain terrestrial bodies, which we cannot perceive, carry out periodic revolutions...”

“It is charming to listen to Lord Cornelius!” exclaimed Bar-Cochébas. “No one is more learned in Memphis or Babylon, and I’m tempted to believe...”

“In fact,” said Aglaonice, “those are compliments indeed, but many things have been announced, and we haven’t seen anything. Let’s stick to the moon, Sir Mechanician, and hurry up.”

Then the Israelite was seen to aim his long tube, composed of three sections devoid of lenses, whose unique property was that of directing the sight and rendering it clearer by separating the considered object from the surrounding objects.

¹⁵ Author’s note: “The solution will be found in the last chapter.”

¹⁶ Author’s note: “Téraois-téréos-clouni-ca-law-bar-cochébas is equivalent to false prophet, speculator, pickpocket, etc., etc.” The Greek *tereo* can mean “observer”; Bar-Cochebas is a Latinized form of the name of Simon bar Kokhba, the leader of a Judean revolt against the Roman Empire in 132 A.D.

“If the moon is inhabited,” said Bar-Cochébas, “the other planetary bodies are too; whoever proves one, proves the other. Such a discovery is of incontestable utility; in any case my lady, take note of one thing: that the parts of the moon that cast the brightest light toward our eyes are massive mountains of silver; so that if we succeed, as I hope, in convincing ourselves that the planet has inhabitants, it will only need a good loudhailer to inform them of our needs. Now, if that is so, and if my lady obtains some pleasure in convincing herself of it, my rivals have nothing more to expect; it is me who will triumph; it is me...”

“Well yes,” said Aglaonice, “that follows. Let’s see, then.”

“See, my lady.”

Aglaonice then drew near to the rather broad aperture of the long tube, which hid more than a quarter of her lovely face. Her left hand provided support for the body of the telescope, while her right lowered the eyelid of the other eye; her attention was entirely focused on the object of her consideration.

The Praetor, who had heard talk of mountains of gold and silver, was almost sorry to have had a serious conversation with a man who was, in the final analysis, making mock of the company, or proffering errors in good faith, which has happened to more than one scholar to whom statues have nevertheless been erected. He regarded it as possible that Bar-Cochébas had fallen into delirium, without being entirely exempt from reason in consequence.

The members of the company, including Cornelius, therefore awaited their turn impatiently to see the seas, the forests, the shiny masses, the rocks and precipices that Bar-Cochébas had advertised, and which Aglaonice had not succeeded in discovering. When each of them, one after another, had become weary of looking, someone wanted to speak to send the promise-maker away and advise him to go see whether, in all those supposed worlds, he could find a jewel similar to the one that he had dared to aspire, but they looked to the left and right and all the corners of the apartment in vain; the supposed inventor of the tube had disappeared. Aglaonice and the ladies found themselves, to their great astonishment, relieved of their purses and some of their jewelry.

The Praetor tried to catch up with the clever rogue and make sure that he never saw the pyramids again, but as his beard and cassock were found at the bottom of the stairs, it was thought that it would be a waste of time running after him. Aglaonice was not the woman of the company who had suffered most from that accident; Cornelius was not a man to let it go unrepaired.

IV. Apparent neglect on the part of physicians.

Serious conversation between the Praetor and old Cyaxare, former secretary of good King Hyeron.

Meanwhile, it seemed that the orphan beauty’s project had failed complete, for I count for little an heir of Euclid who talked to her about dioptrics and catoptrics and made her a long series of propositions, the last of which—the only one that was intelligible to Aglaonice—was no more welcome than all the rest.

The days succeeded one another without any mention being heard of anything, and the beauty’s self-esteem was suffering a little therefrom. She had time to think that her charms had not put such a large number of artists to work, and that they had not had the effect that she had promised herself at all.

One consoles oneself as best one can. The windows of her apartment overlooked the flowery banks of the Arethuse;¹⁷ she frequently cast her eyes upon that spring, whose good fortune made her hope for another Alpheus. Prosperity came to her while she slept, she told herself, and she tried to go to sleep to the amorous murmur of its waves, surrendering herself to sweet thoughts and the void in her heart. She did not know that the appearances of inaction hide labor, most of it undertaken by skillful individuals, and that all of it was about to appear at once, one fine morning.

¹⁷ Author’s note: “A Sicilian spring that runs through Ortygia, the quarter of Syracuse in which Cornelius was lodged.” It was named after the nymph Arethusa, the object of the lust of the river god Alpheus.

The Praetor, whose age and the sacred title of Protector had eliminated from the ranks, scarcely able to talk to Aglaonice about love, conversed with her about politics, and his grateful ward deigned to listen while waiting for something better.

The Senate had charged Cornelius with analyzing the character of the Syracusans in order to discover in what manner they could be managed without embittering minds so versatile and always less submissive than independent.

Cyaxare, a former secretary of the good King Hyeron¹⁸ came to see the Praetor from time to time. That former servant had displeased the young Hyeronimus, the unworthy son of the best of princes, an insolent dissipater of the treasure destined for the embellishment of the city and to pay the defenders of the fatherland, a violator of old treaties and, in sum, a declared enemy of public wellbeing. The young insensate had perished not long before under the vengeful swords of citizens in revolt one day when he had left Syracuse to go to the land of the Leontines.

Cyaxare was no more satisfied with Hippocrates and Epycides, enterprising Praetors,¹⁹ usurpers of limitless power, maladroit politicians whose seditious maneuvers had been the cause of the siege, because both had openly declared themselves for the Carthaginians.

The old servant spoke as an eye-witness of everything that had happened for many years; he also knew by tradition the mind and heart of the Syracusans, and, in more than one conversation with Cornelius he put his mind to giving the Senate an accurate idea of it.

“The Syracusans need a King,” he told him. “They’re capable of an extreme fidelity and a limitless attachment. This city has, at all times, been exposed to strange scenes. It can be compared to a sea, more often agitated by stormy winds than refreshed by the breath of zephyrs. Exposed to the most terrible revolutions, it has passed from liberty to slavery. It has groaned under the iron scepter of Denis,²⁰ and has breathed easy under the mild reign of the immortal Hyeron. It has sometimes been seen surrendered to the caprices of an unbridled populace and sometimes submissive to the authority of laws.

“Such opposite extremes could be attributed to the Syracusans themselves, whose levity was their dominant character, but the primary cause of so many evils is the form of government, composed of two ever-militant powers and deprived of a third whose counterweight might have established equilibrium; with the result that liberty, too often groaning under the hand of aristocrats, rose up more than once, and rendered Sicily witness to the bloodiest scenes.

“What also renders the government of the city less easy is that its citizens, bellicose although frivolous, have not forgotten the signal victories won in Africa by their ancestors and their advantages over the Athenians, too proud of a maritime power that our people successfully disputed more than once with those rivals jealous of their glory.

“Although one has the right to say that wealth has softened the heart of the Syracusans and given them a kind of distance from all that has no affinity with games and pleasures, it must be admitted that they are nevertheless resistant on occasions to the voice of their orators, and then become capable of the greatest enterprises. The same men who went to sleep in the bosom of confidence wake up terrible and threatening, with the most superb heads, and, in their frenetic transports, massacre everything that has contributed to harming them.

“I regard them, therefore, as men inappropriate to enjoy a complete liberty or to accustom themselves to an entire servitude. They need a King, and I want that; but it is also appropriate that they

¹⁸ Author’s note: “Hyeron II. The historians who have mentioned that King, an honest man, have all praised his good taste for the science and his love for the public good. ‘My subjects,’ he said, ‘are my children and the State is my family.’ Remarkable words! He was mourned like a father. Time has not damaged his reputation.” Hiero II ruled Syracuse from 270-215 B.C. His grandson Hieronymus, who took the throne after his death, was only fifteen at the time, and an instrument in a power-struggle between his two uncles, so the blackening of his name by historians might be a trifle unjust.

¹⁹ Author’s note: “Praetors of the Senate of Syracuse, in the fashion of the Carthaginians.” The two were brothers educated in Carthage, who held off Marcellus’ siege of Syracuse for some time before the Carthaginian fleet sent to relieve the siege turned back and left the city to its fate.

²⁰ Denis is the French form of the name of the Sicilian tyrant Dionysius I (432-367 B.C.)

should always be the masters of their own revolutions, when the utility if it is generally recognized by the most sound minds. The Prince will then enjoy the fine advantage of facilitating its execution, and everyone will be happy; otherwise, Rome will probably not have in the Syracusans a people on whom they can reliably count.”

That idea of Cyaxare, of giving them another King, did not please Cornelius; he tried to make that honest man, misled by the memory of the great virtues of Hyeron—as if such sovereigns were not phenomena, to whom nature took centuries to give birth!—abandon it.

“The Roman Senate does not think as you do,” he told him. “I don’t know who you would designate today to reign, but you, who scarcely think of it, would be on the throne now if Rome, which makes Kings, had judged it appropriate to its own interests and those of Syracuse that the constitution of the city should be other than that of a Republic.

“Sicily conserves its ancient rights and customs, as you know, and Rome does not extend that distinction to many its conquered lands. You are more her friends and confederates than a submissive people, as you also know, since it is true that Rome does not levy and tribute from you by the entitlement of monument and the price of victory.²¹

Sicily is Italy’s neighbor; you regard yourselves as being part of it. Kings, Cyaxare, too often affect an absolute power; their procedures, stripped of the forms of justice, then become violent actions rather than. Do you count for nothing the advantage of only obeying laws that you have made yourself, and of choosing your magistrates annually? No more judges henceforth that the parties cannot remove; and it is the advantage of the Valerian law, which ought to have all its force here as it does among us, that the people now have the right to pronounce the death penalty against the enemies of the state.”

Cyaxare was not without a reply to those observations.

“As all Kings,” he said, “do not resemble Hyeron, all Praetors do not resemble Cornelius, and Rome will only leave you here for a short time...but I do not want to anticipate the evils that your successors might occasion here subsequently. Let us enjoy the present; I yield to your arguments.”

Thus reasoned the good Cornelius and old Cyaxare, and at those moments the Praetor scarcely thought about the annoyances of the beautiful Aglaonice, which were increasing every day, by virtue of the silence of the mechanicians on whom she had founded her hopes, and by the nature of those grave conversation, by which she was somewhat embarrassed. But Cyaxare had no sooner left the apartment than the keenest interest in favor of the lovely orphan was reborn in Cornelius’ heart. He begged her pardon so obligingly for having talked in her presence about anything other than what might please her that the most passionate of men would have seemed less expressive and less amiable.

²¹ Author’s note: “Sicily, in becoming a Roman province, conserved its ancient rights and customs. The Sicilians were not treated like the Spaniards and Carthaginians, on whom the Romans imposed a tribute as the price of victory. *Quasi victoriae praemium ac poena belli*. Let us say everything, for the best things only last for a time. So long as Rome was only dominant in Italy, the people were governed as confederates; the laws of each republic were followed; and Sicily, which added a great deal to the strength of Rome, of which it was the storehouse and granary, was to enjoy that privilege for a long time. As Montesquieu says, however; ‘Afterwards, that liberty, so vaunted, only existed at the center, and tyranny at the extremities.’” The quotation, from Cicero, translates loosely as “as if it were a reward for victory and a penalty of defeat.”