THE ANARCHISTS' NOËL

FROM THE PAGES OF "LE LIBERTAIRE"

1899

For this Noël...

For this Noël you will not have the expected setting, the flight of pristine snow, the innocence of the child, the wisdom of the donkey and the ox. Nor the poem of bells trembling with joy, nor the family table, nor the tenderness of lavish Christmas Eve feasts, nor the kiss of peace. Sing hosanna, lull yourselves with romances, drink the wines, eat the meats as a sign of joy, but I am not part of your celebration. For, on that night, like all the others, you will be selfish, cowardly, liars and Pharisees. For, on that night, like all the others, the priests will soil their robes of poverty in the house of the rich. For, on that night, like all the others, the judge will count how much the condemnation of the weak, the acquittal of the strong, can earn him. And you, merchant, extoller of honesty, you will seek, before roast goose, by what new fraud your profits will increase tomorrow. The generals will consider how many stripes a massacre will add to their tunics, what trinkets to their chests. For, on that night, like all the others, women in their bridal beds will dream of adultery, and the virgin, daughter of the confraternities, will hesitate only in the choice of a lover. And the intelligent youth, your pride, those you educate, in whom your hope rests, will roll debauched, after the balls and the drinking bouts, into the gutters. For, in this night you call merciful, there are evils, oppressions and sorrows throughout the world. When the bright fire shines in the warm, closed room, will you think of the sinister roads where the vagabond turns blue, of the black hearth of the destitute? When the dishes steam on the glittering tablecloth, will you think of the empty entrails, of the hands clenched in the anguish of hunger? When you laugh with your family, will you think of the pitiful prostitutes searching for shelter and sustenance? For, on this merciful night, will you think that each of your pleasures is tinged with sweat and blood? I am not part of your celebration. The comfort that you surround yourselves with comes at too high a price; too

many slaves are toiling in the mines, at the machines, in the fields; for one rare fish, the sea has too many storms. Sing hosanna, the people flock to the taverns where they forget, you make the laws, and you have priests, prisons and soldiers. Drink the wines, eat the meats, behind the stable of grace, gallows and guillotines loom, and on this merciful night, be selfish, cowardly, liars and Pharisees.

Pale Christ, from the heights of your Calvary, when death appeared to you amidst the tragic shadows of sunset, did you writhe upon the cross, your sacrifice futile; did you howl in despair at the vision of the disaster of your work? Did your bleeding eyes gaze in horror upon the march of your word through the ages and nations? And if you were a good, human Christ, did you not cry out your denial, and was it not your most unbearable torment that your voice was lost, powerless, in silence? The horror of your agony was compounded by the tortures suffered in your name. The flames of the pyres crackled around your flesh, your bones broke on the wheel, you shuddered from the sharp cold of the pincers and tongs. You saw the murders, the massacres, the enormous clash of races, the corpses, and did your rebellious conscience curse the interpreters, the followers of your doctrine? Did the treachery and lies of the successors of the apostles haunt you with a dreadful nightmare, right up to your final convulsions? You were castrated from humanity; your dogmas became the jailers of thought. Look at the vast enslaved multitude crawling in fear of the punishments promised to those who rebel against the Faith? You told them to be humble, to be submissive, to obey their masters, to render unto Caesar what is Caesar's; they are humble, they are submissive, they tremble before their masters. You have stolen their dignity; you have cut them off from the earth.

Oh, Christ of resignation, you are not one of our own...

We go toward a life that is whole and splendid; our shoulders no longer want burdens. Passions are beautiful; we exalt ourselves in nature, our mother and mistress.

He who comes will proclaim: Glory to man, let him roam the earth free, without masters and without laws. Passions are noble; let him have the pride of life, let him create his own happiness, beyond the fear of the gods. The world is his; let him enjoy it according to his destiny. And if, for too long, the selfish, the liars and the Pharisees reign and obstruct, I will be, on one crimson evening, amidst the flames, the crash of collapsing houses, in the wind of destruction, the great planner.

And when sometimes the people seem to remember, we await you, we implore you! O Red Messiah, Messiah of Hatred, Messiah of Love.

Louis Lumet.

Words, on the eve of Christmas

It is Christmas again. In my mind, memories ring out. Christmas, the anniversary of your birth in the stable, O Jesus, to whom wicked men say: Lord! — Memories ring out, like the bells on the cows returning at dusk. Where are they, in the peace of the blessed home, where are our naive joys of yesteryear?... Noël. Christmas. The night, the north wind banging against the shutters and the gates, the chilly moon and the snow, and the wolf... On the ancient iron andirons, the "coke" blazes, giving both warmth and light. It is also the shivering joy of the old village songs: "Jesus," "The Virgin Mary," "The Donkey and the Ox"... Relatives and friends have put on their festive clothes. They take their places at the big table laden with fragrant meats, ham omelet, fragrant bread, chestnuts and walnuts, and sweet, mellow peppers. What a joyous Christmas Eve! The elder, with an almost religious gesture, traces the prescribed symbol on the round loaf with a knife. And they eat, drink and laugh almost until dawn...

Now tomorrow is Christmas again. Tomorrow, just as before, men, children and women will celebrate the birth of Christ with songs, feasts and kneeling laments. Just as before, the Gospel, the written word of the Nazarene, will lull thousands of human consciences with the sound of its monotonous verses, like the wind rustling through the forest leaves. As before, the priests, who are the purveyors of the Gospel, will exhort the flock to gross credulity, to the acceptance of poverty, to necessary servitude, to the renunciation of all earthly hope, to the worship of suffering. They will preach disgust with reality and tangible truths, contempt for the body, for sacred needs, for august functions. They will try to convince the roadside beggar that he is the happiest of all. They will sing the praises of death.

Alas! Among these men, these children, these women, not one will rise from his pew to cry out against this imposture and outrage, in the name of the humanity to which they belong, in the name of life, in the name of the earth.

And the year that comes will be lost once again for our recovery. And what has been will be. With each new day, falsehood will rise like mist to the heavens, iniquity will strike with its deadly axe, and the pain of martyrs will erupt in their sobs and blood. Ah, Christ, false savior of the world, you have not yet had your last word. Your merciless work is not yet complete.

O Christ, Lord of the rich and oppressors, I hate you and I curse you. Your crimes are more numerous than the grasses of the meadow. In battles, furious soldiers rushed headlong into murder. Priests subdued the races with the chanting of litanies, castrating them of their manly virtues. Heartless judges condemned the Etiévants and the Vaillants, absolved the Bonapartes. The

strongest seized the lands and industries. Governments enshrined the villainy of all these brigands with the articles of the Code. These, O Christ, are Christians!

Listen again. The time is approaching when your Gospel will be torn to shreds, when your churches will be ransacked, your altars overturned, your priests driven out. Your images will be spat upon. Heralds have come who have proclaimed it and preached by example: Lord of the rich and of kings, against your race and against you we rebel. And we go through the towns and villages, bearing the new Gospel, teaching the paths of human salvation.

Listen to the new word: There is no God. Dawn has conquered the night, and there is light. Forget vain prayers, myths and dogmas are absurd, and the priest has lied to you because he was not your friend.

Chase from your minds the old phantoms of death. Embrace the religion of Matter and Life. Believe in the eternity of cosmic forces; worship the elements and the kingdoms!

Have piety for the earth, our mother and nurse. Have pity for the beast. All that is under the sun participates in Life without limits. Cultivate humanity. All people are one family. Let society become a friendship.

Let no one bow their head before another. There will be no masters among you. Governments will be abolished. Prisons, barracks, banks, and taverns will be razed.

Let no one become a beggar. There will be neither poor nor rich among you. The land belongs to the associated peasants who shape it like skilled workers. The workshop, with its tools, belongs to the journeymen, the mine to the miners.

Unite your families in working communities, so that there may be emulation among them. Love your community as a family, but let this affection not conflict with equity.

Glory to human labor and honor to sublime art, sources of all wealth, all morality, all joy.

So be it! Amen!

RAPHAEL DUNOIS.

1901

Small miseries

A Sad Noël

To my dear little sister Marguerite.

> *But I tell you truly, that he who possesses will receive even more, while he who has nothing will have even the little that belonged to him taken away.* — The Gospel.

It was very cold that Christmas night. The snow that had fallen during the day had gradually transformed its cottony softness into a foul slush, in which the busy passersby floundered. The hour was getting late.

"Shall we go in there again?" said Pascal.

And, hesitating between the fatigue of a laborious evening, which advised him to return home, and the desire to earn a few more pennies. Pascal stopped in front of the steam-covered panes of a café.

"Shall we go in there again?"

The hesitation was short-lived, and he didn't wait for for a response from little Luigi, who, his guitar under his arm, was shivering all over.

The café seemed full of people. There would undoubtedly be, in the end some lucrative receipts.

Pascal turned the handle on the door. A puff of hot steam immediately reached their faces, in which the acrid aroma of tobacco mingled with the lingering odor of beer dregs. A flood of white light inundated their blue faces and damp clothes.

The customers then noticed, in the doorway, two young Italian musicians, the kind who, on the Left Bank, go to seek their fortune in the evening, to the thin trembling of their mandolins.

Pascal was fifteen; Luigi, perhaps ten. In the room, around the tables, students sat before half-pints, talking, shouting, smoking fat pipes, sending spirals of gray smoke toward the ceiling.

And women in flashy dresses, with rose-carmine lips and eyelashes lined with thick eyeliner, occasionally punctuated the murmur of voices with thin, studied laughter.

The cashier, enthroned between piles of sugar and greasy blankets at her high counter, looked at the children, symbolizing with a nod and a smile from her painted mouth the favor she was granting them by letting them play.

Pascal prepared his mandolin; Luigi his guitar, and as the hubbub subsided a little, ibis began to scatter the sonorous droplets of a plaintive serenade.

In the music, there were flowers, like the distant sound of dancing, a scent of love beneath vague glimpses of raw blue sky. Then came strange and ardent nervousness, sometimes all joy, sometimes sadness, regret: it paled, subdued, as if from far off, as if, under the misty northern sky, the folk song, like a denial, like the old instrument, had veiled itself in the gloom of things.

This was not pleasing.

“Another one! Another one!” they cried.

“The Serenade of the Pavement, that's more amusing!”

“Hey, kid! Dance the Tarantella for us,” a voice said.

The suggestion was a success. Pascal stepped forward to begin the national step.

“Not you, you're ugly. The other one, it'll be funnier.”

Luigi began to dance, doing his best.

Despite the warmth of the room, he continued to shiver in his damp clothes. Through the crevices of his shoes, too old and too big, the snow had seeped in abundantly, stiffening his poor feet with an implacable frostbite. Despite this, Pascal hastened the measures, seeming to hurry extraordinarily, out of jealous resentment.

With his spongy soles, the child hammered the floor with involuntary stiffness, his movements awkward due to the numbness in his limbs, provoking laughter. The crowd was amused to see this little fellow jumping around so comically. Some stern-faced people softened. Interested, students paid him attention, momentarily forgetting their large pipes, from which only a dying wisp of smoke escaped, rising thin and almost straight, ideally, towards the ceiling.

The dance over, the little one went from table to table, his hat in his hand. A veritable harvest of coins fell into it. They had definitely been right to go into that brasserie again!

Pascal counted the day's takings, greeted everyone and they both left, back into the mud and cold outside, bent over by the frost, clutching their instruments.

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They soon found themselves in narrow, dark, sodden streets, where gaslights formed oil-slick-like patches, their dreary glow illuminating leprous houses. They were now returning to the vile district, beyond the Place Maubert, where

miserable Italy dwells. They traversed dilapidated alleyways, a kind of Court of Miracles teeming with muddy streams carrying refuse, and slimy hovels oozing horror from every crack, their black abysses of doorways, like ghouls, concealing unspeakable wounds.

People came and went, dressed in rags, in the grip of an unusual agitation. Even in these suburbs, it was Christmas, a gloomy, repulsive Christmas, drenched in purple wine, thick with the smoke of frying food and the hiccups of drunks, but Christmas nonetheless.

The two little ones arrived half an hour late, a bit worried. Luigi's father must have been grumbling, and he sometimes became quite terrific when his drunken rages seized him. He had again requested that Luigi be brought back to him at ten o'clock, no later. Running errands too long in this cold had exhausted the child, made him thin, and recently he had developed a severe, hoarse cough that wouldn't go away. With care, the father had declared, it would be fine. He shouldn't work only to have to pay the doctor later.

“Well,” Pascal concluded to himself, reassuringly, “we're not too late, and the takings are good; seeing some coins will calm him down.”

They parted at the door, dividing the money, and Luigi hurried up a few flights of dark stairs, groped in the shadows and knocked. A heavy, uncertain footstep opened the door. The father seemed to be grumbling impatiently, his shaggy face contorted with a burgeoning anger.

"Ah, you!” he said. “Where are you coming from at this hour... You've been spending your time looking in the shops again. When I order you to go home...”

He growled in a thick, hoarse voice, his small gray eyes, usually dull, flashing with malevolent gleams. He seemed to want to focus his wavering thoughts on a fixed idea, to find a pretext for exploding.

Trembling, sensing the storm approaching, the boy quickly rummaged in his pocket, scattering handful after handful of coins across the stained boards of the table.

At this sight, the drunkard's displeasure suddenly vanished. His pimply, brutish, drunken face lit up with the tenderness of a lush.

“What! Kid, you earned all this?"

He stammered happily, his pupils dilated with covetousness and, with trembling and dirty hands, he felt around, disturbed the coins as if he wanted to know, at once, how many were there.

Luigi had approached, turning his face towards him, his features slender and pale, framed by brown curls, and he hoped for a caress, the friendly words that would console him for his weariness.

But the caress didn't come, and, weary of waiting, the child sadly lowered his head.

The drunkard filled his pocket with coins, stuffed the rest into an old, almost demolished kitchen cupboard, the door of which he had kicked down in a fit of anger one day. Then, the money during his pockets, he circled the room, indecisive, thirsty, sniffing out the nearby bar where, rich, he could feast, where his pennies would transform into an endless series of small “casse-poitrines.”[1]

He finally left without a word, having his goal, but Luigi listened to the heavy clatter of his big shoes on the crumbling steps until the noise faded into the distance, until everything returned to a profound silence.

A silence?

No, for in the next room, they were celebrating; people were having a party, and by pressing his ear to the thin partition of brick and plaster, the little boy heard laughter, a drone of voices, the clinking of glasses and plates. But this didn't make him envious. He too had his goal; he too would have his party.

Certain that his father wouldn't be back for a long time, he quickly put on his soaked shoes and, lifting the chimney damper, empty of fire, he placed them among the still-warm ashes, lowering the metal plate over them so as not to frighten the baby Jesus when, in a little while, he secretly brought his gifts.

He then knelt down and said a short prayer, one his mother had taught him long ago, which he repeated fervently every night.

His poor mother! He could still see her just as he had last seen her, in the hospital a year before, all white in her white bed, eyelids closed, only a little thinner, and seeming to sleep so peacefully!

She was dead.

He had been devastated, unable to comprehend that such a thing was possible, that his mother had been taken from him, that her eyes would never open again, that she would be buried and that he would never again feel her caresses!...

After crying a great deal, he had found some solace, certain that she must be very happy, as he had been told. He had meekly endured his father's brutality and the cruelty of Pascal, to whom he was entrusted, so that he could earn money in the cafés at night. And it was his greatest sadness to feel alone amidst the indifference or bitterness of these people, with no one to love him as before...

His prayer finished, he huddled in a corner, waiting for midnight, wrapped as best he could in an old rug to keep warmer.

He felt hungry, noticed on the sideboard a crust of bread his father had left for him, along with some greasy wrappers where cold cuts were displayed.

He ate greedily, took a swig from a jug and curled up again, satisfied, in his rug.

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[1] A form of fortified brandy. — TRANSLATOR

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Half past eleven had just struck in the distance.

In the next room, the noise continued! Despite his fatigue, he didn't feel very sleepy; emotion kept him awake. It would be soon. But a vague fear began to take root within him.

The room was now lit only by the dim glow of a foul-smelling candle placed on the table, in the neck of a bottle serving as a candlestick. And this faint light cast long shadows, black holes he avoided looking into, making the damp plaster of the walls, the blackish grime of the sparse furniture scattered in the corners, the putrid grass that the straw of the rickety chairs resembled, seem even more filthy.

And, truly, were it not for the murmurs next door, were it not for that flickering, yellowish light that threatened to soon go out, he would have been seized by a mad terror, would have screamed, run to the neighbors to beg them to take him in, not to let him return alone to that large room from which dread emanated from the shadowy corners.

He was dreading seeing the candle go out before Christmas, before the moment when, safe under the covers of his bunk, he would see nothing more, fall asleep, his head turned towards the wall, his toys in his arms.

To keep from being afraid, he tried to think only of these toys, of what his shoes might contain; he imagined the magnificent shopfronts in the wealthy neighborhoods.

On the sly, while following Pascal, he had been able to admire the Punch and Judy shows, the figures dressed in silk and gold, and the sheepfolds, the soldiers with their barracks and cannons; and then, the fir trees covered with tiny candles, the talking dolls, the mechanical figures that pull carriages, pump water, wrestle and labor with all the strength of their springs.

He had also noticed the hoops, the enormous balloons painted with grotesque landscapes, the articulated clay clowns, the ferocious rubber animals, the gleaming tin kitchens, the tiny households with sofas big enough for a sparrow, the colorful plates adorned with Lilliputian dishes.

He also remembered the pastries, the resplendent sweets of sugar, creams, elaborate cakes and treats he had never tasted before, whose names he didn't even know.

His desires shifted by turns toward each of these marvels, though without much hope. Like other years, he expected Christmas to bring him only the cruder toys from the “thirteen-cent” store, and perhaps a few sweets from the grocer next door.

Time was passing too slowly for his liking. Every now and then, he would listen intently, thinking he heard a faint rustling in the hearth, and he would remain motionless, holding his breath.

Perhaps Father Christmas had already left his presents? Perhaps he wouldn't arrive until precisely midnight? He had so many chimneys to visit! In any case, so as not to upset him, he was determined to not go and get his shoes before the hour. Father Christmas doesn't like to be seen...

He was still worried about not hearing anything. And the candle, which threatened to disappear at any moment! Fear gripped him again. Nearby, someone was barely moving. The people had deserted the table. Only a muffled sound reached him from time to time. Wouldn't midnight strike?

Just as he was growing alarmed, midnight suddenly struck. Regularly spaced, its twelve strokes, like a death knell, rolled through the night, made more distant, barely distinct, by the snow that had begun to fall again, covering the monstrous City with a mantle of purity.

He threw back his rug, listened, his heart pounding. Father Christmas was coming with his bells!... There would still be a little light to see his offering, still sparkling with frost.

And as exclamations rang out nearby, as children, no doubt having just discovered the chimney, expressed their joy, he rushed to the hearth, lifted the trapdoor and searched his shoes, turning them inside out.

They were empty!

The heat had dried them a little, but only a thick layer of mud covered them.

Then he stood there, stunned, pale as a ghost. Father Christmas had forgotten him! Did his mother no longer love him, not think of him at all? It couldn't be! The sky, his heaven, once populated by angels and the blessed, appeared to him like a black, empty abyss. And he let himself fall to the ground in a torrent of tears, his whole frail little body wracked with sobs, while the dying candle illuminated the room with fantastic flashes, while the drunkard below rolled, blissful, into some stream.

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Jesus is a God *parvenu*, a social climber who no longer remembers the poor wretches, his brothers.

JEAN MARESTAN.

1903

Noël! Noël!

Noël! Noël! Behold the Redeemer!...

If my more mystical memories serve me correctly, this is more or less what's sung in one of those old carols, stubbornly clinging to life despite it all, like moss on the cracked and decrepit lacework of ruined buildings.

Behold the Redeemer! I didn't realize I was so redeemed! And I truly believe that the Eternal and His worthy Son are pulling our leg, constantly reminding us, to the accompaniment of organ music, that for over nineteen centuries, the golden age has been flourishing on earth. No more slaves; the divine Child — and the oxen that witnessed His birth — have, with their warm breath, melted as if by magic the chains of the people, those ancient convicts.

And the people — behold the marvel! — have not noticed. Shame on them! The ignorant and ungrateful people!

They have the audacity to observe that they are dying at their work, like the Hagars and Spartacuses of those cursed times; that they are, and more than ever, driven out by their masters — their keepers, no less — into the bleak desert of hunger, or served up to every eel, small or large, to every brutal sergeant, jailer, prison guard, sword-bearers, to every bearer or a crozier or sash.

The misfortune is that we lack faith: and that is why we have not understood. The good little Lord, having taken the trouble to be born, whimpering and shivering with cold, on a poor bundle of straw, in a hovel open to the winds — no sooner was this accomplished than, at once, by some sleight of hand, tears, cold, straw, hovels, and even the biting breeze were overcome, all of it rising in rank and becoming sweeter than jam, more luscious than blossoming oranges, more delicious than Edenic pleasures.

This stunning transformation, it must have left you cold. Indeed, that’s putting it mildly, my friends. You don't understand it at all.

Be patient. It's the spiky shell of the chestnut you're holding now that's scratching your fingers and lips until they bleed. Later, you'll have the fruit, later still, when you're dead, and you'll have time to savor it at your leisure: for when one is dead, it's for a long time. The chestnut that this master conjurer, the Nazarene, promised you, is rounding out and gilding up there behind the wainscoting of the clouds and the mocking moon. You guessed it, this posthumous dessert he's preparing for you, as compensation for your long fasts, is heaven itself.

For the moment, instead of chestnuts, be content with those that Lépine occasionally serves you in abundance, delivered by the well-trained fists of his mercenaries. These aren't glazed, unlike those that will grace the tables of the wealthy on these festive days; and if they don't quell your hunger, at least they stifle it deep in your stomach and prevent it from rumbling too loudly.

Good voters, wretched voters with their gaunt eyes, who, on icy nights, chatter your teeth and stamp your feet in shivering bands around Les Halles, begging a few pennies from the lingering passerby so as not to force the hospitable Republic to house you in its prisons, Noël, Noël, Noël! What! You're not singing. You persist in trembling! What an aberration yours is! Noël! I tell you; Noël! Look, then, through the cracks, at these Market Halls, against which your feeble and pathetic figures lean. It is a granary of abundance, crammed with Gargantuan victuals. Frantic choirs of stuffed turkeys answer blissful groups of turkeys offering their bellies to the very Christian chestnuts that will soon stuff and revel in them. And all this cries out, all this turkey-like: “Noël! Noël! Noël!”

And if you have a keen ear, you will hear, from a thousand stalls and confectioneries glittering with lights, mirrors, and gilding, the moved nougats, pink, green, and white, dressed in their communion wafers, crying out, in their melting, honeyed voices, as much as nougat can cry out: Noël! Noël! And the countless legion of sweets bursts through the embossed, painted, scalloped, satin, pleated, glazed paper of the pretty bags with the mystical and joyful refrain: Noël! Noël! Then the oranges and tangerines, the color of dawn, join in, so that one would finally believe that paradisiacal and distant orchard, whose mirage the Gospel showed to our astonished eyes, had come to life.

And this Noël, being desired, so eagerly awaited, cannot do less than appear in person. And here he is, behind the shop windows, this venerable old man with a white beard, the same one who will slip discreetly down the chimneys on the night of December 24th to 25th, despite the agents patrolling the streets, and leave, in the bottom of his traditional clogs, so many good things for the laughing, chubby swarm of children.

But where were you, poor babies, forgotten in the magical distribution, and what had you done to Father Christmas, you whom, in bitter mockery, he endowed with horrible and sinister gifts: frail newborns of mothers exhausted by work and deprivation, whose mouths found only a withered breast; And you, wretched children of misery, thrust amidst all the filth and filth, whom our maternal Republic will cultivate in its reformatories only to transplant you later into its dungeons and prisons, and finally pluck your red blossoms on the scaffold?

Noël! Ah! Bon Noël! There are still barracks, courts-martial, Biribis, firing squads, little soldiers shooting their starving brothers, or improvising as workers to thwart their just strikes and magnificent revolts.

But, what are you dreaming about? Noël. My poor old fellow, you're rambling, with your visions of Paradise. While you're strolling through the soot of the chimneys, haven't you glanced at the asphalt of the streets and boulevards? You would surely have discovered herds of wretched women there, selling their flesh to the first comer, perhaps a syphilitic, a stinking, portly octogenarian—what does it matter—for a piece of bread.

And you wouldn't have been able to help but glimpse behind them the shady informers, tailing them, ready to seize them, to protect public morality and health.

Oh, Noël, why didn't you bring these pale, low-class Phrynes into the world sooner, in a padded, frilly cradle, daughters of a Rothschild, a Motte, or even a mere president of the Republic, or a tiny senator or deputy, or a modest investigating magistrate?

Or else, helpful Noël, why didn't you point them to some desperate boss, closing his business and reduced to hanging himself, having pleaded in vain with every voice for the working women? So, the poor sex workers would have been honest laborers; or perhaps, after selling their arms all day long, they would still have had to sell their bodies at night.

Frankly, Noël, I don't understand anything anymore; and I greatly fear that your mystery of the Trinity might be just as impenetrable as that other secular Trinity mystery emblazoned on all our buildings:

Liberty, Equality, Fraternity.

SILVE.

1906

The Noël of the Miserable

I.

Under the hammering of the days that mark his years, man is the resigned one who sees the dark procession of hours pass by, bearing countless sorrows;

And his powerless eye follows them, lamentable cohorts, from the bloody dawn to the sinister dusk:

The stinging rain, the dreary sun, the heavy flowering of dreams, the harsh swarm of pains in the abyss of reveries, the inert nights after the pallid days, the insurgent words with their lying echoes, under the fever of laughter, the hoarse hiccup of sobs, the savage theory of human hideousness that slowly unfurls its rosary of death rattles in a setting of mud...

Under the cold shroud of the extinguished skies, man gropes with his plow of misery through the funereal field of life;

Down the short road, with its cruel stages, he goes, a cursed beast, sowing his suffering among the brambles;

Misfortunes have torn a hole in his soul: he knows nothing more. Tears freeze his eyelids; drop by drop his blood falls on the furrow...

What will be the ransom for his dreadful Calvary? His harvest is gall and his bread is but ashes. Darkness blackens his brow; his being is torn to shreds. ...

Under the livid sky he goes.... There, the horizon draws near where the port must be: he feels it;

The shadow thickens still; he hears his heart beat in the silence, with faint strokes, like the tolling of distant bells;

He goes on, until he stumbles. ... His head strikes the plank of a coffin: there he finally plucks the palm of his martyrdom in the nothingness of death!....

II.

... A star lights up in the impenetrable heavens. From the depths of shadow rises a stirring: the man of the new age has slowly risen...

His eyes, heavy with night, seek the dim beacon; his eyelids blink in the pale light;

He ventures forth, trembling, onto the rough path. Woe! His weak foot becomes entangled in the treacherous rut, he staggers and he falls....

But, silent, with a resolute gesture, the man, fierce, has risen. He has resumed his march toward the invisible and certain goal he senses on the hazy horizon;

A dawn now floods the expanse. On the still harsh road, his strengthened step resounds; his tenacious will triumphs over the obstacles;

In the growing light, he advances, confident in invincible right. On his glistening brow, the light flashes; his quiet courage laughs at the cruel traps;

By the liberated path, man, fervent and proud, opening his clear eyes to the radiant sun, leaps toward Life in a blaze of light!

Under the biting sting of daily injustices, man is the rebel who sees, spurring his tireless and strong labor, the ardent procession of eternal hopes passing by;

And his impatient eye follows them, indomitable phalanxes, from the pearly dawn to the fiery evening;

Shackles broken, iniquities vanquished, tortures appeased, truths won at the price of passionate struggles;

After the languor of comforting nights, a smiling awakening for the hard days ahead, complaints stifled by supportive embraces, the joys of endless effort for a better future and that distant dream that tomorrow will bring to life:

Guided by the torch of Universal Justice, the peaceful legions of peoples united, passing, with hymns of jubilation, the golden gates of the City of Fraternity!...

Stephen Mac Say.

1908

Christmas Night

“The key to your room? You'll have it when you've paid for the three weeks you owe me. Go sleep wherever you like!”

Thus spoke Madame Lacassagne, owner of the Hôtel de l'Alliance, and Jacques left without insisting. He certainly wouldn't have convinced the old woman, and besides, he was so sad, so unhappy, so overwhelmed that he couldn't even rebel anymore. He calmly accepted the harsh Aveyron woman's sentence, which condemned him to wander endlessly that Christmas night.

He thought he would be less cold if he walked very fast, and he ran off without worrying about where he was or where he was going. Oh! This aimless running of the poor wretch who no longer has a place to rest his head, who shivers in the dark night!... Jacques walked and walked on; he jostled people laden with toys, food and cakes without even seeing them. He moved through a crowd preparing to celebrate the birth of the savior Jesus — in whom, incidentally, they didn't believe — by gorging themselves on black pudding, turkey with chestnuts, light pastries, small bottles of wine and other succulent things designed to make them see life in a more favorable light.

The lit windows, which cast points of light in the dark night, seemed to mock Jacques. They seemed to be saying to him, “At home, in our home, for we, wandering knights of misery, have a lovely little home of our own, nice and warm, where the kettle hums softly on the stove, where on the white tablecloth, the tablecloth for special occasions, on a bed of watercress in a large platter, the roast basks; there, somber pauper, is a good fire, plenty of precious little things to eat, and soft beds for us to stretch out on. Ha ha! You big fool, you have none of that. Go for a walk, hee hee!...”

Jacques was indeed taking a walk, and he arrived, without knowing how, before the river that rolled its muddy current towards the sea. Jacques envied the current. Once on the bridge he stopped and, leaning on the parapet, he watched for a long time the Parisian boats passing by, their red lights fading in the distance. The mysterious depth of the banks attracted him; he went down to the very edge of the river. The murky current seemed to call to him; he wished to disappear in an eddy, to leave this wretched world all at once, but childishly he plunged his hand into the water and found it very cold....

He sat down and remained curled up for a long time to keep warm, then he fell asleep. The water nymphs no doubt took pity on his distress; they gave him a dream — and that, I believe, is all that the fairies can give. He saw a little boy

returning from the village school, carrying a bag full of books on his back. He was picking poppies and corn cockles along the roadside, cheerfully arranging a brightly colored sheaf. Then he pushed open a gate, and a good-sized dog jumped around him. A housewife in a cotton jacket, loudly expressing her joy at seeing him again, leaned over his rosy cheeks, kissed him tenderly, and called out to him: “My little one...”

Next, he saw a train station in the Beauce region: a young man listened to the countless instructions given by a poor woman, her voice trembling with suppressed sobs, and replied: “Yes, Mama.” Finally, the train started moving, handkerchiefs waved and, on the platform, a shivering figure remained motionless for a long time, then shrank, shrank and disappeared into the mist.

The young man settled comfortably in a corner of the carriage and dreamed. He was finally going to know life; his twenty years freed him from his mother's control. He was going to live freely, he would taste joys that had been forbidden to him until then, he would be a man in every sense of the word: he reached out towards happiness, towards pleasure, and girls, pretty girls with resounding laughter, came to him, took him by the hand and swept him away in a wild dance. White-clad clowns whispered mad things in his ear, and bards dressed in velvet, wearing wide-brimmed hats, glorious possessors of magnificent hair, sang to themselves on the guitar: life, joy, love and the wine that makes one forget all things.

Finally, the train pulled into an immense station: the young man was no longer dreaming, he was already vaguely worried, frightened: he took his trunk and entrusted himself to the care of a coachman who drove him down a street where the tall houses revealed very little sky. He got off at a filthy hotel, at the home of a coachman who assured him he would be “treated like a prince.” Immediately he was confronted with the hardships of existence. When he had exhausted the small savings he had brought with him, he knew hardship, he worked hard and earned very little, he was odiously exploited. It wasn't the march to the Star, alas! It was a race to the abyss. Each passing day carried away a hope and soon all his illusions were shattered. Just a few years had transformed the enthusiastic and generous young man into a resigned and pathetic wretch, a poor man who drifted from hotel to hotel, trying his hand at every job and barely managing to eat almost every day.

Now, that Christmas Eve, the poor man met Father Christmas, the famous bringer of joy for little ones, and demanded an explanation.

“Well, my dear Jacques,” said the old man, “I must have put something in your shoe once upon a time. Perhaps I made a mistake, perhaps I gave you too much honesty, too much sincerity and not enough cunning?... “

“You old scoundrel, that's why I'm starving!” yelled the poor wretch, and he wanted to give the fellow, who was skipping away, a good thrashing, but he took a bad step and fell...

Jacques woke up frozen. The water nymphs had played a nasty trick on him by giving him his life in a dream. He got up and set out again, more gloomy and desolate than before. An idea sprouted in his brain, and he repeated: Prison, prison... Oh yes! Prison, there at least he'd be warmer, he'd eat.

A pile of demolition materials on the quay was lit by a small lantern attached to a stake driven into the ground. Jacques picked up a paving stone and aimed a gas lamp at the lantern. But the projectile, too heavy, missed its target and fell squarely on the head of a stout gentleman who, bundled up in an expensive fur coat, was turning the corner of the neighboring runway, humming the cavatina from “The Barber of Seville.”

"Oh well, tough luck," said Jacques. "I have broken something anyway...”

And he waited for the officers.

Eugène Peronnet.

1909

A Malthusian Woman's Christmas

(A Tale)

Christmas has cast its white mantle of frost over the rooftops. The long branches of the bare trees, like ghosts, stretch out their gaunt arms.

We celebrate Christmas Eve in the palace, under the thatched roof, in the big city, in the tiny hamlet.

Everyone hurries, impatient, towards the warm, nearby hearth where they will have fun.

Christmas! A traditional family celebration!

Lovers, to keep warmer, huddle closer to one another, their eyes shining with the joy of loving... It's Christmas!...

Mina, her little nose buried in her white ermine fur, quickly returns to the heights of Montmartre; as every year, she no longer lingers at the shop windows lining the boulevards, their indiscreet calls no longer tempt her.

Mina's heart is heavy... All day at the studio, her friends have been making plans for tonight. She thinks that for her, this evening will be like all the others since last spring; it will begin as a comforting dream and end as a dreadful nightmare.

Since April, Mina has known love in its exquisite form, the slender adolescent who has captured her heart and possesses her completely. But she is afraid! Afraid of the consequences of abandonment!

What will she do with the two francs she earns if she has a little one to feed?

Abandon it? Never! What mother abandons her child?

She glimpses the long procession of misery that accompanies her stepmother; the jeers directed at her growing belly.

And the room over there, all white, where, on the painful bed, she will give birth to the being she did not want; — then — the dark days without bread!

And every evening for months — for centuries! Her young, sixteen-year-old flesh shudders and convulses; she closes her mouth, stifles the throbbing of her frantic throat, bruises her troubled flesh, hungry for love and rebelling against human laws.

When her friend leaves, she screams out her agonizing torment, tenses and calls for him...

Tonight will be even harder: in her closed room, she waits, her cheeks burning, for the hurried steps of the pitiful Friend she makes suffer so much with her.

He enters!... He is there! A radiant madman!

He offers her his Christmas present and, in a low voice, holding her so tightly she can barely breathe, whispers: Come!... Oh, come at last!... Oh, mystery! Mina no longer refuses... She gives herself... entirely, without constraint... From her unsealed lips rises the hallelujah of grateful love, towards the one who, more than a god, has just brought her in her Christmas stocking, the means to love without fear, to know ultimate joy, without which, nothing is!

Christmas! — Little Christmas — be human! Be merciful! In your wanderings across plains and hills, sow with open hands the fruitless love, the love without pain! In your sack, with the toys for the little ones, with the bugles, the drums, the tin soldiers that teach them — so young! — that on one side of the cardboard fort, there are friends, on the other — and why? — enemies:

With the flowers, the sweets, the jewels for the grown-ups, give to all the right to free motherhood.

May this Christmas Eve leave no bitterness in the hearts of lovers. You will finally have, Little Christmas, good and useful work!...

Jeanne Desmoineaux.

Le Libertaire (January 3, 1909): 3.

1910

Jean-Pierre:

A Christmas Tale

That evening, like every other evening, Jean-Pierre had gone up to his cramped attic, warmed up his soup and, after eating it, was getting ready for bed. But at that moment — was it because of the nighttime festivities he sensed were beginning throughout the town? — his garret seemed more squalid than usual; so the old man preferred to go out and mingle with the crowd, sharing in the common merriment.

Jean-Pierre advanced in slow steps, shifting his weight from one leg to the other, as if he were still carrying heavy burdens. He was an old mason whose age was impossible to guess, so worn and slumped was he by labor. The man, moreover, led a miserable life; too old to climb scaffolding, he now dabbled in odd jobs here and there. Ah! He was no longer the proud worker of yesteryear. In the old days... had he seen flags planted on the rooftops! And with what moving pride he would tell you: “A house that you've built, you see, it's a real pleasure to look at; it's like a child bigger and richer than yourself; you feel it's truly yours, and it's like a stranger: it's so beautiful...” Today, the old man lives in an attic... tomorrow... who can say where he'll go when he's even more weary, more helpless...

Jean-Pierre experiences the joys of a child watching passersby and shop windows. It's Christmas. A woman with arms full of packages bumps into him a little, then apologizes kindly. Putting his hand to his felt hat stained with plaster: “No offense,” says the old man. The woman moves on; from among her packages emerge the four legs of a large wooden horse. Other ladies pass by, similarly laden with provisions and toys. People dangle white bags tied with pink or pale blue ribbons from their fingers. A few young girls pass him, humming; then others, and still others. And all quicken their pace, eager to reach the warm, cheerful home. He doesn't need to hurry; no one is waiting for him; he can only try to warm his heart with the joy that shines in the eyes of others.

At a street corner, a crowd of people stops in front of a brightly lit shop. Electric bulbs of every color cast blinding flames, irresistibly alluring. The onlookers appear, jostling each other, some struggling to make their way out of the group, others pushing forward until their noses touch the window. And somehow, pushed from here, pushed from there, Jean-Pierre finds himself in the front row.

The object of all this desire is an enormous goose, bloated with fat, marbled with black spots that are truffles; elaborate pyramids of pies with golden crusts surround it; an avalanche of lights falls upon everything, casting green, yellow, bluish, or pink reflections on faces. Exclamations mingle. The women speculate about the price of the poultry. The men joke. A high-pitched, cheeky street urchin's voice rises above the hubbub: “Damn, this isn't working-class food!” The remark sends a chill down everyone's spines; faces darken. Someone adds that this display, on the corner of a working-class suburb, is scandalous: “It's all about the rich. — The wealth of some is built on the poverty of others. — That dirty butcher has no conscience. — That's to thumb our noses at the starving.”

The replies multiply. Jean-Pierre listens to them with some astonishment; he has never given much thought to things; despite his broad shoulders and enormous hands, he is shy and humble; he has always seen both the poor and the rich and cannot conceive that it could be otherwise. If he has sometimes said, shaking his head, “All the same, some people have too much,” it seemed necessary to him that there should be men to command, others to serve; and now, all of a sudden, these ideas, firmly established by the years, are becoming muddled in his mind. He is ill at ease; suffocating under the pressure of his neighbors, he feels as if he is very hot, then very cold.

His dinner was meager indeed... the sight of those sumptuous victuals left an emptiness in his chest... A mist rose in his eyes...

And suddenly, Jean-Pierre felt himself becoming light, so light, as if he were floating effortlessly through space and time. Many centuries must have passed, and it seemed to him that he must have died and been reborn several times... People, as on Christmas Eve in his other life, went about busy and joyful.

What a strange celebration! Instead of general idleness, everyone seemed to be performing a chosen task; all came and went with cheerfulness, like bees that flew from flower to flower in the bright summer light, then brought back to the common hive the delicious fruit of their amiable labor.

And Jean-Pierre, still gray-haired, but light, oh! So light of heart and mind, he soon finds himself transported into an immense human hive where, beneath tall, multicolored canopies, rise beautiful palm fronds and great trees laden with fruit; flowers in abundance spring up in sheaves or fall in fragrant clusters, and sweet music rises from all sides. As if lifted by these harmonies of colors, scents, and sounds, he advances among welcoming, fraternal groups, full of exquisite attention for old men like himself. The old men... they are numerous here, and all participate in the sumptuous feasts of the place, with those direct eyes and high foreheads that denote familiarity with these wondrous things, as if it were the ancient custom of a sacred right.

Yes, that's it, that's it. Jean-Pierre can no longer doubt it. By what miracle did he enter a wondrous city of love and peace, where it's a celebration for everyone, every day of the year. A perpetual Christmas now reigns on earth; there are no more disinherited people, no more outcasts, no more abandoned old people; an unheard-of joy and well-being are expressed in everyone's eyes and gestures...

Ah! It's too much... it's far too much all at once... Is it that, or is it the flowers that, by the myriad, exhale intoxicating perfumes; is it the music with its overly sweet and penetrating accents, or perhaps the caress of all those loving and kind gazes around him...? Jean-Pierre no longer knows, but it seems to him that he is now fainting under the influx of so many sensations so sweet to his heart, the heart of an old outcast. It seems to him... But then a bump half-awakens him, and, falling at the feet of the onlookers — oh! so very contemporary, these onlookers — exclamations rise up around the poor old rag that he makes there on the sidewalk, in front of the resplendent shop:

— Ouch! — Damn! — So what? What's gotten into him! — A drunkard, by Jove! — Then a voice more piercing than the others:

— Well, you old pig, you're not slow getting drunk in honor of the baby Jesus!

Renée Dorient.

1911

One Christmas Eve

I just found my friend Jean. He's back in his usual spot, on the corner in the suburbs, with his basket overflowing with a few bouquets of violets.

“Well, Jean, were you on strike then?”

The boy smiled and politely removed the cigarette butt from the corner of his mouth to answer me.

— I’ll tell you... Apparently, I caught a nasty case of pneumonia from wading through mud one rainy evening. So I had to go to the hospital. Luckily, I'm more or less back to normal now, because Christmas and New Year's are prime time for business.

— Hey, that's right, Jean, it's Christmas tomorrow. Tell me, are you going to celebrate too?

— Who knows... the child said mysteriously. Christmas Eve celebrations would be so awful if they always ended with misfortunes, like the last time.

— Misfortunes, I said. You never told me about that. What happened to you last year?”

— I can tell you, if you like; but you'll have to buy me a hot milk, because there's a terrible draft in here, and, besides, I need to take care of myself.”

Settled in a small café, Jean savored his hot milk in slow sips and began:

— When I was a kid...

— Excuse me, Jean, how old are you? (I'd guess that he was twelve.)

— Fifteen. When I was a kid, I never saw Christmas celebrated at our house. My parents loved me and my brothers; only, you know, it was almost always a mess. Even though my father was a hard worker and didn't drink, we barely managed to eat our fill. You should know that we were three rather frail kids, and we saw Mom sick almost all the time.

One evening, two weeks before Christmas, Dad came home happy. “There’s some good news,” he said, “maybe we’ll finally get out of this rut. I’ve just been hired by a new boss; I’ll be able to make seven or eight francs a day. So, kids, to start things off, I promise you a fantastic Christmas Eve dinner. For once, damn it! We have to do like the rich and treat ourselves! We’ll save money later.” — You can imagine how much we were looking forward to it.

Yet Dad, who had initially seemed so pleased with his job, often came back looking downcast. “I’ve landed in a real mess,” he’d say. “The boss keeps saying he doesn't want any troublemakers in his company and that I'll have to toe the line like everyone else, according to my friends. They also say that those in the

red union, like me, aren't fit to work and that the boss, who now knows I'm one of them, wants to treat me like dirt."

The night before last, my father came home furious. "I've had enough! Oh, if only I were alone!" he shouted, clenching his fists. And he told my frightened mother about the boss's "vexations," as he called them, because, being a good worker, there was nothing to criticize about his work. My mother tried to calm him down by crying. Finally, he stopped shouting. "Come on, you lads," he said, "don't look so glum. Tomorrow's Christmas Eve! I'll get my fortnight's pay, and we'll still have fun, you'll see!"

The next day, my mother had put down a white tablecloth and, in the middle of the table, a branch of holly. The soup was steaming in the tureen; we were just waiting for Father, who was supposed to bring the provisions for the feast. But how late he was... We thought he wouldn't come back; Mother was crying, the soup had been cold for ages.

Suddenly, my father bursts in like a madman. He was as white as a sheet. "What's the matter?" cried my mother.

"Well, I gave the boss a hard time. Ah! The bastard, throwing me out on the street like that, for nothing, because I'm in the red union... Yes, he fired me for that, and how! With dirty insults, provocations... Ah! No, I couldn't take it. Twenty years of hard work and misery went to my head. I went for the guy's throat, and that was that..."

Anyway, it was the saddest Christmas Eve I've ever seen. Two hours later, the cops turned up at the nick, taking my father away and leaving my mother fainting. She died three months later. My father got three years for half-strangling his boss, and that's why you see me hawking my wares on the street.

— My poor boy... I murmured.

But Jean isn't one to get sentimental for no good reason. "Well, that's life," he said philosophically.

He finished the last sip of milk in his glass, then added, rising:

— That's enough of that, I have to get going, and quickly.

— Do you have an appointment, Jean? I asked, with a mischievous glint in my eye.

— My wife is waiting for me, he replied with the utmost seriousness.

And as I followed his gaze, I saw, across the street, the slender figure of a little girl shouting, "Valencia oranges! Beautiful Valencia oranges!"

Renée DORIENT.

1912

Noël

Noël!

The Christians sing.

Wealthy children see gentle lights passing by in their dreams. Society women and high-priced prostitutes go to listen to the voice of the organs and that of the actors mingling beneath the resounding vault of the churches.

After the joy of the feasts, the bellies of rich men are filled with lust and the women, under the light, offer shameless bosoms that make men's eyes lecherous, give them lewd thoughts and excite their flesh.

In the churches, they speak of the Child God who came into the world 1,912 years ago.

The priests recount the birth of the good man who went through the cities of Judea and Galilee, speaking softly to prostitutes, embracing children and crying out to the powerful, the rich, and the high priests of religions:

> "Cursed be you, hypocrites who oppress the people and teach them lies."

And who was nailed to the cross for having done all these things.

Noël!

The childlike peoples still groan under the boot of the soldiers, and the slaves of labor still lower their shoulders, whining with fatigue, and the priests tell them: "Obey those who govern you."

Around the lights and the resounding joy of the rich, the lamplighters prowl, their teeth chattering in their blue faces.

In the pestilence of the barracks, in the shadow of the muddy and bloody flag, young men, dulled by boredom, think of the joys of drunkenness or the joys of brothels, because these are the only ones that men in livery can taste.

The wind gallops over the rooftops and rushes into the slums through the cracks in the doors.

The phonographs in the bars whine. Men talk and laugh over absinthe. Violet-eyed prostitutes watch them, smiling:

"Three more will pass through a room tonight."

And they sing to themselves.

The happiness of the rich, who eat at their sumptuous tables and fornicate in their harems, bursts forth like a loud laugh in the heart of the cities.

And the curses of the poor echo through the dark, cold streets like the howls of dogs.

Noël!
The poor are starving, the workers are slaves. But they've had enough.

René.

1913

Noël

Noël! Noël! The bronze bells ring out for a long time over the bustling city, their sounds like frost on the branches of the trees lining the avenues and boulevards.

Under the blaze of an orgy of lights, piercing the thick darkness with dazzling gleams, night seems to recede, while the stars, against the black velvet of the sky, are nothing more than tiny fireflies, reminiscent of the humble candles of the poor.

Beside the shop windows where aristocratic gems ignite the most intense desire in women's eyes, other boutiques display every gastronomic splendor, the sight of which fills the poor souls who behold them with the anguish of unattainable temptations.

Noël! Before the church gates, carriages belonging to wealthy patrons disgorge their gleeful masses, who come to celebrate the birth of humanity's savior.

Beneath the gleam of chandeliers and candles, amidst the smoke of incense, the priest, sexless in his priestly robes, lets fall from his ambiguous mouth the mendacious dogmas of a monstrous religion.

Then, when, through the enveloping gestures of precise ritual, and while music of such perfection that it seems immaterial intoxicates minds and hearts, the pure voice of a renowned singer breathes a breath of secular art upon this mysticism; the worldly women gathered there, half-naked beneath their half-open furs, seem to swoon with love in this atmosphere that borders on the brothel, twisting their nerves, exacerbated by nameless desires!

Noël! Noël! Jesus said: The poor will be welcome in my father’s kingdom; I was born on this day to establish brotherhood!

And the poor wretches who would gladly enter the sumptuous houses his representatives have built on earth — to warm their limbs chilled by the cold — are harshly turned away because their misery would be an affront to the Pharisees of our time.

Ah! If he were to return among men, he, gentle Jesus, the philosopher illuminated by true goodness because he was *but a man*, and whom the priests ridiculed and mocked by making him *a god*... if he were to return, I say, he would still be driven out by those very people who magnify and praise him like a fierce and brutal idol.

Noël! Passersby emerge from the still-open shops with boxes of toys in their arms. The rich children will have a wonderful awakening tomorrow!

And in the slums of the suburbs, mothers lament before the fireless hearth, thinking that tomorrow, their child will have no toys!

Noël! Before the windows of brightly lit drawing rooms, amidst the throng of black-clad women, one can glimpse the extravagant luxury of their gowns, their beauty drawing the attention of the men who crowd around them.

Their flesh is temptingly offered beneath the transparency of their still deeply cut dresses. The jewels with which they are covered — in their hair, on their fingers, between their breasts — make them resemble reliquaries whose fabulous prices make the little working girls dream.

Noël! Noël! In many garrets, pretty little girls dream that they will never own a single piece of jewelry. Oh! How gloomy the little room seems on this bourgeois holiday evening! Why is the life of these well-behaved little working girls so terrible? Despite their exhausting labor, they cannot even manage to eat their fill!

Noël! Tomorrow, we'll find the poor woman lying lifeless beside the stove!

At the restaurant doors, between a throng of onlookers, dignitaries and socialites file and pour in to feast.

What a splendid table! What culinary masterpieces!

Noël! Noël! The voices, momentarily raised to their highest pitch by the effect of the generous wines, now overflow the confines of the banquet hall.

Outside, in the street, one hears, one understands vague strings of phrases: Liberty... France, homeland of generous men... Yes, gentlemen, fraternity is not an empty word... The Republic has done everything for the people... Let us contemplate without fear the coming of a saving socialism. We, the representatives of the working class, will sacrifice ourselves without hesitation... we will impose income... yes, rent will be immune... Dear Madam... your virtues, your charity... we will save the needleworkers... we will give them flowers... admirable work... Jenny's garden... charity... charity... humiliation...

But, the guardian angels of the peace gently move the unfortunate souls who watched and listened, mouths gaping!

Noël! The prisons jealously guard men who wanted to think and write according to their conscience, having believed that in a Republic, all opinions were permitted.

Noël! The specter of war is still being stirred up by a militaristic fool, behind whom a whole gang of financiers is stirring.

Noël! The people, crushed under the weight of taxes, are becoming increasingly stupefied by parliamentary charlatans and trying to drown their

misery in the adulterated alcohol complacently dispensed by the licensed, official bureaucrats.

Noël! The slaves are groveling more and more before the master who mistreats them...

When will the Red Noël come, which will sweep away, like a straw, the dross that poisons all of humanity?

PAUL PROLO.

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