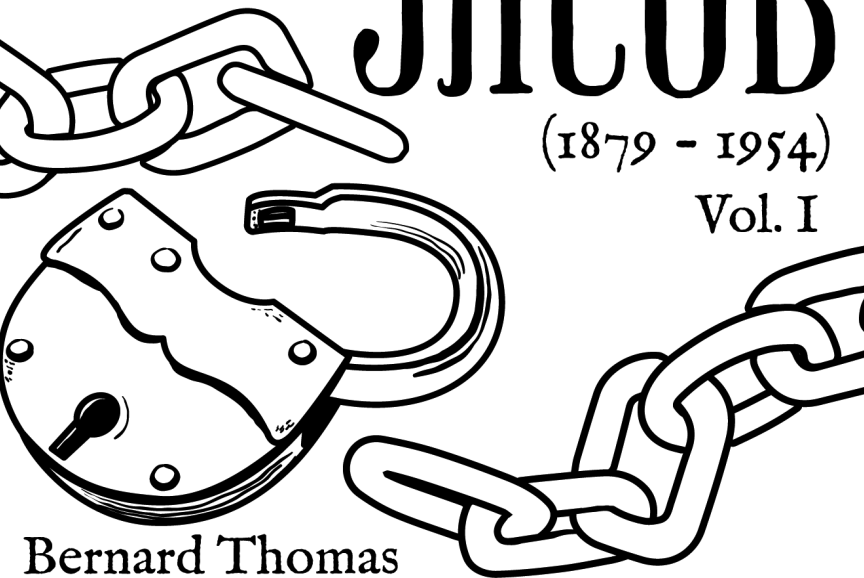


The Lives of
Sailor
Thief
Anarchist
Convict

Alexandre
JACOB

(1879 - 1954)

Vol. I



Bernard Thomas

Jacob
Alexandre Marius
alias *Escande*
Attila
George
Bonnot
Féran
Hard to Kill
the Robber

Bernard Thomas volume 1

Introduction by Alfredo M. Bonanno

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introduction

The impossibility of a perspective that is fully organized in all its details having been widely recognised, rigor and precision have disappeared from the field of human expectations and the need for order and security have moved into the sphere of desire. There, a last fortress built in fret and fury, it has established a foothold for the final battle. Desire is sacred and inviolable. It is what we hold in our hearts, child of our instincts and father of our dreams. We can count on it, it will never betray us.

The newest graves, those that we fill in the edges of the cemeteries in the suburbs, are full of this irrational phenomenology. We listen to first principles that once would have made us laugh, assigning stability and pulsion to what we know, after all, is no more than a vague memory of a passing wellbeing, the fleeting wing of a gesture in the fog, the flapping morning wings that rapidly ceded to the needs of repetitiveness, the obsessive and disrespectful repetitiveness of the bureaucrat

lurking within us in some dark corner where we select and codify dreams like any other hack in the dissecting rooms of repression.

Short-lived flashes attest to the heroic deeds of some comrade here and there, some rebel, sometimes even looked on with suspicion before history brands and seals his perfectly battered flesh. We are not inane spectators of unwatchable television or readers of serial romances buried in dusty library catalogues. We are alive and for life, so feed off experience. As soon as a vital sign appears here and there, we pick it up with the tip of our fingernail and place it in the secret portfolio of our heart, a tiny heart-shaped icon or forget-me-not.

Basically, we too, the hard, dauntless ones with our refusal to accommodate, even we, who are not discouraged by the threats of the institutions, nor by the far more terrible ones of imbecility disguised as rebellion, also need our iconography. That is why we collect memories, sympathies, friendship—sometimes no more than a simple handshake—storing them up in our minds as sharing and support when not direct participation. Many of us have cracked open vaults of banks and the Treasury, carried

out radical expropriations, taken land from the landlords and killed enemies in bloody gun battles at sunset, at this hallucinatory level. And reading and making notes of our emotions and remembering stories around the fire when grandmother gave the correct interpretation of Red Riding Hood's rosy cheeks, in our own wildest fantasies we elaborate these events that really happened, which we have only participated in from afar (in the best of cases), and place them at the liveliest part of our desires. And that is that, while the critique that sided with the wolf and not the child remains in the loft. Rigorous science is no longer possible: remember? So how can we put any criteria in our fantasy. Let's leave it at full gallop, far from the sepsis that used to confuse us not long ago. Let's warm our hearts—like taking a cold meal—with tales of adventure like the one we are presenting here—moreover one that is not all that badly realised.

The story tells of a thief. A thief with egalitarian illusions. An anarchist and his dreams. But with a difference: this man, along with his comrades, really did open the safes of the rich, and by this simple fact demonstrated that an attack on social wealth, even if only partial, is possible.

It might seem insignificant that this be the most interesting part of the whole story, but that is not so. The spectacular aspect of the activity of Jacob and his comrades, the incredible list of their robberies and the elegant way they were carried out, are not the most important aspects. But they could be those that strike the reader's fantasy most, even the anarchist reader. Basically, now as in the past, we still want someone to supply the iconography we cannot do without. The comparison with Arsen Lupin is enough. Maurice Leblanc was a well-known serial romance writer; Bernard Thomas is a serial journalist. The two genres go hand in hand.

But Jacob and the others were something else. In the first place, they were comrades. And it is here, in the field of their choice of actions, that we need to grasp the deeper significance of their exploits. The description of acting beyond the levels that most people put up with daily is implicit in the story, although it does not succeed in completely rendering the levels of consciousness that were necessary in order to do this. This 'going beyond' was faced and taken to the extreme consequences with all that was extraordinary, not as something mythical but in the reality that Jacob and the

others faced in order to carry out their attacks. Procedure and method, rigidity and anarchist ethics in dealing with the representatives of the class in power, are but a few aspects of the tale. It is therefore necessary to put description aside and dig deeper beyond the fiction, in order to reach a point for reflection.

What does it mean to reach out and touch other people's property? To answer this question and look at some of the mistakes that are systematically made by many comrades, as well as those specifically connected to Jacob's illusions, we need to make a few not very pleasant points. The first is that theft, appropriation in general carried out with strength or guile and not simply by ceasing work, is not a weapon that can lead to social leveling. No matter how colossal the illegal appropriation is, it is but a small thing compared to the wild accumulation that capital puts at the disposition of the financial bosses, the wealthy, the managers of the huge public enterprises, the warlords and every kind of Mafia. The appropriation we are talking about and which was certainly sufficient to make the well-fed bourgeoisie of the French empire tremble, was simply a means to be used elsewhere in order to

attempt to set off the generalising of the struggle which for anarchists is the primary aim of all revolutionary activity. I believe that this is now clear once and for all but the ingenuous.

Another myth that needs to be dispelled is that such actions could become a model for the oppressed as a simple, quick way to regain possession of what has been extracted from them by force through exploitation and repression. Right from the first rather banal raids on supermarkets, the concept of proletarian expropriation makes no more sense than the scenario for a film of the life of a revolutionary expropriator: from Durruti to Bonnot, Sabate to Facerias, Di Giovanni to Pollastro. The passive fruition of heroic deeds always produces myths, tales for adults that the frustrating conditions of life demand nonstop, prostheses that help one to carry on living in just the same way as alcohol or sleeping pills do. The overall conditions of the struggle could, at any given moment under certain conditions of a social or economic nature, produce movements of great masses within which expropriation, becoming generalised, ends up being daily practice. But that all germinates spontaneously and has no need for models.

But if we think seriously about what the anarchist who asks himself what is to be done from a revolutionary point of view faces, the problem presents itself in more detail. It becomes necessary to resolve one's relationship with reality as clearly as possible, a reality that is rigidly incarcerated within the conditions of life marked by production and consumerism. Of course, as we all know, one can 'cop out' (up to a point), close oneself up in the idyllic conditions of a commune rich in hideous self-exploitation and frustrating conditions of life, or in the fresh air of a supposedly uncontaminated nature. Or, within the enclosure of interpersonal relationships, seek to create conditions that allow one to go beyond the cohabitation sadly marked by the classical limitations of the couple, to the point of knifing oneself. All this is possible, and at times even beautiful, but it is not enough. Going further, beyond, always further, one finds the first signs of the real problem: what do we want to do with our lives? Do we want to live them as fully as possible, or do we want to hand over a considerable part of them in exchange for a salary camouflaged as economic services rendered.

There are many ways to camouflage this

exchange today: voluntary work is one of them. There are many ways to become involved in the social field at the tail end of new political models aimed at guaranteeing social peace, and be compensated with unexpectedly large amounts of 'free time'. Power realizes that it must attract this band of social misfits to within the field of control by using increasingly intelligent methods because they are precisely the ones who could react violently to normal working conditions. And many are falling over backwards to make the compromise more attractive in this direction. But conditions of privilege do not make us masters of ourselves. Work, even voluntary work (that's a manner of speaking), eats away at our soul. In a word, we become what we are doing. We are what we produce, and if we produce condescension and acceptance, we ourselves become the policeman standing on the street corner, or even the torturer in the white coat or the prison warder brandishing a bunch of keys in his gloved hand.

According to Jacob, if we do not want to eat our hearts out there is nothing else for it, we must reach out and put our hands on the property of others. But in order to reach out we must have a clear conscience, otherwise we would simply

be carrying out more or less gaudy transfers of wealth, nothing more. The way to look at things then is to see what the expropriator, he who recuperates from a revolutionary point of view, is proposing: what does he intend to do about everything that needs to be done with this wider space of freedom of movement? We are not talking about real freedom here. Freedom does not come from having more money, but from the greater capacity within which to operate, more time to realize one's revolutionary project: As you can see, this has little that is mythical or fascinating about it. It is simply a case of being able to realize revolutionary projects which would otherwise be clipped in the wings due to lack of means. The world in which I operate with my revolutionary activity involves my whole self. There is not me living my life on the one hand and my revolutionary activity on the other. That is why I cannot suffer the consequences of an absurd dichotomy that lacerates me: worker and revolutionary producing wealth for the exploiters on the one hand, and combating them and the very flux that I contribute to with my own work, on the other.

A classical objection to this is that theft

is also work, and produces wealth. Jacob and his comrades also accepted this interpretation, calling themselves Nightworkers. Personally, I have always seen this label in the ironic sense. At the time it threw fear into the hearts of the bourgeoisie, who had not forgotten the days of '71. In itself, the objection is not unfounded. If nothing else, the outlaw produces the judge, a considerable part of prison, a great coming and going of lawyers and court employees, and a whole repressive mentality going right from those who possess wealth to the old lady who is afraid of being robbed of her pension. All this undoubtedly goes to make up the game. Theft in all its forms is a working activity that employs thousands of 'legal workers', themselves only just a step above poverty, and systematically robbed by a system that pushes them towards a retinue of brilliant prospects of consumerism. If the revolutionary were to fall into this trap (as Malatesta seems to fear is inevitable), he would be a fool just like any poor soul who hands over his booty, fruit of honest robberies, to the first salesman of expensive cars he comes across. I do not even want to think of this eventuality, which in any case, for what my personal experience is worth, is not very common.

But the other aspect of the problem still holds. Theft is not something that can be improvised: it requires professionalism and commitment, punctuality, precision and cold blood, knowledge of human psychology and the most advanced techniques of prevention and control. In a word, it requires time. So it is neither a question of a generous gift, nor an exciting adventure. It nearly always becomes a meticulous routine that tires out the best of comrades.

Mistakes are often made one way or the other: either by supposing such activity to be easier than it is, or by thinking that it is more complex and exciting. It is important to bear all the various problems involved in mind, and no romanced narration can help us in that. Then, after thinking about it, one might reach the conclusion that such efforts could, under certain conditions and in certain situations, be the most effective way to begin to carry out a revolutionary project.

Not being capable of grasping what pushes many rebels to identify the enemy, I know that my conclusions will not please many comrades. I'm sorry, but never having been a rebel I wouldn't know where to begin. I only hope that the few revolutionaries, to whom these considerations are

addressed, at least know how to read them for what they are: a critical reflection and the background of an operational project.

Alfredo M Bonanno
Catania, 10 October 1999

THE BANDITS

Wednesday 8 March 1905, the day after Carnival. Riot is in the air as an extraordinary trial, which the outstanding journalist Louis Roubaud was 20 years later to recall as 'one of the most formidable cases recorded in the history of crime', opens before the Somme assize court.

Streets adjacent to the Bicêtre prison where the accused are lodged have been blocked off. Amiens courthouse, ringed by three companies of light infantry and by all available personnel from the gendarmerie, is in a state of siege. Since day-break a sizeable and edgy crowd has been gathering. Prowling around and 'easily recognisable' say the experts, 'by their shifty and sinister appearance', are some detectives dispatched from Paris by the head of the Surete. 'In high places', they do not disguise the fact that incidents are feared. Maybe an escape.

Every step along the progress through the corridors brings one up to troops, service revolver or fixed bayonet by their sides. A pass is required before access may be gained to the courtroom. Suspi-

cious-looking sensation-seekers are peremptorily turned away. Access to the holy of holies is granted only to those whose dress is testimony to their respectability... the well-to-do, property owners, officials and functionaries: agitators would have their work cut out to blend in with this crowd.

The major newspapers—*Le Figaro*, *Le Temps*, *Le Petit Parisien*, *L'Aurore*, *Le Matin*, *L'Eclair* and their junior competitors like *Voix du Nord* or *Gil Blas*, (for which latter Maurice Leblanc, the Norman shipowner's son who, before three months have elapsed, is going to invent the character Arsene Lupin), have sent their finest reporters along. Ten correspondents from the biggest foreign newspapers have found themselves seats. In the kiosks in every town in France, enormous headlines are already whipping up public opinion... "A monstrous business", "One hundred and fifty crimes", "Five million francs stolen"¹ *The Night Workers*. An

1 Gold francs are difficult to translate into contemporary money, budgets in those days having little in common with our own. However, one can reckon on the following basis: 20 francs were then the equivalent of one *louis*; in 1969 one *louis* was worth roughly 60 francs. So one need only multiply by three. Which in this instance would give us 15 million revalued francs. A premier main with the house of Worth was then earning 250 francs monthly: a good carpenter was making 300.

unbelievable organisation.' All manner of things, mindnumbing things. The prosecution file, 161 pages of painstaking manuscript, covers 20,000 items. One hundred fifty eight witnesses to be heard. An overwhelming burden of proof.

The police and magistrates aim to keep this affair within the narrow limits of criminal procedure. Wisely, the chief news organs have followed them in this. However, one cannot avert certain rumours racing through the crowd to the effect that the accused are redoubtable anarchists.

Anarchists! Shudders. Everyone remembers the bombs of Ravachol, Emile Henry and August Vaillant. Elegant ladies experience a delicious quiver at the mention of those queer romantics who schemed from the dark recesses of their offices to blow society asunder. The rentiers, though delighted to have 24 of their personal enemies brought to book here today cannot disguise their anxiety: five of the ruffians are still on the loose. What are they hatching? Such people are capable of anything. They respect nothing... not morality, nor religion, nor the flag, nor government. Nor, above all, private property, regarding which-in order to excuse their own misdeeds-they contend is theft. The court, they hope, will show no mercy: these

ruffians must be dealt with severely. To set an example. Culpable clemency would risk inciting others to swell their ranks. All things considered, les Apaches are more deserving of indulgence: at least with them, one knows what one is faced with.

Sinister rumours are circulating among the more 'proper' elements in the crowd. Some suspect the gang of having immense ramifications in France, England, Holland, Germany, Italy and Spain. The accused persons are no more than their minions. The real culprits are those unscrupulous agitators hired by foreign powers to weaken the Republic, that whole shady cancer of pseudo-thinkers, assassins and Jews overrunning the country, abetted by a handful of Freemasons infected with the cholera of subversion and striving to capitalise upon the ingenuousness of the people in order to establish a dictatorship of bloodthirsty brigands. But the workers are not so stupid. They are well aware that France is a democracy, that they like everyone else, have the right to vote and that the government's decisions are but the expression of the will of the majority. Their will. To which the minority has to defer. Anyone refusing to play by these rules constitutes a danger to the established order and is indicted by society. In this instance

the authorities are displaying an excess of patience. The 'Abbeville gang' should not be alone on the bench of infamy. All anarchists, all reds should be there with them.

Distrustfully, the populace teeming in its thousands towards the rue des Trois-Cailloux hears out these witchhunters. Dress and vocabulary alike have erected a barrier between them. Instinctively, trickery is scented.

Then again, what the newspapers reiterate is too pat: if the accused are vulgar thieves, how come so many precautions? Why this deployment of men? There is something queer about this. To be sure, a thief is a malefactor. To be sure, it is normal that he should be punished. Yet one does not know what to think.

It is with curiosity, almost deferentially that the rubbernecks mouth the name of the gang's leader, a curious sort, an adventurer, monster or apostle according to one's views... One Alexandre-Marius Jacob. The more literate mention him in the same breath as Robin Hood, Cartouche, and Mandrin. Some students of English even have recourse to the term *gentleman burglar*. But the juxtaposition of the two words, though engaging, is scarcely convincing. Lupin has not yet popularised the notion. There is

a lot of gossip. It is said that Jacob attacked only the rich, that he kept back nothing for himself from the proceeds of his misdeeds, but redistributed them all among the poor. It is said that Jacob had forbidden his men to take a life except in self defence and then only where the police were concerned, these being christened by him "society's guard dogs". While one might not be able to openly endorse that, the fact remains that the idea of downing a cop down some dark alley is not one that everybody finds displeasing: let he who never dreamed of it-if only he might be assured of impunity, of course-cast the first stone. In short, this outlaw is intriguing. The women hope he will be handsome.

It is known that Jacob comes from Marseilles; that he is a mere 26 years of age. They say that he has dark eyes, that he fears nothing and no one and is a sort of genius. He has friends everywhere. He will slip through their fingers. He will vanish as if by magic. Anyway, the Germinal gang await only the merest error by the guards to fly to his aid.

"Germinal", the erudite remember that last cry set up by the teenage Angiollilo after he had gunned down Canovas, the Spanish premier, the man responsible for the Montjuich tortures a good eight years ago now, in 1897. Germinal... the Re-

publican month of renewal, of hope: in particular it is the month in the Year Two when a revolt erupted in the Paris faubourgs, demanding bread and implementation of the Constitution of 1793, the only constitution to have been truly democratic, the only one never to have come in to force; “Germinal”: “The ideas for which I perish will shortly thrive,” the young avenger had probably said at the time.

A band of French anarchists seized upon the word, the way one passes the baton in a relay race, making it the title of a newspaper. The Amiens police were immediately stirred by their activities.

They ensconced themselves first in 69, rue Saint Germain and then in 26, rue Saint-Roch four months ago, in November 1904. The editorial of the first issue gave clear, if moderate, expression to the underlying implications of the venture.

Workers!

Despite all the promises of the politicians of every colour, your lot is becoming increasingly precarious.

The press says naught of the vexations of every sort visited upon you by the exploiters in their modern prisons...

Frankly libertarian, Germinal will not be treading the muddy byways of politics, unless to unmask the tricksters and flatterers teeming there. Emanating from the people's ranks and made by the people, Germinal will be striving to truly become the journal of the Amiens populace...

The countless victims of priests, sabre-rattlers, judges, police and bosses will be able to have their cry of rebellion heard here without fear of being revealed. We have sufficient revolutionary energy to take upon ourselves full responsibility before laws that we hold sovereignly in contempt.

Let each one do his duty, and Germinal will live to make the well-fed and the complacent perish of rage, while paving the way for the Social Revolution from which Freedom will come forth at last.

This profession of faith in no way resembles a pious vow. The paper has organised meetings, gatherings, conferences, demonstrations, on every pretext. It has nailed the slightest local scandal: the 14 to 15 hours worked each day by the crewmen in the railway depots; the working con-

ditions of the railway workshop and depot employees, 10 hours a day without the right to speak, under the supervision of retired policemen; the congratulations sent by General de Nonancourt to Lieutenant de la Roche when the latter was acquitted by the Toul court of correction despite the punch that he struck the editor of La Moselle who refused to give way to him: *This act will impose and force respect for officers. Fear is the beginning of wisdom. I can still see myself in Paris in 71, right after the Commune: they would all scatter at the approach of officers.*

(After the 35,000 corpses that they had just made, there was reason to respect these gentlemen, commented *Germinal*.)

But among the many victims of the “judges and sabre-rattlers”, one seemed immediately to enjoy a privileged position in the columns of this highly subversive organ. From issue No.2 onwards, under the rubric of “Petite Correspondence” insertions reading thus began to appear... *I know lots. Reply: We will put your information to good use at the opportune moment, the dossier of the Gentleman in question is well underway. Or even... Would the comrade who has sent us intelligence concerning the police make himself known so as to assist in the*

enquiry on which we have embarked on this matter.

Who is the Gentleman? What can this matter be? Those in the know claim that it is purely and simply a matter of Alexandre-Marius Jacob. The launching of the bimonthly four months in advance of the trial and in the very town where that trial must take place is allegedly no coincidence. It was allegedly part of a two-pronged effort: to capitalise upon the audience which the Jacob affair could not fail to provide for the cause, with an eye to stepping up agitation and propaganda in the region, and to strive by every means to rescue the comrade in jeopardy.

A newspaper specifically set up to defend a thief? Yes. And indeed, it was said, the newspaper of a thief, for Jacob had allegedly managed to get money out of his prison cell to his friends on the outside. The last of his savings. Jules Lemaire, Pa-caud, and Ouin, the principals behind the journal are openly talking of funds that they have raised: displaying far more discretion, they hint at one "Alexandre", without whom nothing would have been possible. Enough said.

Be that as it may, issue No.4 of 3 January devoted the entirety of its editorial comment to him, beneath the headline *To Jacob and his comrades:*

Judges, civil servants, priests, soldiers, gendarmes, police, lawyers, businessmen all conspire to keep the people hungry, to wall them up in factories, to do them to death in their prisons.

Markets are monopolised, there is speculation, there is hoarding, there is wheeling and dealing, stocks are driven down prior to purchase, driven up prior to sale: gold shapes policy, bankers declare war. This is lawful.

The worker is exploited: they capitalise upon his ignorance and resignation: some are hurried into insolvency and poverty, others are prompted to strike, revolt, starvation, others still into thieving, hopelessness, suicide, murder. Again, this is lawful.

The factories, prisons, and barracks are breeding grounds for typhus and tuberculosis. The penniless are cast out into the streets. The homeless are cast into prison. The law is the instrument of persecution. This, again, is lawful.

*You, Jacob, who refuse to be the rich man's slave or to exploit the poor,
You who shun the suicide of brutalising toil
and who rebel against a criminal society,*

*You who at last seek to live,
You are society's victim!*

The word "victim" was doubtless hardly calculated to endear itself to Jacob at the very time when he had to admit his crimes, which he regarded as so many acts of war. But he did not have unrestricted communication with the outside and only belatedly was he able to convey how he felt. Small matter for the time being: the article sets the tone. It is followed by a veritable manifesto:

*To work according to one's ability and talents;
to consume according to one's needs: that is
the sole solution to the social question. It is
the right of which capitalist society, represented
today by the social-democratic minister
Combes refuses to let us avail, and which it
strangles with the cord of the lois sceierates...
Out of a population of some 40 millions, a
mere 4 million men labour as toilers. And
still these produce too much, as government
figures themselves indicate, for there is unem-
ployment and overproduction.
Thus if everyone capable of it were to engage
in useful production, each person (and we are
not counting adolescents, women, or the aged)
would have to work only half an hour each*

day from the age of 20 to the age of 50, which is to say 540 ten hour days in his whole life!

The writer stipulates that in his reckoning he has taken no account of that segment of workers whose task consists of the maintenance of order or the repression of disorder... civil servants, bureaucrats of every description, police, soldiers, magistrates... and who account for two thirds of wage earners. Logic taken to its extremes potentially leads to such things: a fair number of us would be constrained, on pain of finding themselves unemployed again, to participate willy-nilly in the repression of others. Absurd? In any event, Jacob has not disowned these lines.

Issue No 5 of *Germinal*, dated 17 January: *Louise Michel, our beloved Louise, the Red Virgin, is no more. All humanity is bereft.* In his cell, when informed of the news, Jacob, it seems, blanched. The good Louise was a part of his belief system, from his teenage days at sea, ever since the day when he had heard her mentioned by convicts in Noumea. Later he had become very well acquainted with her, as with all the great names of the libertarian world who are presently signing articles in his favour in every anarchist publication... Sebastien Faure, For-

tune Henry the lecturer, the very brother of the dynamiter, Laurent Tailhade, the poet blinded in one eye by an anarchist bomb in the Foyot restaurant, or indeed Paraf-Javal the individualist, or Libertad. Not forgetting all the others who do not have by-lines but are activists. So, were the rentiers so very wrong to take fright? And what if all these 'intellectuals' were to amass a horde of henchmen: what if they were really to hatch a plot to rescue the bandit?

The tone of their newspapers furnishes reason to fear the worst. They are mad dogs. Why doesn't someone render them harmless? Early in February, Issue No.7 of *Germinal* says:

Now that the Russian revolution has been thwarted, the primary maxim in the manual of the perfect revolutionary ought to be this one: 'If you wish freedom, buy a rifle! If you have not the money, steal it!

A downright incitement to murder. Maybe Jacob himself has not taken a life, but he is on the same side as the raging madmen. It is a capital offence to attack strongboxes out of idealism: his head must roll for it.

Less than a month ago, on 12 February, Sebastien Faure came here to give a talk at the Alcazar.

As is his wont, he besmirched the name of the army, the expeditionary force covering itself in glory in the Far East, then moved on to the clergy, the police, and the judiciary. Police spies posted in the hall took careful note of it. But that talk was only a pretext upon which to assemble the largest possible public gathering. The orator was in on it. In small groups, several thousand people assembled in the rue Delamhre. The Alcazar emptied. A demonstration set off in the direction of the rue de Bicêtre, singing the Internationale. There it clashed with a strong contingent of troops happily posted at random on guard duty in front of the prison. The procession dallied for a long time to beard the troops with shouts of: *Long live Jacob! Long live the revolution! Long live anarchy!*

Then, all of a sudden, there was an incident. Straboni, a guard brought in specially from Rouen to watch over Jacob lest he manage to convert the usual screws to his own way of thinking, as he had successfully done in the past... this Straboni, attracted by the furore, stepped out of the Lephay pot-house. He was without doubt a glass or two the worse for drink. Well, he drew his revolver, screaming that he was going to "kill some of them". The demonstrators threw themselves on him: they dis-

armed him and rained blows on him. The troops charged. “Regret” was expressed at the ten or so wounded.

In the wake of this affray, Superintendent Jénot summoned the admitted leaders... Lemaire (the manager of the *Germinal* newspaper) and his cronies Pacaud and Ouin... to his office.

The anarchists sent him this note by way of reply: *Monsieur Jénot, you are summoned to appear at 10 am. On Monday at the offices of our newspaper at 26, rue SaintRoche.* Flabbergasted, Jénot determined to appear there, in the company of a dozen men, and... it is true... at noon instead of 10 am... doubtless signifying that he was not at their beck and call. Needless to say, a search produced nothing. By contrast *Germinal* had the audacity to relate the whole episode in its 17 February issue: not content with being criminals, these people showed themselves to be boors as well. One could scarcely expect anything better of them.

So on this 8 March 1905, while the Black Marias were being awaited, the people in charge of maintaining order prepared themselves for every eventuality. They were torn between “cautious optimism” and “reasonable caution”, endeavouring not to yield to uncontrolled panic like last week

when an apprentice plumber searching for leaks in the guttering upon the roofs of the Passage Couvreur, near the Bicêtre prison, found himself set upon by two gendarmes and handcuffed. Suspected of preparing an escape for Jacob, the unfortunate fellow had been interrogated throughout the night, somewhat brutally, by some overzealous inspectors. (Moreover, there was nothing to show that they were not in fact faced with an accomplice of the Robber).

From his vantage-point atop the staircase, the superintendent tries to divine the crowd's intentions. They are murmuring. Getting worked up. Ready to intervene, narks monitor its changing moods. He picks out scattered anarchists distributing packets of leaflets attempting to offer a justification of Jacob. Their manes of hair, their beards, and sombre faces make them readily visible from a distance. Over on the left, three of them are trying to organise a meeting. Four plain clothed inspectors immediately move in to frustrate them. A crowd gathers round. Soon it degenerates into the most immense confusion. Five ranks of chasseurs protect the court-house, not to mention the troops held in reserve. The officials blithely step inside, mingling with the bourgeois who have come to

watch the spectacle and who are holding forth on the threshold. Let us go! Disorder will not triumph this time!

But the ranting floats off in the direction of the boulevards. The rumbling of the Black Marias reverberates from the cobblestones. The escort appears, a squadron from the 30th Chasseurs Regiment headed by a general in his underwear. The muffled sound of a song covers everything... la Carmagnole, intoned by prisoners and taken up by 20, by 100, by 1000 raucous voices from the populace. The wagons come to a halt amid a clatter of ironwork. The infantrymen push back the huddled ranks of the crowds. The doors are opened. Four women disembark first, shackled in pairs: Jacob's mother, Rose his companion and two others pale and skinny and rather elegantly dressed, though their furs are mangy. The *Petit Parisien* and *Gil Blas* correspondents will be scathing about them in their reports: but it has to be said that, as these wretches are unloaded, they have been languishing in prison for the past two years and have scarcely had the opportunity to renew their wardrobe at Paquin's, Worth's or the Callot sisters' place.

Then it is the men's turn. Hollow cheeks, fiery looks. *A truly strange sort, low-set, supple and ag-*

ile as a sailor, notes Monsieur Beau of the Havas Agency. *A queer, devilish head, pierced in the middle by two bright points of extraordinary vivacity,* notes *L'Aurore*. *A sallow face, the nose strong and flattened, the beard sparse, the lips sparse and pouting, the ears sticking out,* the reporter from *Le Petit Parisien*, unkindly notes. He is wearing a broad black bowler hat. He has on a black overcoat with astrakhan collar, a red tie and straight collar slightly crumpled at the edges. In his hand he has a huge briefcase stuffed with papers. *It appears that inside the prison he has a secretary to whom he dictates his thoughts. His mother and mistress do nothing unless he has first given his consent,* opines *Le Petit Parisien*. In any case, there is nothing about him that is redolent of a lout in a peaked cap. Nothing of the sinister-faced ogre. His dress is correct, his toilet painstaking, his moustache crimped and almost bristling under his strong nose. Of medium build, but squat. He has the air of a civil servant, bordering on that of a teacher or savant. Two by two, his 19 accomplices line up.

Jacob's face is brightened by a broad grin when he spots the crowd gaping at him. He makes to raise his arms, despite the shackles. *Long live anarchy!* he cries. *Long live anarchy! Long live Jacob!*

answer the onlookers in a burst of applause. The gendarmes step in: they jostle the prisoners, prodding them with vehemence towards the steps. Jacob does not comply. They have to drag him by the arm. His eyes sparkle. He sings the Internationale. The cortege, the women, the public, join in. The song rises into the air and ascends towards the overcast skies. The accused and their guards, followed by the flapping black sleeves of their lawyers, disappear beneath the archway. They vanish into the corridors. The team from *Germinal* tries to follow in their footsteps. Jénot signals to his men to head them off. The argument lasts barely a few seconds and then the anarchists give up the attempt. They vanish into the crush of people standing around in small knots waiting for God knows what.

The courtroom is shabby, dim, grimy, with faded frescoes on the back wall. Some benches and an additional platform have been arranged to accommodate the accused. The exhibits of the prosecution, a real mountain of them, overspill onto the press benches: jemmies, artistically laid out in order of size; bit-braces, drills, hacksaws, glass-cutters; some Edison lamps linked together by five metres of wiring; some oilcans; a few soapboxes.

Jacob's own personal kit, dubbed by him his

“double bass” is a wondrous specimen. The judicial police’s best experts have given up on trying to understand the function of several instruments. They admit to never having seen anything like them. According to them there is at least 10,000 francs worth of equipment here. Let us listen to *Petit Parisien*:

Upwards of 80 keys in nickel-plated steel, each one actually comprising two keys, for there is an extremely ingenious moving part which, it seems, is of American manufacture. Furthermore, the end of these keys presents a rectangular-shaped recess which makes it possible to tailor a special attachment to the instrument for opening the most complicated locks. The malefactor also carried electric lamps, one of which, collapsible and fitted with reflectors, provided a powerful beam capable of lighting up an entire room. He also had in his possession a highly refined instrument designed to break open safes and from one of the finest companies in New York: a ladder of silk fitted at the ends with two sturdy hooks capable of gripping anywhere and other sundry accessories, all of them equally refined.

The whole thing fits into a black leather satchel

just 70 centimetres long by 95 centimetres high.

At noon, the Court makes its entrance. Councillor Wehekind, who seems ill at ease, presides. He is assisted by his assessors Job Vaselle and Thorel. The procurator-general Regnault in person occupies the chair of the public prosecutor, aided by his deputy, Monsieur Pennelier.

First item of business: the drawing of lots for jury membership. First sensation: only five of those whose names are called are present. The others have been detained by urgent business. Or indeed by illness: one angina attack, some renal colic complaints, some severe bronchitis. An epidemic appears to have descended upon Amiens. Procurator Regnault appeals to a sense of civic duty, to dedication to the law: why did they come forward as volunteers only to absent themselves now? Some medical certificates, properly and duly completed, offer the only reply.

To tell the truth, the jury panel members were afraid. They have no wish to get embroiled in some squalid episode. They put themselves forward as volunteers in the trials of murderers, of “normal” thieves. Not of anarchists. That is too risky. Their neighbours have intimated as much to them. Their wives have pleaded with them in the name of their

children. And then... this is something that they do not admit... each one of them has received a threatening letter written in vitriol. Thrown for a moment, court president Wehekind regains his composure: let some gendarmes be dispatched, accompanied by a doctor, to verify these excuses and summon the dodgers.

The sitting is suspended. For lunch. Capitalising upon the absence of the reporters, the troops have left unmanned the approaches to the courthouse, which are now deserted.

In the clammy atmosphere about 50 soldiers are napping on the steps, belts unbuckled, rifle laid across their bellies.

One would say it was the aftermath of battle. Thousands of leaflets litter the pathway. When at last the court resumes at 2 pm, the definitive jury is at last appointed... pallid men with worried brows and frightened faces. Then comes the establishment of the identities of the accused: *Jacob... Alexandre-Marius*, Fischer the clerk of the court calls out.

Present, he replies.

He is seated peacefully, tethered by his handcuffs to his warder guardian angel. The bowler hat is pulled down tight upon his head. He grins at the

angels. The court president, who had not hitherto glanced in his direction, gives a start:

Stand up! he exclaims.

You're well and truly seated, you are! Jacob returns.

And remove your hat when you address me!

You're well covered!

You are here to stand trial. You must conform to practice and show greater decorum!

*This is a sham! A parody of justice! I will show regard for you when you show some for the workers!*²

The gendarme escorting him snatches the hat from his head. The remainder of the outburst is lost amid the brouhaha.

Silence! shouts Wehekind. *Silence! Or I will have the court cleared.*

Then:

Do you wish to challenge any of the jury? he proceeds.

I challenge them all, answers Jacob, *for they are my enemies.*

Everyone catches his breath again. The enumeration of names, surnames, ages, professions proceeds without further incident. However,

² Just as each development of Alexandre-Marius Jacob's extraordinary existence has been scrupulously traced back from witnesses accounts and documents, the trial's lines are genuine.

there is no article in the code capable of preventing the bandits from adopting an air of mockery. Next, the clerk sets about the litany of the 161 pages of the indictment sheet. The public strain to understand. Several of the accused ejaculate expressions of astonishment at the relation of certain exploits of their mastermind, of which they had been unaware. At 6 pm, after various formalities, their first day's proceedings are concluded. When Jacob emerges, the crowd has formed again and is controlled by the cordons of chasseurs only with great difficulty.

Revolutionary songs burst forth on all sides. Two anarchists who succeed in gaining access to the courtroom despite superintendent Jénot's strict screening procedure rush to the printing works of *Germinal*, the workshop of Jules Lemaine the shoemaker. At the back of the shop, the yard, and shed, an ancient much repaired hand-operated press has been set up and a compositor's workroom. On the grimy panels of the front door are two placards: *Germinal*—Editorial—Administrative—Advertising offices / Soles (heels included): Men (Hobnailed) 3 Francs and 3.25F; (stitched) 4F.; women: (hobnailed) 2.50F.; (stitched) 3.25F.; fittings guaranteed invisible, 0.30F.

Two advertising notices: “No more abortions! Scientific and practical means of limiting female fertility, by Doctor Knowlton. Translated from the English by Lennoz. Pamphlet prosecuted and acquitted by the Brabant assizes. Price 0.50F. Apply within.” And the other reads “Midwife. Cures all women’s complaints. Absolute discretion, receives boarders at any stage of pregnancy. Apply to Mlle. Berthe Leguillier, 388 Route d’Abbeville, Montieres. Consultations daily from 1 pm. To 3 pm.” For the anarchists, 60 years or so ahead of their times, are also actively campaigning on behalf of birth control, which brings them plenty of vexations.

By 7 pm, the team, bolstered by a number of persons who have come down from Paris, is in full session, amid the shoes, clogs, awls, gouges, lasts, and nails. Feverishly, they set about preparing the special edition which they have resolved to put out just as soon as possible. Pacaud sees to the editorial:

Rarely will a trial have caused such a sensation... The judiciary, the army and the police are dumbfounded. The defenders of order have been seized by a tremendous funk that shows itself in the grotesque, not to say pointless deployment of manpower.... The court-

house has been turned into a barracks.... But disappointment among the bourgeois newspapers, the mouthpieces of middle-class mediocrity, has been great indeed! Good Lord! Sacrosanct property has been attacked. The quivering bourgeois must have visions of looting and riot flashing before their eyes: all because the demonstrations of hate by those who own nothing against a recuperator such as Jacob have ceased. The prejudices that underpinned the old authoritarian society have melted away. Which just goes to show that our propaganda is on the right track!

Then he takes the jury to task: *Sometimes, doctors' certificates are convenient.* He breaks down by profession... each profession accompanied by some epithet of his own devising... the *panel list* from which Jacob's jurors have been chosen by lot.

There is among them, he notes, *not one worker, not one peasant, not a single proletarian.* How come? *Because if justice was just and were Jacob's jury made up of twelve workers, he would necessarily have been acquitted!*

What, then, is the difference between the judges and the judged? It is that the thieves are not the ones

that are believed to be so!

At the corner of a table, Maurice Lucas is drafting another document in the same vein:

They have been racking their brains since the start of the investigation to cultivate a mysterious lust for vengeance in the crowd, in the ignoble aim of ensuring that Jacob would be lynched. For the sake of the soundness of its foundations, it was in the interest of society as a whole that some avenging spirit should stir the stupidity of the mob. To meet the requirements of its cause, the people had to anathematise the destroyers of property.

All in vain! Today, for all the tremendous obstacles placed in its way, the people are in contact with these revolutionary heroes! Miscalculation and amazement! The accused are men of mettle! Jacob, Pelissard, Augain, Chalus, Soutarel, Baudy and Charles are educated minds, noble hearts devoted to the cause of humanity.

How could the people's sympathies fail to fly to them who are going to pay with their lives and their liberty for the tremendous wound they have inflicted upon the butchers of the people?

Jules Lemaire picks up the baton. He is on

edge. Demonstrations of sympathy from the crowd were not enough for him. He had called a meeting of all militants in the region for today: he had been expecting a riot; they had made do with a rendition of the Internationale. He looks for, still wishes for a reversal of opinion, a gesture, a backlash, something. But Souvarine, a Russian emigre who by some miracle escaped the clutches of the Okhrana, is not happy with Lemaire's prose. One does not make revolution with demonstrations, but with bombs.

Souvarine has drawn up a text which, according to him, should override all the rest.

Even as the dispatches are reporting that in Russia, hordes of muzhiks, starving bands made up of several thousands of peasants in open revolt are roaming the countryside, looting the castles and mansions of the landlords, burning and pillaging with no one capable of opposing them-at this very moment, a sinister comedy is being played out between robbers and robbed in the Amiens courthouse: a comedy that has been nearly two years in the making.

We have to believe that fear is the getting of wisdom, for this time the selection of the jury was not without complications. Nonetheless it

is an exceptional delight for twelve who own to sit in judgement of 23 dispossessed. Could it be true, as is being said, that Jacob still has some friends at large who are monitoring the actions and moves of the jurors, and preparing to take revenge for them?

It would certainly be regrettable to have to resort to weapons of intimidation like the bomb or the revolver, but if this salutary fear had the effect of making them reflect they would at least grasp one self-evident fact: Jacob being an Anarchist, cannot be a leader. Whereupon the thesis of a band of malefactors led by him collapses. The fiction maintained by the hireling press caves in.

You have gulled the people long enough: long enough have you managed to induce them to believe the robbed the robber! Today the truth explodes for all to see! The proletariat are awakening, they read, they listen, they reflect, they see clearly. They know that Property is theft.

You have the effrontery to pose as fair-minded men! Craven hypocrites, you well know that there is nothing fair in your stinking society. Your learned men, your professors, your

journalists are repeatedly forced to concede that injustice, everything most ghastly in the moral and material sense... these are the rules of your beautiful society of carrion flesh and inverts.

The risen people are expropriating your like in Russia. A new day has dawned at last when there will be no more judges, no more robbed and no more robbers!

Having perused Souvarine's text one by one, the comrades say nothing. Are they afraid perhaps? Do they fear lest he may go out and down one of these grasping bourgeois? Yet he is ready to do just that! And this very evening if need be. To set an example. To strike terror into the others. Violence is atrocious when it serves the master. But sublime when it serves the free man! Let's go! What is holding them back?

But a man enters the shop, a short, bearded, eagle-eyed man with a hooked nose, dressed almost like a bourgeois alongside the rest. He shakes himself as he removes his rain-soaked mackintosh. His name is Charles Malato. One of Jacob's oldest friends. He made his acquaintance in Marseilles when he was just 17 years old. He himself is aged 40. He is a man who carries some weight, a man

that one can tell does not hesitate to lend a hand to the plough if need be. An insurrectionist anarchist. They respect him. He has been out and about making inquiries. He has contacts everywhere, known to him alone. They huddle around him.

So?

So, it's a hell of a mess. The screw who was in with us has been moved to another department. Jacob has been moved to another cell yet again. It's back to scratch again.'

A sympathetic silence greets the news.

Be that as it may, Malato has managed to get hold of a message from Jacob. Jacob thanks them for all they are doing. However he does not think an escape is feasible at present neither in the Bicêtre nor in the courthouse: he is hemmed in by too many soldiers. It would also be madness to attempt to pull something as he is being removed from the van. It only remains to await a favourable opportunity and then to try to cobble something together... One never knows... In any case, Jacob prefers to be guillotined rather than be the cause of any pointless blood-letting: so, he hopes, when his head falls it will bloody the enemy.

They all bow their heads: would they show the same courage in similar circumstances? They have

not many chances left to get him out of there.

Let's go to it, Malato begins again.

In one way he has the finest part. He has conducted himself like a free man. If die he must, he will die like a free man. And then what! At this very moment throughout France, in Paris, in Marseilles, in Lyons, in Perpignan, all of the comrades have their eyes turned to Amiens. We have to live up to expectations. Mustn't disappoint them.

Here! he concludes after a pause. *I've brought you this. Libertad sent it for you. He had prepared it in advance. It puts things back into perspective. From our point of view, of course. He will release it to the public simultaneously through *Germinal* and *L'Anarchie*.*

Libertad, the redoubtable crutch-borne leading light behind *Causeries du XVIIIe* and who had just founded *L'Anarchie*, a libertarian weekly of the individualist persuasion, is known to all present. Soon, despite himself, he is to be the inspiration of the Bonnot Gang.'

The article is passed from hand to hand. They peruse it. Comment upon it. Gradually life returns and so does a diehard hope.

At this very moment, Libertad writes, there are two collections of individuals in attendance at Amiens. One seems to have scored a victory: it no longer fights, it merely judges. It has even appointed its delegates who deck themselves out in uniforms and adorn themselves with special names: gendarmes, judges, soldiers, prosecutors, jurors. But they fool nobody. In them one discerns the usual partners of the social struggle: robbers, counterfeiters, murderers, according to the circumstances.

Securely bound, the members of the second gang may be shackled but beaten they are not. And whenever they shake their heads, delegates and onlookers look like taking to their heels.

The folk from the first gang call their operation doing justice and claim to prosecute crime. In any event, it is not remorse that drags their enemies before them, but handcuffs instead. 'Whether they be judges, officers of the peace, business men, inspectors or administrators, no useful work has ever emanated from the ten fingers of the former. They did not make the bread they

eat, nor build the mansions where they live, nor make the garments they wear, nor the vehicles which transport them. So what they live by they have stolen.

In another society, Jacob and his friends might find useful employment. Their shrewdness, their expertise, their strength and courage are questioned by no one. They began to burgle society in order to live in the... perhaps mistaken... hope that this would cause disruption in the body of society. That was their only fault—if fault they have committed.

The following day, the crowd control was equally impressive. Before the proceedings commence, Rose, dragging her gendarme behind her, manages to hurl herself into the arms of her lover who squeezes her to himself. Unexpectedly it is decided that the women are to be held apart from him and he is moved back to the fifth row of the accused instead of the second where he spent yesterday. Even so, he blows kisses to his mother and to Rose.

The clerk completes the recitation of the charges whereupon the examination begins immediately: *You are a native of Marseilles?* President Wehekind asks Jacob.

Proud of it! he answers with a grin, laying the accent on thick.

You received good primary schooling.

Free of charge and compulsory. The people were led to believe that it was for their own good and out of a care for social progress that schooling was made compulsory for them. What a lie! It was in order to turn them into learned monkeys, more refined slaves in the bosses' hands.

I am not asking for your opinion.

You are recounting my life before all and sundry. I have my piece to say.

Then you were a seaman. The references from your officers are generally good.

I've seen the world, it wasn't pretty. Everywhere a handful of malefactors like you exploiting millions of unfortunates.

Outraged cries from those present. The president of the court raises his gavel. Maitre Justal, Jacob's counsel, leans towards him in an effort to get him to moderate his conduct: his client won't save his skin with this sort of behaviour.

THE AGITATOR

1

The family of his father, who came from Alsace, had emigrated south around 1850 into the Vaucluse first and then to Marseilles. Joseph Jacob had started out as a cook with a shipping company. He had had to swear never to take ship again when he began to court Marie Berthou, a girl from La Crau: a sailor as a son-in-law was out of the question. In token of his good intentions, he had found a job as a helper in a bakery in the dock area in the Rue Fontaine-Rouviere. Whereupon he was able to take Marie as his wife. But a pining for the South seas had begun to gnaw at him in the bakery despite his efforts to rinse it away with alcohol. Pernod sold for three sous in the bars: now, one never sits down to a drink on one's own and four or five drinking companions meant four or five rounds of drink.

The logical step would doubtless have been to go to sea again. But Joseph was a waverer. For good or ill, a thousand considerations kept him on dry

land. He could not leave Marie in the lurch. Could not betray the pledge sealed over a bottle of vin rose. Soon it was a case of not leaving the kid tied to his mother's apron strings.

In point of fact, Marie had money. It was she who would inherit from her parents. Not that they had been very well-to-do. The rent from their holding in La Crau: a bit of a field towards Plan de Cuques: a horse for turning the soil and ferrying produce to market: that was all their earthly possessions. But they had always worked hard, and lived meagrely. They were suspected of having put by a tidy little sum. As for Joseph, he hadn't a single sou coming to him.

It was all the easier for him to threaten her that he might go away for ever—and that was a threat from which he did not shrink—than to actually take that chance. As pretty as she was, she would not have had much trouble in finding herself a fancy man. After about a dozen false starts, Joseph wallowed in bitterness and in talk about the sacrifices he had made for her and in the card schools in the corner grog-shop.

She came to despise him. She was suffocating. Wed at the age of 18, she had known no other world outside of the convent, the Sunday vegetables and,

from 29 September 1879 (when Alexandre-Marius came into the world), nappies that needed changing, and knitting for pin-money. She would never forgive him for the heroic tales of fearless and irreproachable mariners with which he won her over. Divorce: the law as it stood ruled that out to all intents and purposes. Resignation, passivity, stagnation: these were impossible. He had pulled the wool over her eyes. She had bought a pig in a poke. After three years, she had but one desire left: that he might take off, disappear, leave her in peace. Of course, the more she told him this, the more he could discover excuses for hanging around.

One day she jumped the omnibus for Plan de Cuques. She ranted and raved and played the cat: she inveigled her aging parents into agreeing to let her have a little from the stack of louis upon which they chose to sleep, in order to set up a business. This was a bakery, just 100 metres from the house, right in the middle of the Vieux-Port district, on a little square which lay at the top of a cobblestone ramp lost amid a warren of alleys. By agreement, the deeds were in her name. Joseph became her hired help: he was the baker's boy, she the cashier. This final degradation he could not forgive. He concocted memories for himself: she set to work.

She was the mistress. To reassert his crumbling authority he soon began to thrash her. On the first occasion he begged her forgiveness, weeping like a child. He was full of good resolutions. The weeks passed. Mates sneered at his astounding sobriety. And then, in the final analysis, women are like doormats, there to be walked over.

Alexandre-Marius grew up as best he could between this unsatisfied Amazon of a mother and this emasculated father. He was not really unhappy. Not really a martyred child. The forenames borrowed from the generals of antiquity, in memory of the Other One, the true Napoleon who would have spread the Revolution throughout the whole of Europe but for the interference of the Austrians and the British, surely destined him for higher things. On different counts, they both had high hopes of him.

In anticipation of a great future, they put his name down for the Christian Brothers' school. A whim of Joseph's which sat ill with the anti-clericalism which he declared and declaimed between glasses of Pastis and absinthe. But it is possible to be a dyed-in-the-wool socialist and to be concerned for one's children's education: only louts attended the lay school in the district. Marie, who had inher-

ited a scathing opinion of soutane-wearers from her days with the sisters, superciliously gave way to this latest act of renegadeship from her lord and master.

Furthermore, Alexandre never roamed the streets. He was not an “urchin”, as she said. He preferred to make rag dolls with his devilishly agile hands: *You’ll end up as a hairdresser, a girl’s job!* Joseph sneered at him one evening.

Whenever his father’s cronies would drop by for a drink, Alexandre’s greatest pleasure was to listen late on to tales of crossing the line, when the whole crew dresses up as sea-gods, or of exotic ports of call in strange-sounding islands... Java, Borneo, Celebes, Fiji, Sumbawa—where, inevitably, apocalyptic typhoons blew, while lovely halfbreeds devised lascivious belly dances for their exclusive benefit. Marie would shrug her shoulders at such tales, which she knew by heart. But Alexandre would salt away their quasi-epics like so many treasures in his memory where they joined the likes of Ivanhoe, Ulysses, Jean Bart and the bailiff of Suffren.

From the day when he saw his father beat his mother and his yellow animal eyes flame with rage, he despised him. Not that that stopped Marie from contending that her husband was a fine fellow. His temper was short-lived. Once the crisis had passed,

he would do anything to please.

She strove in vain to paint him in an enchanting light for Alexandre. Alexandre merely heard her out without a word. By the age of eight, he had a serious look about him, like children who have already seen too much. He would sit on her lap. He would put his arm around her neck. He would hug her. He would tell her how he would carve out an empire for her in China where she would be queen. In China, because missionaries would often arrive to give talks about the “savages” whom they had brought the knowledge of the Gospel. He had difficulty seeing what benefits the blessed sacraments could have brought the pagan idolaters of Lao-tse, but could talk endlessly about junks, about the Great Wall besieged by the Manchu hordes and about emperors in palanquins. He had built himself a heroic world on the far side of the ocean, where absolute beauty and the radiant perfection of golden days were within reach, contrary to conditions in Marseilles.

My son's going to be a priest! ejaculated Joseph one day with his customary delicacy when he stumbled across Alexandre regaling his mother with twaddle of this sort.

Priest he never dreamed of becoming. A mis-

sionary rather: on account of the travel. Anyway, his vocation dried up at the time of his first communion. That morning, in a provocative act and persuaded that a formidable hand was about to descend upon the back of his neck to the accompaniment of a roll of thunder, he bit down on the host. His disappointment was beyond measure: God did not intervene. So he did not exist. The Brothers had been telling lies. The matter was settled once and for all: he had no supernatural soul. His mind turned more towards action—which did not rule out reflection—than contemplation.

At the age of 11 and a half, he was awarded special permission to sit his school certificate which he sailed through. His teachers vaguely expected that he would carry on for his diploma, perhaps even take his baccalaureate. They confided as much to Marie. Alas! Joseph went on a real binge. Every other batch was burned. Customers became rare. Money even rarer. This business of studies was doubtless yet another ploy by the Christian Brothers to recruit a long-stay customer and to grow fat on the backs of the poor. Marie, who never failed to caw like a crow whenever she came across a priest in the street was quick to credit them with the most Machiavellian intentions. In vain did they refer to

the little seminary's having no fees; she distrusted them. As for the obligation to attend school up to the age of 13, the law that had just been passed to that effect in 1883 remained, for the moment, a dead letter.

Consulted by Marie, Alexandre blushed. The insult hurled by his father still had him seething. Seminary school... that meant becoming a priest: akin to becoming an ox. Given his air of discomfiture, she did not press the matter. In those days that stratum of society had not yet been touched by the craze for Great Schools. As long as one can read, write, and reckon one can always get by, provided that one is dependable. Diplomas are all very well for the offspring of the rich. One argument clinched the decision: a neighbour's son who had passed his baccalaureate was unemployed.

Upon hearing the news Alexandre was relieved, just as any other child would have been in his place. Though an excellent student, he was too bored in class. The Masses every morning, the catechism lessons, the saints lives overwhelmed him with disgust. For three months the weeks simply dragged by. He discovered Jules Verne and dockland. Dockland and Jules Verne, tirelessly: the 15 year old Captain, the Children of Captain Grant

and Captain Nemo... he was surely going to bump into them in the Canebiere, on the Canal quay or out towards the La Joliette dock, ready to take ship for some fabulous expedition. What Pierre Loti calls the “call of the wide open spaces”.

Thus when, one day, he caught sight of a suitcase-laden officer coming down the gangway of a freighter, he rushed to give him a helping hand. The man, in the belief that this was some down-and-out he was dealing with, made to give him a tip at the end of the trip. Alexandre refused it, his pride injured. Amused, the officer put some questions to him. Spluttering, Alexandre confessed his ambition:

Ah! So you want to be a sailor? said the officer, patting him on the cheek. Then come see me at the Freycinet's one of these days. You must ask for Monsieur Martinaud, armoury captain.

He was dazzled. One of the most joyous experiences of his life.

Breathlessly, he raced off to report his providential meeting. His mother began by squeezing him to her, sobbing... just like some bitch about to lose her pup. His father on the other hand congratulated him, tottering, and made him toast the

prospect with a glass of wine. Freycinet was one of the biggest companies along with the Transatlantic line. And this Martinaud was a very fine sort. He had heard tell of him. A trip around the world is the university of life. Alexandre was going to see the Southern Cross and emerge from under his mother's apron at last. Marie argued as best she could. Be it now or later, he would leave somehow; that was fate. He would see the landscapes of which she had dreamed. He would not be like her and go stale waiting for Sundays to arrive. Perhaps it was as well.

Three weeks later, on 22 February 1890 to be exact, at the age of 11 years and five months, he set sail as a ship's boy aboard the *Thibet*; thrust into the bottom of his new kitbag as his only viaticum, were the works of Jules Verne that had brought him to that place. Without a doubt, he was going to seize the tiller in the midst of storms and, thanks to the daring of his resolve, to rescue crews in peril. Such dreams were to be dashed.

He had to rise at 4.00 am. Swab the deck with huge pails of water and scrub it with a brush. There was the deckhouse to be swept out, bunks to be made, brass to be polished, sewing to be done, officers to be served, and the fearsome invective

of the ship's mate and bosun to be braved. Jules Verne had not told the whole story. He had left out the mops, the needle and the teatowels, the aching muscles, the vomiting, the despair, the filth of the crew's quarters, the aimless wandering from port to port, while the seamen got drunk with loose women in sordid grog-houses.

The more deeply he got into the life, the more the aura of the exotic faded away with each time they put ashore along the African coastline. Oran, followed by Dakar, Conakry, Monravia, Tabu, Abidjan, Accra, Lome, Cotonou... single-storied huts, overcast skies, humidity. Scrofulous, club-footed, grinning, grimacing, eaten by flies; officers with switches smacking their boots; arrogant, bloated, good-for-nothing civilians. No tigers, no lions, no hippopotamuses: no chance to display one's heroism. The clouds over Africa were the same as the ones that hung over Marseilles in winter. The stench, the sweat, the ugliness: maybe Alexandre was not the stuff of which poets are made. But nor was he a first-class passenger aboard some liner.

After three consecutive journeys aboard the Thibet, he now saw his father in his true light: a bar-room raconteur, a grog-shop braggart. There was no truth in any of the things he had said.

At the age of 12, he began to come alive to his responsibility as the head of the household: he realised that in a way his mother had determined that he should live life for them both. That he would do what she had never dared do; because of her womanhood, and never been able to do, for want of opportunity. Housebound, she shared, at every port of call, his amazement, joy, resentment, suffering, and judgement. She demanded but one undertaking of him: that he follow the prompting of his heart, not the calculation of his interest. An old hangover from Catholicism, no doubt.

When he learned that the bakery was mortgaged down to the last baking-tray on account of the batches ruined through his father's drinking bouts, he made up his mind to look out for Marie. From then on he would eke out every sou of his pay so as to take back the greatest possible sum to her.

This he did from the moment he transferred to the Messageries Maritimes line where his good references earned him a place aboard the *Ville de la Ciotat* as a trainee helmsman on 45 francs a month. To him that was a fortune. To Marie, it was worth all the nuggets in California, for quite apart from the fact that these tiny sums helped to

restore the balance of her hugely overspent budget, she saw them as a token of priceless filial love.

Egypt, the Suez Canal and its caravans of camels, Djibouti, the Red Sea, the Seychelles, Sydney and its pink granite rocks, where he saw his first convicts, escapees whom they had to ferry back, ankles shackled deep in the hold, to Noumea. Alexandre wanted a close look at them. He passed them tobacco. Got to talk with them. They were not wild beasts: unfortunates, rather. At least so they seemed to him. Criminals to be sure. But were not those who, from the comfort of their offices, reduced human beings to such abject degradation criminals also? When he got home, Marie was quite of this opinion.

It was there, on Nou island, that he chanced to hear a reference to Louise Michel. A horribly ugly old girl, completely crazy, a *petroleuse* from the Commune, who had been amnestied back in 1880 because Victor Hugo had written some poems about her. During her time of servitude, she had conceived the ludicrous notion of setting up schools for the Kanaks out in the bush. By then some of these savages had achieved baccalaureate level. An abomination: for, inevitably these people, equipped with their new and laughably useless

knowledge, were going to question the white man's orders. A funny sort of a woman. Pity she was an anarchist. Marie might be entitled to a report about this as well. On the subject of anarchy she embroidered with thread a golden legend of unselfishness, liberty, and fraternity, which Joseph came along and spoiled with his slurred assertions that folk who drink only water are not to be trusted.

Alexandre left the Ville de la Ciotat for the Alix. Off the Syrian coast, the Alix was holed by a freighter and sank. The whole crew was saved, including the apprentice, who had not had time to feel afraid. What struck him most about the episode was a bonus of 250 francs. For Marie, of course. After that, it was the Suzanne-et-Marie. But not for long. Indeed Jules Verne had overlooked one other essential feature of shipboard life. At no time had the prim novelist dwelt upon the morals of sailors. Now some of these had an infuriating tendency to confuse the apprentice's part to that of the object of their sexual desires. Bad enough to slave day and night, to be treated as a greenhorn or poet because you get bored when they force you to stand watch with them and it reminds you too much of your father's drunken stupors, but to be harassed by some wine-sodden deckhand feeling

horny... there was nothing romantic about that.

The first serious row to erupt over this came when they were at anchor in Saint-Louis du Rhone. Alexandre resisted. The amateur invert swung a punch at him. Alexandre pounced on him and suffered the public humiliation of defeat. He resolved to be avenged, clambered on to the roof of a shed and lay in wait for his tormentor, clutching a cobblestone. By some stroke of good luck, the target failed to show. His honour was safe. But the episode cost him his job. He had his work cut out to restrain Marie from heading out to avenge him.

In any case, Marie had plenty on her plate. Her pleading and cajoling had succeeded in extracting a further sum of money from her parents—her last. Some weeks later, old man Berthou passed away. His true financial state came to light when the grandmother, incapable of working the land alone, was obliged to rent it out and resort to a costermonger's barrow. Marie was desolated by this. Her debts had been cleared completely, the bakery sold off and a grocery-hardware shop purchased in the rue Dragon, but here was her mother parading the streets like some down and out. *The young with the young, the old with the old*, Mama Berthou obstinately used to say, not being fond of her son-in-law,

whenever her daughter besought her to move in with them.

Alexandre was entitled to inspect and be shown around the new premises. It occurred to him that, with no more dough to knead, his father would be less of a daunting prospect to customers among the green beans and vegetables. As for himself, this was not for him: it would undoubtedly be a delicate task to coexist with Papa Jacob.

So he set off again. Aboard the Armand-Behic this time. During a further outward journey to Australia, the attempts at sodomy began again. Should he complain to the captain? That sort of carry-on was so commonplace in those days that most of the officers preferred to turn a blind eye to it. It was looked upon as a very natural small service to do one's elders. In all honesty, the men could not comprehend Alexandre's refusal to join in their little games. They thought him a bit of a wally. Shipboard life became hell. He was forced into the worst drudgery. In Sydney, on an impulse and with two sous in his pocket, he jumped ship. He was 13 years old. Any lingering romantic illusions died right there.

He lived by his wits, bought an apple, sold whips (the first was filched from a cabby), shone

shoes, kept seals, up to the day he met up with a compatriot who suggested that he sign on with a whaling ship. Whaling. Enthusiastically he boarded his new ship. The crew members had the look of pirates about them. The captain was black and built like Hercules. All of their faces struck him as admirable adventurers' faces.

A month passed: no whales. Instead, one day a small ship appeared on the skyline. Alexandre was sent below to fetch some spars. The hatch cover was battened down after him and sealed. He could hear the captain's voice promising that he would be released from there in an hour or two. Then strange noises reached him in his hiding place, loud shouts followed by what sounded like shots. Then nothing.

The hatch cover was thrown back. He climbed on to the deck.

His fellow crew members were wielding rifles. The vessel opposite was deserted. Or rather there was someone; bodies sprawled in weird positions as if fast asleep. Corpses. The whaler was a pirate ship. At last Alexandre was caught up in the Adventure (with a capital A) promised him by Jules Verne: chance had made him into a buccaneer.

Not having been present during the carnage,

he was not shocked by the dead to begin with. That was all abstract, confused, exciting. Moreover he was not given time to reflect upon his state of mind: there was cargo to be transhipped. That done, a barrel of gunpowder was placed aboard the other ship. A man lit the fuse, they scurried away and there was an explosion. A very fine firework display.

This expedition brought him a small fortune: 800 francs which he sent off immediately to Marie with a letter eulogising his “new trade”, certain aspects of which he nonetheless felt he had an obligation to keep quiet about.

On their next sortie, the pirates, reckoning that he was enough of a veteran, let him witness the whole operation. The unsuspecting approach of the prey, the frantic waving, the cries as if appealing for help and then... suddenly... the rifles, the dumbfounded expressions of the victims, and the bloodshed. This time, Alexandre began to throw up. The story-tellers had forgotten to mention the spurting blood, the death throes, the grimaces, the screams, the terror of the wounded dispatched at point blank range. He pocketed his portion of the loot, 1000 francs, for his mother’s sake, then took to his heels just as soon as the whaler made port.

He had understood. Crime did pay. Paid well indeed. But it was ghastly.

Eight hours later, the whaler, caught in flagrante delicto was arrested by a coastguard vessel and the entire crew was strung up unceremoniously. Had he been on board he would not have been spared the slaughter: the laws of the sea allowed no trifling with piracy. For a time, his nights were haunted by nightmares during which huge blacks chased him in order to put a noose around his neck. These cold sweats were a lesson to him: henceforth he might speak knowledgeably of piracy to his erstwhile chums from the Christian Brothers' school-but he would have no more truck with it, ever.

A vacancy for a ship's boy aboard an English ship, the Prince of Albert enables him to make it home to Marseilles by way of Liverpool. In Marseilles the gendarmes were waiting for him: he had deserted after all. In short, knowing nothing of his Australian adventures, they threw him into jail for having refused to submit to buggery. Alexandre was livid. His mother calmed him: to be sure, he was basically right, but unless deserters faced punishment, how many ships might never set sail from Tahiti? And then he was to face judgment for

his escapade. This was no time for a revolt which would necessarily be taken for insubordination. He had to get out of this fix.

She moved heaven and earth. She produced references from the successive masters who had her son under their command. She stressed his age: at the age of 13, one doesn't realise what one is doing. Surely they were not going to destroy his career! Alexandre's clear and lively answers to the court made a favourable impression on the judges. They made him swear on his honour as a seaman that he would not appear before them again, and were willing to let bygones be bygones.

He was touched by this humane justice, so different from the atmosphere which had prevailed aboard the Armand-Behic. The generous comments of the officers moved him to tears: he was weeping as he left the courtroom. He would not let these men down. They had placed their trust in him: he would be deserving of it. One day, he pledged, he would wear a braided cap.

Opting for boldness, off he went to seek out Captain Martinaud again. He confided in the captain his misadventure as well as the quite new ambition he was cherishing. The officer heard him out gravely and with him explored... *the chances*

of a sailor devoid of theoretical background achieving his master's ticket in the long run; he sounded his sincerity and made no secret to him of the enormous, thankless, and burdensome task that lay ahead of him and for which, saving his being in a position to pay his way, he would not enjoy the benefits of the competitiveness that prevailed in the training schools. Alexandre had an answer for everything. Martinaud, defeated, lent him his navigation and hydrography manuals.

For the ensuing four years' sailing, his watch completed and regardless of the hour of day or night, while the other sailors grunted over card-games barely a metre away from him, he sat with his head between his hands: and clapped them over his ears, the better to digest the indigestible treatises. Currents, soundings, tides, signals, buoys intoxicated him as Jules Verne had once done. Beyond it all lay salvation: life as a proud and upright free man.

Most of the officers helped him out with advice. Truth to tell, they adored him. Some of his shipmates, on the other hand, took a dislike to him: he was aiming to rise above them. He hobnobbed with the "petty officers"; so he was a boot-licker. The deciphering of letters and lines struck

them as a magical preserve of the officers' ward-room, to which a mere novice could not aspire without sacrilege. Constantly he had to watch his language, lest he utter words that they would not be familiar with. Moreover, he hardly ever went ashore. He did not drink; did not smoke; did not gamble; did not disport himself with dockside whores. His seeming Puritanism, which was nothing more than a distaste for vice observed at too close quarters at home, irked them as if they were being taken personally to task.

He did not balk at work: he helped people out whenever he was able: in the event of a brawl he always took his mates' part against the pacha (skipper): he used to organise their affairs: would write on their behalf to a girlfriend or wife: he was loyal, courageous, and, on occasion, could share a joke but was ready to kill too, if anyone rode roughshod over him. In short, he had to be accepted for what he was: a weird, candid lad; compassionate yet violent; unselfish and quick-tempered; a fine sailor, but as ingenuous as a child. Beyond reproach: that was the exasperating and disarming thing about him.

Each time he came home, Marie could see a change in her son. He was maturing. Turning into

a man. She encouraged him along the course he had chosen—annoyed only that she could not be of more help to him, but inevitably she had slipped into debt again.

Single-mindedly, he was forging the weapons that would enable him truly to escape, and not in daydreams only, from the prison of the crew's quarters: the lever with which he would shift the world. He learned a still greater store of things about men. How, aboard certain vessels, during the crossing for example, officers and men conspired to replace a portion of the cargo by an equivalent weight of pieces of coke. Once the merchandise had been delivered to the wharves, the owners lost their right to raise any more complaints: any casual passer-by might have been responsible for the pilferage. There was a certain kick to be had out of pulling a fast one on such a businessman who already had millions. But the hypocrisy, the cowardice, and the guile which surrounded the coup revolted him. The whaling ship's buccaneers had at least had the gumption to risk their necks.

He also came upon a veritable trade in human livestock. Jews, Greeks, Armenians took ship in Beirut, Salonika or Batum, and were herded into steerage, crowded together, packed like sar-

dines, humiliated, their only offence their poverty: abused, exploited, but still happy to be there as the chosen candidate of some family, clan, or tribe that had collected its pennies to buy them a passage to the El Dorado of America. And the trade in blacks, a trade established by the Sultan of Zanzibar in person for the benefit of the potentates of the Middle East, and which was to survive for a long time, tolerated by the British occupiers who creamed off a percentage, and was organised by a Jewish baron by the name of Hirsch who made a fortune out of it... a trade practised by France herself in that the Guadiana on board which Alexandre was serving, incontestably flew the tricolour. And France, as everybody knew, abandoned Zanzibar to the British only in exchange for a free hand in Madagascar.

He experienced shame, despair, and rancour. Hatred... one frosty evening in London where the bosun, to revenge himself upon this indomitable adolescent who had the effrontery to have a mind of his own, who dared refuse to conform to the sexual practices had sent him out to rub down the mizzen-mast with a sponge stuck fast in a pail of frozen water: and it was only the cold that set Alexandre's hand trembling that saved the bosun from being struck full on the head by the sharp edged

chamber-pot that he flung at him from his perch.

At the age of 14, he made the acquaintance of the female sex in the person of a Creole hostess in Sourabaya who relieved him of his savings. He knew others, in Amsterdam, in Caracas, in Tamatave, all of them built along similar lines, three francs for a “quickie”, some jiggery-pokery, a cure against nostalgia, a trip to the edge of disillusionment. He was after a heart, they were after some sous. They breathed France from his torso, dreaming of ransom amid rum-flavoured hiccups: they would tell their stories, their interchangeable, pitiful, and untruthful stories, grinning with distress, all crocodile tears, with their blotchy cheeks made sooty by kohl. Every time these dull-witted, mechanical bitches made him want to slap the face of the shipowner’s crinolined wife whom he had sighted one day quite by chance behind the dockside railway station, her and her angelic smile, in her cabriolet. Why? That was something he did not understand himself.

He loathed the fool’s bargains sealed behind closed doors, the casual copulation, the fiasco of bought embraces, the spinelessness of drunken knife fights, when eyes were bloodshot and one had bemoaned one’s coauthored downfall. His

father had furnished him with a model for all failures, all cowardice. As time went by he espied them in others and despised them. What would he do once he had obtained his captain's ticket? He did not know. Only one thing was certain: things would not be the same aboard his vessel.

In the vast shambles that was society, with its bloated traffickers in black flesh on the one hand and its deckhands, brutalised by toil, resigned, furtive, embittered, beaten, spent, and alcoholic on the other: for the sake of a ship-owners's wife and of regiments of whores... and unless women had had the good fortune to be born into the fancy homes on the Canebiere, their mangy self-respect vegetated, as his mother's did, in the dungeons of matrimony... the tiny, undying spark that kept him moored for a long time to the common code of morality was this hope of some day attaining officer status.

But his lever—his physical well-being—let him down. In Dakar he had caught "the fevers". Which fevers? No one knows. Over sleepless nights, the first virus to attack seized a hold of him. Throughout the entire return trip he was unable to stand his watch. When the bell sounded the hour, he would stumble in vain towards the wheel-house,

his lungs rent by a severe coughing: they had had to ferry him hack to his bunk.

He was put ashore in Marseilles on a stretcher, more dead than alive. An urgently summoned specialist shook his head pessimistically. If he came through this, which was far from certain, he would in any case be left with precarious health. Resumption of his seaman's trade was out of the question. With two off-hand remarks, the man of science shattered four years of dogged determination and quiet heroism in the obtuse and milling solitude of the crew's quarters.

The physician asked ten francs of Marie by way of consultation fee.

2

You were first condemned on 13 October 1897 to six months imprisonment and a 50 franc fine for manufacturing explosives.

You were 17 years old at the time.

A youthful error, believe me. My bombs were laughable attempts to destroy a band of malefactors whose power I did not suspect!

His eyes deep-set beneath his bushy eyebrows, the thinning, skeletal figure fought the malaria attacks for a long while. He was delirious. It muttered and growled inside him, as if he had trouble digesting his trials, a mishmash of confused and contradictory demands in search of some unknown outcome. In the end the will to live won through. He emerged from the ordeal almost as if purified, whittled down to the essentials-but seized by a breathtaking feeling of emptiness. The world of his dreams had collapsed. His past doggedness seemed laughable.

However, he was not of a temperament to rewrite history: if only his father had not been a sot; if only he had the money at home to enable him to pursue his education; if only he had not worked so hard; all of these ifs amounted to nothing.

Though who can say by what aberration, Joseph Jacob had been appointed as surrogate guardian of a distant cousin who had been left an orphan. For the time being the young man was lodging in a tiny room available on the same landing as Alexandre's room. He came to visit the convalescent. He was a huge, bearded, shy fellow who rocked from one foot to the other while he spoke. In short order he demonstrated to the crestfallen sailor that:

- 1) Man is an atom in infinity. Governed by the laws that order the world. One of these laws makes him the product of the social setting in which he is placed.
- 2) He, Alexandre Jacob, had been obliged to overtax himself in order to escape slavery and in an attempt to win a decent social position because others had everything handed to them at birth. The true cause of his ailment was no microbe, but society's despicable organisation. It was injustice that had reduced him to the state of least physical resistance.
- 3) In circumstances like his, some people, most, simply gave up or gave way to vice. Joseph Jacob exemplified these. Others, a few, used adversity to gain internal freedom which

was not a universal gift but the outcome of patient endeavour.

4) His adventure was merely an insignificant episode, a laughably banal anecdote in the titanic contest which pitted the propertied against the propertyless, the exploiters and the exploited in every civilised country.

5) Alexandre, obsessed with making a career, was unwittingly in jeopardy of taking a wrong turn. So these fevers were a godsend. Maybe they had prevented his becoming a dealer, a millionaire, one of industry's sharks, a knight of finance, a slaver, a tapioca king, a monarch of gold or tin. As long as all men were not free and equal, no man could claim to be so except at the expense of someone else.

6) The only task worthy of man was working to change society. In working to free one's fellow men, and only thus, could one free oneself.

To lend his argument greater weight, the youthful libertarian left him alone with a book by Victor Hugo, one of his bedside favourites, which he regarded as truly revolutionary despite some regrettable passages on Catholic morality: ninety-three.

The impact of Alexandre's encounter with Hugo was devastating. Verne had sent him off in search of the Holy Grail in the direction of an endlessly retreating elsewhere. The mirages of the exotic having faded away, he discovered the chance to create the absolute in the here and now. For Alexandre, Cimourdain's final exchange with Gauvain in the cells, two paces from the guillotine where the former (a pupil become master) is about to extinguish the latter, was a revelation...

You want compulsory military service. Against whom? Against other men. Me, I want no military service.

I want peace. You want help for the poor whereas I want to see poverty abolished. You want proportional taxation.

I want no taxes at all. I want social expenditure trimmed to the very bone and paid out of society's surplus value...

First, away with parasitism, The parasitism of the priest; the parasitism of the Judge, the parasitism of the soldier... Let every man have a plot of land, and every plot of land its man. You will increase social output a hundredfold. At present, France affords her peasants only four meat days a year; prop-

erly cultivated, she would feed 300 million men, the whole of Europe... You want the barrack made compulsory, I the school. You dream of man the soldier, I of man the citizen.

Those words of Cimourdain's were engraved on his heart. So one had to act. But was Cimourdain a utopian? No. He himself had said it: to achieve the possible one has to... "start by not rendering it impossible".

But hadn't Cimourdain perished, a victim of the order established by the Robespierres and the Cauvains? No matter. Others would pick up-others had picked up the torch. He was going to pick it up himself. If need be, he would perish too, eyes open beneath Monsieur Cuillotin's blade. He forswore his life in advance. Where? When? How to go about it?

It was quite simple. As soon as he was up and about again, his young neighbour dragged him into the backroom of the Noailles pub where the Renovateurs group, having learned that the local socialists were due to hold a conference, had decided to show up to argue them down.

Several hundred people were standing around, huddled around a makeshift rostrum to which the

speaker clung: the air was stifling. From time to time squalls of exclamations burst from the huddle, drowning the speaker's voice with a rumpus that defied description. Whereupon the meeting degenerated into heated private arguments until, slowly, a semblance of calm returned.

After a moment of hesitation, the two young men wove their way, the one steering the other, as far as a compact group at the foot of the platform. There were handshakes, words exchanged. Inquisitively, Alexandre observed those around him. They were workmen, artisans in blue smocks, in overalls, in pea jackets, sometimes with broad red carpenters' belts around their middles. Under a forest of hirsute manes, beards, and moustaches, the angry faces strained towards the speaker, all boiling with shared fury. Terms of abuse welled up from the group.

Sellout! Nark! Forty sous!

Among them were five or six women, not good-looking but dressed any old how. Except for one who is standing apart seeming not to know anybody, in a light dress cut high upon a pale skin, with a veiled bonnet. To his eyes she had the look of a princess who had strayed into the crowd. Pressed, despite his efforts, against her

back he breathed her intoxicating perfume. Curly black tresses cascaded over the nape of her neck. She was wasp-waisted. He was getting warm. She did not resemble any of the women he had had dealings with. Nor any of the hussies from the brothels overseas. Nor Rolande, daughter of the post office clerk who lived beside the house, with her provocative laughter and teasing smiles when they had walked on Sundays on several occasions during his all too short visits to Marseilles, under the melting eyes of their two families. The woman turned. For some seconds, she pierced him with a serious, fiery and oddly imploring look. Alexandre was deaf to the racket all around him. In a stupor, open-mouthed, he wallowed in her charm. He was going to speak to her, to say something, anything. He melted into a sensation of wellbeing: he floated. He was an omnipotent giant. He was going to enfold her in his arms: to protect her from danger... But she blushed, the shadow of a smile brushed her pale lips and she wandered off a little, unnerved by the stare of this adolescent who was gazing at her so impudently.

Alexandre made the tiniest move to draw closer to her. Shoulders intervened. The crowd was milling around. One of the bearded men leapt on

to the rostrum, jostled the speaker and began to declaim, leaning forward, the veins in his forehead and throat protruding, his arms gesticulating level with his knees, his fingers locked, clenched in awful suffering, a despairing attempt to shower the crowd with the immense, fragile, and tottering mass of electrifying truths.

Savings banks putting up the money for workers' houses-to hell with it! The fight against alcoholism... to hell with it! The eight hour day... to hell with it! That's Christian charity! Alms! Paternalism! We want no part of it! Comrade Rostand tries to lull us with fine promises! We want no alms! We want our due! We want an end to slavery! We want freedom! We want immediate social revolution!'

A dull murmur rises from the back of the room and enters the ranks like a wedge into a beech tree: *Kill him! Provocateur! Let Rostand speak!* The group of bearded ones strikes up the Internationale. A stool crashes down upon someone's head. A clearing appears at the foot of the rostrum, like some miniature arena. For a moment, silence interrupts the whistling. Then Alexandre spotted her, cowering in the front row, her hand clutch-

ing a lace handkerchief in front of her mouth. She wanted to get away. Could not. The wall of brawlers pushed her back. He threw himself in front of her. Coshes, which had appeared as if by some miracle, were slashing away at random; chairs were being smashed up; there was a flurry of fists and feet striking home. Some shrill whistle blasts rang out in the street. Then it was as if the huge hanging chandelier was coming down on her. He reached out towards her. He thought he heard a terrified scream.

That was all he saw of his first political meeting. He never did find out who had struck him. The police stepped in, batoning everyone in their path—but mostly the bearded ones. The young orphan, assisted by three comrades, managed to beat a retreat with him in the direction of the office. They made their escape via a garden. They scaled a wall and took him home covered in blood. Wincing with the pain, he asked what had become of the veiled woman. Tiny brunette with a good bust? No, they did not know... They hadn't noticed. So many people there...

The upshot was that he was laid up in bed for a further week. His lips, his forehead, and his cheeks turned black and blue. He had difficulty breathing.

But no bones were broken. A flood of caresses, reproaches, sweets, infusions, and damp compresses from Marie indicated how frightened she had been by the sight of him in a coma. Joseph, secretly proud, perhaps, passed no comment.

For all his aches and pains, Alexandre was swimming in joy: he was nearly Cimourdain. The Gauvains had downed him—but a lost battle did not mean a lost war. He would have his revenge. Slipping abruptly and without transition from ecstasy into the darkest depression, he wondered mostly whether he had cut a heroic figure in the view of the veiled woman, or whether she had not regarded him as a hopeless runt instead. That question, to which no one could supply the answer, haunted him.

A few nights after the incident, the orphan hastily gathered his things together and surreptitiously slipped away: somebody, he knew not who, had reported him as a dangerous ringleader. He headed for Lyons where he had a hideout. He left Alexandre his books. He also requested that Alexandre go, on his behalf, to the Juge printworks in the rue de la Republique, almost on the corner of the boulevard des Dames, to warn them that he would not be returning. Alexandre went there.

The first person he spotted upon going inside was one of the men who had pulled him out of the fix in the Noailles hostelry, a man by the name of Arthur Roques. Or to be more exact it was the latter, a greying, muscular 40 year old who recognised him and warmly shook his hand. Juge, the boss, a gruff, ringing-voiced burly type with continually watery eyes, thought that this messenger wanted to step into the shoes of the fugitive. That notion had not even crossed Alexandre's mind. But it caught his fancy. And then there was Roques. And so it came to pass that he found himself as a compositor's apprentice.

Into this new calling he poured the same enthusiasm for work done properly that he had displayed in his days as a sailor, and the same intelligence too. It was in his blood. Descended from countless generations of industrious folk, not counting his father, he had an innate respect for expertise. Monsieur Juge was happy with his new employee and Alexandre with his new job.

Whereas, not having the time, he could not perhaps become Gavot, the dutiful companion of liberty, he was at heart in favour of that functional freemasonry which also acknowledged—and still does acknowledge—the three symbolic points.

1897 had arrived. The industrial revolution was spreading with the rash of mines, foundries and railways, congregating a rootless proletariat into the huge factories of dingy suburbs. It had been masons, carpenters, locksmiths, shipwrights, roofers, plasterers, lous, passants and devorants who proclaimed themselves the sons of Hiram, the inspired architect of Solomon's Temple, the Children of Master Jacques or of Father Soubise, the Gallic companions of Hiram who, tradition had it, had gone home bringing the Secrets with them. Hitherto, each worker had seemed irreplaceable, initiated patiently over the five years of his Tour de France up to the day when his masterpiece bore witness to his expertise, thereby gaining him admission to the rank of companion. And the masterpiece itself was merely the token of a perfect inner accomplishment, mastery of self as much as of the tools of the craft, a slow maturing into wisdom, proof that man might make himself through the making of his art.

Like some unique bloom, each individual had been tended by the Companionship. Industry tied men to the machine. It belittled them. Made them much of a muchness. It replaced love of craft with the notion of productivity. Aside from

the bourgeois and entrepreneurs responsible for this equality of brutalisation, this brotherhood of dross, the freedom of the slave in his chains—it was against industry that the anarchists took up arms: the apprenticed Jacob accepted the orders of Monsieur Juge in a natural way, and it did not cost him a thought, because he may have been a boss, but he was primarily a master. In the libertarian's New World also there would be apprentices, companions, and masters—provided of course that the latter did not abuse their abilities.

What there would not be, however, were these submissive regiments of sub-humans turned into automata by the phenomenon of huge capitalist property. Alexandre—and this was the subject of his earliest discussions with Roques did not even understand how one might consent to prostitute oneself in a factory. When one did not have the good fortune to be in a position to practise one of the rare trades which had remained “noble”, such as typography, one had to rebel or perish on the spot. On the day when the numbers of the rebels would be sufficient, the social Revolution might at last proceed. With that in mind, perhaps it was to be hoped that the workers be exploited a little more still: in the end, the spark would catch...

This is why he remained quite indifferent to the endeavour of men such as Fernand Pelloutier who, with an eye to spreading libertarian ideas among the masses, were turning their attention to syndicalism.

Two years previously in 1895 Pelloutier had just been elected secretary of the Federation of Bourses du Travail, the most powerful congregation of corporate bodies then in existence. That same year, unspectacularly, the CGT had been set up in Limoges. Hard-liners had pounced upon it. They had won a majority within it. At the level of the workplace, they had launched the slogans of boycott and sabotage in the hope that the phenomenon would spread like wildfire. According to them, the general insurrectionary strike, during which the authorities would collapse of themselves like rotten fruit, would automatically erupt... But the great day was slow in coming. Each year it was awaited in vain, every May Day. Apropos of this, Alexandre was deeply impressed by a paradox by Paraf-Javal in *Le Libertaire*:

What is a syndicate? A grouping in which the brutalised band together by trade in an attempt to make the relations between bosses and workers less unbearable. There are two

possibilities: either they are unsuccessful in which case the syndicalist endeavour is futile: or they succeed, in which case the syndicalist endeavour is harmful in that a group of men will have made the situation less unbearable and consequently will have extended the life-span of contemporary society.

Guided by Roques, he gradually discovered libertarian circles in Marseilles and throughout the region. He had access to the editors of *L'Agitateur* at 22, Quai du Port, where everything was hatched. He took part in the gatherings of the *Renovateurs* in the Flory bar at 69 allée des Capucines: in the meetings of the *Vengeurs* in the Place Saint-Martin at the *Rendezvous dauphinois*; in those of the *Jeunesse Revolutionnaire* and of the *Libertaires de la Belle de Mai* at the Briant cafe at 80 rue Blanc in the back-room, behind closed shutters. He frequented the *Taverne provençal* in the rue Rameau, behind the Grand Theatre: the *Bar du Grand Orient*, up until there was a falling-out with the owner, and the *Brasserie du Midi* at 10, Quai du Port. He helped steward the great meetings for which the *Chave* theatre was hired. He was there for the one held by Sebastien Faure, when a brawl provoked by a nark by name of Camau, had erupted. "The

apostle” had been sentenced to a month in prison for having taken a swing at a certain Monsieur Toyrion, another notorious informer.

He improvised poems at “family evenings” at which the libertarians would get together with their spouses and children to listen to talks, to hold discussions, sing revolutionary songs and, on occasions, to dance. One evening he brought along Rolande, the daughter of the post-office clerk, their neighbour. But Rolande was very standoffish, pronounced the people there “a motley crew” and wanted to go home very early on, thereby introducing a chill to their relationship. In any case, he hardly had any time to see her any more.

Marie, on the other hand, thoroughly enjoyed herself on the two or three occasions that she attended. Whereas she did not understand much of the political argument she danced the Boston with several comrades whom she found “very likeable”. They laughed all the time. And, above all, drank nothing but water.

One Sunday Alexandre accompanied Rogues to Toulon where he was due to contact the Revolte des Travailleurs which met sometimes at Caneppe’s at 23 rue Alezard and sometimes at the Bar des Artistes in the place Maurice in the Cha-

peau-Rouge district. He handled liaison several times with the Libertaires du Vancluse in Avignon at the Laguir cafe in the Porte Saint-Roch, or at the ChampFleuri cafe behind the railroad freight yard, and with the Jeunesse libertaire in the L'Aveyron refreshment rooms in the rue des Carmes. His feelers reached as far as the Indomptables at the San Pareil bar at 3 rue des Petits-Ponts in La Ciotat and indeed as far as Beziers, to the Fourastie cafe at 6 place du Marche where he rendezvoused with local militants.

At *L'Agitateur* he mucked in. He spent sleepless nights, ignoring the recommendations of the doctors, helping to set type for the paper. Sometimes he brought the still damp-inked copies himself to the newsstands of Marius Gauchon and Madame Dumont. He handed out leaflets outside offices. And on Sunday mornings, at the entrances to the churches he would distribute Sebastien Faure's pamphlet *God's Crimes*:

Straighten yourself up man! And once upright, quivering and rebellious, declare war without quarter on the God whose brutalising veneration has so long been imposed upon your brethren and yourself!

During masses, he let off stink bombs just as

the priest mounted the pulpit: what a show to see these holy Joes at last getting a whiff of the stench of their sins!

He made the acquaintance of the most celebrated comrades: Henri Lucas, who had just served two years in prison in Angers; Escartefigue Verite who came from Paris and whose real name nobody knew: Jesus, so called on account of his goatee: Manuel, the printer from the rue Fortia-Geraud, at whose place the paper was produced: then there were Adrien, Pertuis, Francis Guy, Antoine Antignac, Emile Rinaldoin, Eugene Sartoris, Ferdinand Calazel, Emile and Victor Rampal, and Leca. He became one of *L'Agitateur's* greatest stalwarts. Into it he injected a certain view of the world that thereafter conditioned his behaviour.

Throughout Europe, tens of thousands of autonomous groups just like theirs, in a burgeoning of sometimes contradictory ideas, gave unstintingly of their energy for freedom's sake. Everything was ranged against them: the sabre, the murderous brutaliser, the holy water sprinkler, the robber of souls and promiser of paradise in the hereafter in return for the submission of today; the judge, lurking crab-like in his grotto of files, and the cop. The latter was seen most often. Two years before,

the police had arrested the then editor of *L'Agitateur*, Tremoliere, along with ten companions on the pretext of 'theft of dynamite and constituting a criminal conspiracy', after having themselves planted the dynamite under their desks. They had repeated the operation with Tremoliere's successor, Louis Riguier, on a charge of his having made a false statement of residence. His replacement, Edouard Roch, was arrested for breach of the legislation on registration of periodicals. Their narks, their snouts were at work everywhere. On occasions even, these were former comrades who had been induced to spill the beans: like Auguste Marcellin, the latest to have come to light, and who had blandly handed to the anti-anarchist brigade the minutes of the conferences held in Lyons and Turin. And so many others! On the pretext of making a search, the police would terrorise families and smash everything in their homes. On the excuse of press laws or without any pretext at all, they seized newspapers, pamphlets, manifestos, posters and correspondence. Mount a trial? Even when they tried that, two years or five years would elapse before the verdict: plenty of time to go bankrupt. Time for authorities to turn up something else. The well-to-do had rifles, law, the banks, and ple-

nary indulgences for Paradise. That left faith, mental agility, and daring. For every anarchist who fell, ten sprang up to take his place and always they were more hot-headed and staunch in their beliefs than before.

Every day between noon and 2.00 pm, instead of lunch, Alexandre along with Roques would devour the multicoloured propaganda pamphlets, ranging in price from 0.05 to 0.50 francs, left to him by the orphan... pamphlets by Bakunin, Proudhon, Kropotkin, Malatesta, James Guillaume, Louise Michel, Sebastien Faure, Stirner and Elisee Reclus, which they would then regurgitate together as handouts or at meetings.

Gradually, through his reading and the discussions in Pouget's *Le Pere Peinard*, Faure's *Le Libertainaire*, Zo d'Axa's *L'En-Dehors*, or the Natanson brothers' *Revue Blanche*, he came to form a picture of France, a country with which he was less than familiar.

If the government of Meline-pain-cher (Meline dear bread) was to be believed, everything was going just fine, as ever. The workers were happy: since more savings bank accounts were being opened in France and more were betting on the tote. But nobody spoke about the 90,000 people

who died of hunger every year. Nor did anyone go into the degree of frustration one must have felt to stake two franc's worth of miserable dreams of splendour on some nag.

Our trade was thriving. Perhaps science had failed to deliver the golden Age which yesterday's scientists, like Compté, Taine, and Renan had foretold—the stuff of the dreams of poets and philosophers—but at least OUR engineers and OUR scholars were working for the nation's prosperity: 1200 automobiles were on the road: the great race from Paris to Marseilles and back, which had just been fought out between Renault, Panhard-Levasor, Bouton, Peugeot, and Boilee, had set a fantastic record by covering such an enormous distance at an average of 30 kilometres per hour, which is to say, at half the speed of a galloping horse! It is true that whereas the necessary funds were found to build racing cars for the use of the sporty rich, there was never a sou available to boost the wages or build accommodation for the use of those whose hands created the country's wealth.

The bicycle was beginning to live up to its nickname of 'little queen': now, according to the advertising headings, it took only two months of the average wage to pay for one. A tram-line had

just been inaugurated in Marseilles. In Paris, some bold spirits were drawing up plans for an underground railway: the metropolitan line. Across the land, new railways were under construction: restaurant cars and sleeping cars were being put into service. At sea we held the blue ribbon thanks to the Touraine, belonging to the Compagnie Transatlantique, the most luxurious steamship ever built. True, for the sailors, it was still the Middle Ages, with a discipline worthy of feudalism, with no cooperatives, no hostels, no protection of any sort against the employer and his divine right representative, the captain, the rule of the traffickers in human flesh, the slavers with whom Alexandre had had dealings after his desertion: but that was something that was not forced upon the attentions of the readership of *L'Illustration* and *Le Figaro*.

In short, scientific discoveries were undeniably spreading in, so to speak, a natural fashion, and doubtless would bring benefits gradually to an endlessly increasing mass of people. But human happiness was not one of the factors considered in the making of investments. What the financiers had in mind was profits, not the harmony of society. Sometimes their choices turned out to be beneficial, but unwittingly and fortuitously so. If

the bicycle developed for instance, it was primarily because certain people were making more money out of selling more of them, and not primarily because it made the workers happier: and otherwise why wouldn't the bankers have provided the workers with decent housing in the first place? Alexandre had just seen Kropotkin issue a word of caution to the privileged through *L' Agitateur*:

There is a force', he had written, which has turned production upside down for the past half-century. Placed in the service of falsehood, it has produced inequality. Placed in truth's service, it will be called happiness. It is science. It is just too bad for some if today it goes by the name of dynamite!

The telephone was spreading. For the past year there had been talk of Marconi's radiotelegraph, capable of transmitting a message from across the Channel without wires. There was talk of mysterious rays discovered the previous year by the German Roentgen and capable of piercing the heaviest bodies: X Rays. There was talk too, of another radiation emanating from a curious metal called uranium and which had allegedly left an impression on photographic plates. There was even more talk about the death of Pasteur the previous year,

and of how he had “invented” microbes, making it possible, following anthrax and rabies, soon to prepare vaccines against diphtheria, typhoid, plague, and maybe pulmonary tuberculosis. Marvellous discoveries by a genuine altruist on his way to becoming a fabulous businessman, and taking their place on the pharmacy shelves alongside Pink pills, Geraudel pastilles, or Cola Mariani wine. Thanks to all this, the mother in the poorest districts, unable to feed her fifth child, still (and would continue to do so)—resorted for many a day to the knitting needle—condemned by law and by morality and threatened with notoriety and imprisonment for her refusal to give birth to a soldier to be.

It was said that in the finer districts people were even becoming bored, doubtless because they had the time for it. The “toffs” there proclaimed that they were “shattered”, “fagged out” or “dead beat” while playing “lawn tennis” with beautiful young things. As for the inhabitants of the Belle de Mai and Vieux Port districts, they slogged away 12 to 14 hours a day, without holidays, without sickness or accident insurance, without the prospect of retirement—and quite happy to judge by the quaint Sunday game of pet-

anque. But, the bosses mused, aren't those people the happiest of all with their simple pleasures?

In short, any murmur of complaint was always countered by someone... claim that they were fortunate to be living under a Republic, that the deputies, elected by universal suffrage, were the authentic representatives of each and every citizen, that the government was accountable to them for its actions—and that, consequently, if everything was not perfect, they were slowly but surely on the road to greater equity. The deputies were seeing to that.

On this topic Alexandre had one or two furious arguments with his father: these ended with doors being slammed. In fact, between periods, Joseph saw eye to eye with most French people in criticising the regime. But whereas his sneers had turned to fury during a scandal as enormous as the Panama scandal four years before, his recriminations had never been carried any further than the cafe doorstep. Once he had agreed with his cronies, for two hours that 'the more the cabinet shuffles, the more it is the same old story' and that 'the little man was always done down', he would shuffle off home having had his fill of politics, convinced that he had done his civic duty, amazed when all was

said and done, by the liberality of this easygoing Republique which let you vent your spleen without coming on you like a ton of bricks.

Joseph was a moaner, but a resigned one, with political theories of negligible interest, subtly influenced by newspapers with huge circulation but small professional conscience, incapable of seeing clearly for himself, the fodder of demagogues of every hue, overwhelmed by the problems of survival but not of living, sensitive to the fine promises, chauvinistic, confident of having blazed a trail for democracy worldwide, and that despite the slaughter of the Communards; in him Alexandre discerned the perfect prototype of Monsieur Prudhomme, the average Frenchman. He was Darien's La Belle France... soft, vain, jingoistic, self-centred—and led by the nose.

1897. By now Alexandre was 18 years old. Twenty six years had gone by since the German occupation of 1871 when the Parisian workers had shown a will to resist the invader whereas the bourgeois, having fled to Versailles, seized the occasion to decimate these irritants with the assistance of the occupiers. Following the resignation of General Trochu—past participle of the verb *Trop Choir* (To Let Down too Much), as Victor Hugo quipped—

they had slaughtered 35,000 Communards, including all the leaders, all the hopes of socialism and this had enabled them quietly to seize power under Monsieur Thiers on the back of the Fourth Estate. They had had the people pay off the reparations awarded to the Prussians under the Treaty of Frankfurt, but in the space of a few months had increased their business ten times over. Without affording one extra sou to the workers.

Inside the army these collaborationists had even set up a screening committee, to purge it of those officers in whom the spirit of popular resistance was a touch too strong. Now they were making up for their recent cowardice by urging forward some revanchist blusters. Alsace and Lorraine would be snatched back. National greatness. Not one gaiter button... Etcetera. As for those who could see the hypocrisy of all this, they were accused of the ultimate offence: an offence against the flag. They were excommunicated when they could manage it—which is to say they were banished to Noumea or to Cayenne—for anti-patriotism.

Disappointed, famished, manipulated, emasculated, deprived of their finest, those who had lived through 1871 slipped into resignation. They

were afraid: afraid of themselves, afraid of repression, afraid of their own shadows. At least, Alexandre, who belonged to the first generations not to have known war, concluded that they were thus.

The most cynical—or most honest—politicians made no secret of the fact that the ‘colonial age’ had come at just the right time to supply an excellent bypass down which to direct somewhat reckless youthful energies. Not only would African and Asian conquests open up new markets, thereby creating new sources of profit, but they would also make it possible to throw troublemakers into the firing line.

On this topic, Alexandre could not resist speaking of what had scandalised him overseas during his five years at sea, in the likes of Panama, Tunisia, Tonkin, the Sudan (where, at the orders of Colonel du Trentinian, the Tuaregs had been “pacified”); in the Ivory Coast, where the blacks suffered the same fate at the hands of Commandant Cordelier and Captain Marchand: in Dahomey, which had been invaded as far as the Niger: in Upper Ubangi, where Victor Liotard was carrying out extermination drives from the Congo across to the Nile: in Guinea, in Senegal, in Madagascar especially, where 6,000 peasants’ and workers’

children had just died of dysentery for the greater glory of a once revolutionary flag in the folds of which lurked racketeers. The unfortunate troops, rather than see their own throats cut, had had to slaughter tens of thousands of Hovas: they had forced Queen Ranavalona to submit: with each passing day they carved out new empires for the bourgeois. Oh, the tasks were of course shared! To the workers' lot fell the mud and the massacres; to the titled officers, the useless young sons of great families, the glory: to the bourgeois, the profit. But the workers would wake up to it in the end! One had only to open their eyes!

Alexandre, Roques, and all the comrades from the Egaux de Blanc-Sceau of Roubaix to the Compains from Longues Haies, not forgetting the Parisian activists of *La Revolte* or *Le Libertaine*, beavered away at it day and night in cities large and small.

1897. The Marxists, still referred to as authoritarian socialists because, until such time as the classless society arrived, they regarded as inevitable a period of dictatorship of the proletariat, a temporary arrangement but one needed, they argued, to stamp out the last remaining vestiges of capitalism, entered the lists of political activity:

hence the contempt in which Alexandre and his friends held them. They got themselves elected to parliament in so-called red wards on the basis of faith in what often were respectable programmes but programmes that they showed themselves incapable of putting into effect. Since the 1893 elections their number has grown to 45 in the Chamber—quite an advance compared with the 12 in the preceding legislature—but a tiny minority in the context of the 445 “aquarium crumb gobblers” as the parliamentary deputies are known.

Aside from a handful of persons wistful for Bonapartism or the monarchy, overwhelmed since the MacMahon venture—these 445 are distinguished one from another by subtle nuances, ranging from the candy pink of the “government republicans” to the bright red of the “socialist radicals”, via the moderate radicals styling themselves the “progressive left”. At *L'Agitateur* only one explanation is offered for their conduct: universal suffrage is no obstacle to their doing deals and the Republic is much less of an inconvenience to them than a dictatorship—a regime replete with drawbacks, one to which they would only resort in circumstances of extreme urgency, in order to uphold in the people “due respect for the law”.

Through splashing around in the aquarium, most of the “government socialists” have wound up contaminated. The lawyer Alexandre Millerand, managing editor of *La Petite République* delivered a resounding speech just last May at a banquet in Saint-Mande. He aims progressively to substitute social ownership for “capitalist ownership”, which is to say to nationalise businesses—but slowly, and with due regard for vested interests. He accepts “the workers’ International”—provided, however, that we remain patriots above all else. Since that “something to suit everybody speech”, he has been looked upon in political circles as a “realist”—a “man of the future”. A brilliant career is forecast for him—and he will have one. The workers shout him down. At *L’Agitateur* he is considered a turncoat.

Jules Guesde on the other hand has kept the faith. But he too is desirous above all else of getting control of the government. And that by means of “parliamentary action, which is the socialist principle par excellence”: he has just proclaimed it from the hilltops three months after Millerand’s speech, in August 1896. In no particular did Alexandre see eye to eye with this strategy. Sure, they shared with the Marxists the goal of achieving a society without exploiters or exploited, without executioners

or victims. Sure, in France, a capitalist country like the rest of Europe, there was in progress a sometimes bloody but at all times oppressive class struggle. But take control of the government? No. "The State is Evil", Bakunin said. Injustice springs inevitably from man's government of man. To set up a dictatorship of the proletariat would be to fall into a worse trap than ever, for the inevitable short term implications of such a setup would be the need for a secret police, press censorship and a dictatorship exercised over minds as well as bodies. The precise opposite of the spread of freedom.

According to Alexandre's cronies, politics is not practised by delegating one's powers for a five year term to some individual whom one is not entitled to replace if one is unhappy with him, which boils down to being a citizen for the one thousand four hundred and sixtieth portion of one's life—1461 in leap years—on the glorious day when one stuffs one's ballot paper into the ballot box: politics is practised, ought to be practised every day in any true democracy. The pamphlets bequeathed to Alexandre by the orphan are at one in their condemnation of universal suffrage.

Louise Michel encapsulates them all in a single phrase:

Your vote is the lowing of an ox scenting the slaughterhouse.

At the end of six months of militant activity, he was so well schooled in such writings that he quoted from them as casually as drawing breathe. They spoke Bakunin like Monsieur Jourdain spoke prose. The daily practice of action had turned the trainee-helmsman into a professional agitator. He had embraced anarchy in its entirety. It afforded him an ideal, a philosophy, a guiding rule. Had he lived at the start of the Christian era, he might perhaps have been one of the followers of Jesus—the only anarchist who pulled it off, some argued. In 1897, he could see no other cause to which to commit himself than anarchy, being as he was possessed by the absolute, having seen only injustice and atrocity in the world and he scented only compromise in a France that was a disappointment to him.

Following hours spent over his type-case at old man Juge's place, he would occasionally stroll down by the docks. He was sometimes seized then by a hankering for the trade winds, and for night watches in the tropics when he was at the helm and the ship was carving a wake through the phosphorescent waters. But he soon came upon

former comrades: they conjured up the past a little: but then they no longer had anything more to say. They were miserable wretches, trundling their defeats through a world of shadows.

With Captain Martinaud maybe... But how would he go about explaining to him that he had discovered a goal in life, a hundred times grander than the command of a ship? How would he explain to him the Stateless, governmentless, Lawless, police-less, judge-less world, basking in harmony, towards which he was presently working? He had tried on the day when he had come across him near the Lazaret docks. He had told him with all fire how the criminal was the product of society's injustice-and how most offences are only committed for gain. Abolish the injustice, captain, and you will do away with the vast majority of crimes! Society looks upon offenders as rebellious slaves in need of punishment; we regard them as sick brothers whom we will make every effort to cure with every means that science may indicate to us. The history of the West today boils down to the history of the conquest of power by a succession of castes. But that is not necessarily the definitive history of the whole of mankind.

You cannot alter the fact that there are wolves

and sheep, gluttons and misers, Martinaud had murmured, startled by so much vehemence.

Alexandre had replied with a diatribe upon the necessity of allowing the creative capacity of the individual to develop.

Martinaud said nothing for a long time but just stared doggedly at the sea. He stated in a sad, almost pained voice:

Take care, Jacob. Utopias are dangerous. In seeking to have everything at one fell swoop, you risk destroying everything.

The conversation had died. They had taken their leave of each other. Every time that Alexandre thought back on the meeting, his fists clenched. Martinaud belonged to the lowest of the low: the liberals. People who have an easy conscience because they think they understand things.

Anarchist ideas were so self-evident! So self-evident that they need only be propagated everywhere and one would have a general uprising to contend with. The only serious problem remained the propaganda issue. How to alert the exploited to the fact that they had only all to break their chains at the same time in order to be free? That question had been asked for the past twenty-odd years.

During the summer of 1897, Charles Malato

arrived in Marseilles in the course of a tour undertaken in an attempt to coordinate the actions of the provincial groups, if that turned out to be feasible. Alexandre was introduced to him on the premises of *L'Agitateur*. He was instantly won over by him. A man of 30 years, with a face that looked as though it had been lit up by the ordeals he had gone through: the adolescent soon came to look upon him as a sort of model. This was the first hero from the anarchist pantheon that he had seen at such close quarters. When Malato expounded upon some idea with that warm, singsong voice of his, everything became crystal clear. They formed a circle around him.

He reviewed the movement's history. Spoke of the inestimable daring and devotion displayed by the militants of an earlier generation—and of their half-failure as well. Without letting himself be put off by the excess of avenging fury in some individuals, he calmly and indefatigably urged them to draw the lessons of the past. Of their own past.

In the wake of the Commune and the disintegration of the International had come helplessness. Wildcat strikes and huge riots had erupted pretty well everywhere, hopelessly and bereft of political awareness—beggars' revolts. Ineffectual

labour congresses had been held in secret: some sensational trials, like the Lyons trial of 1874, had offered an ephemeral platform. Living as refugees around La Chaux-de-Fonds in the Swiss Jura, some comrades had striven to keep the ideal alive. But no one had managed for very long to propagate it in a France where every militant was registered, shadowed and imprisoned, denied any support from a terror-stricken populace.

By 1880 most of the amnestied Communards had come home from penal servitude, promptly to resume the work of agitation where they had left off. Simultaneously, an idea had been thrown up by the Jura's international congresses: since the people were asleep, they needed awakening. Since they were afraid, confidence had to be put back into them by proving to them that the Versaillese could be matched blow for blow. Monsieur Thiers had issued a declaration of war by massacring the Communards: the gauntlet would be picked up. It was at this point that the erstwhile prince Kropotkin, a geographer and explorer of Siberia, more titles than the Romanovs and recently escaped only a few years since from Saint Petersburg's Peter and Paul prison, had issued, through Geneva's *Le Revolte*, his explosive watchword:

Our action should be permanent revolt, by word of mouth, in writing, by dagger, gun, dynamite and sometimes even by the ballot paper when it is a question of voting for the ineligible Blanqui or Trinquet. We are consistent, and we, as rebels, have recourse to every weapon when it is time to strike. Anything other than legality is acceptable to us!

Paul Brousse had reiterated this embrace of political murder in the columns of Geneva's *L'Avant-Garde*.

When the murder of one can prevent the murder of thousands: resolutely when one is able, by, striking down some dull-witted soldier, to ensure the success of a cause by averting anticipated bloody hecatombs.

He had added a repudiation of mindless violence. *It is obvious that we will display the same circumspection and considerably more prudence in the selection of the act to be carried out in order to make political propaganda.*

Alas, such counsels of moderation had not always been taken to heart. The sorcerers' apprentices of La Chauxde-Fonds and the Saint-Imier valley had

opened the sluicegates. Every individual promptly came up with good reasons for hurling his infernal machine. Humiliations had been rebuffed by means of the random use of nitroglycerine, by heroism, by heroics, by vengeance, by despair. There was no longer any way of holding the troops in check nor of controlling the movement.

There had been a rash of violent acts across Europe: in June 1878 Nobiling made his attempt on the life of Kaiser Wilhelm I; in November Pas-sanante attempted the life of the King of Italy; in '83 the L' Assommoir café in Lyons was bombed; Cyvoct, wrongly accused of having planted it, was sentenced to penal servitude for life; in '84, at Montceau-Ies-Mines, the workman Gueslaff, caught red-handed while planting a bomb wounded three gendarmes with his revolver: in January '86, the miners of Decazeville performed a defenestration of the engineer, Watrin: in March, it was Gallo's turn to throw his dynamite into a busy stock exchange and empty a full magazine at the jobbers: on May Day in Chicago there was rioting that was to give rise to the labour holiday and during which Spies, Engel, Parsons, Fischer and Lingg were seized: it was repeated every 1 May thereafter:

in 1890 the town of Vienna had been placed under a state of siege: in '91 troops killed ten demonstrators, two of them children, in Fourmies in the Nord department: in Clichy, mounted gendarmes charge the crowd and beat up Decamps...

'85 saw the return from penal servitude in New Caledonia, where he and his mother had followed his Communard father, of Malato himself.

In all, he had spent 14 years in Noumea-part of his childhood and nearly all of his adolescent years-until his father had expired at the hands of martinet warders.

Growing up like a savage among savages who, he claimed, were more civilised than the Whites, he had learned the Kanak dialects down there. It was he who had taught them to Louise. In return, when Madame Malato passed away, having succumbed to the climate among the wattle and daub huts of the Ducos peninsula, she had been a second mother to him. She had introduced him to poetry, botany, geology, literature, to music on her piano (where every other key was missing) and to anarchy in the school which she had opened for the deportees' children and shortly also for the natives. Even as certain fathers, mixed up with the worst criminals, dragged their ball and double

chain (others such as Henri Rochefort, enjoyed greater freedom) she inspired their offspring with her own wonder at the beauty of things and her own faith in the transformation of mankind.

There was no need for any stockade fortification to pen the convicts on Noumea: the jungle and the Kanaks saw to the devouring of all would-be escapers. But Louise had one day decreed that these primitives had to be good in that they lived close to nature. Whereupon she dragged Malato with her into the heart of the forest: two trusting souls among the cannibals. Back in the colony, they were given up for dead. But Louise was right...

They had come upon a tribe whose chief they won over in just a few hours by gibbering libertarian theories in his own tongue. The chief, soon followed by the whole tribe, had been converted.

You and I are of the same breed, he had said. *You have been defeated like the unfortunate Kanaks when they tried to stand up to the Whites. Yes, the evil always outnumber the good. They always kill and win the day.*

After she had done her best to tend their illnesses and made up her mind to teach them all to read, those political deportees who broke loose from their chain gangs had been welcomed with

open arms by the tribe in question. Other run-aways... "mischief-makers" nonetheless ended their days in the cooking-pot, as in the past: perhaps the libertarian spirit had not quite thoroughly pervaded the place.

In '78 when they had revolted, weary of seeing their females carried off and raped and their finest trees felled, tired of finding themselves driven away from the clearings into the deepest bush, the chief had sought her out again. Almost alone (even among the anarchists) in taking their part, she had made the chief a present of her most prized possession: the red flag which she had brandished in the dying days of the Commune. She had recommended him to cut the Whites' telegraph wires as a matter of urgency. But, the rebels, pitting slings and spears against repeating rifles and mountain artillery had soon been overwhelmed. At least Malato and Louise had had the consolation of knowing that their friend the chief had been mown down in a hail of gunfire, with the historic flag draped about him.

Alexandre, we imagine, was stirred by these tales which brought so many memories flooding back to him. When Malato had arrived in France he had promptly hurled himself into activity,

aghast at the poverty of the suburbs. He had written a novel *La Grande Greve* (The Big Strike) about the Montceau-Ies-Mines affair: he had founded a paper, along with Jean Pausader, alias Jacques Prolo, and some others; *La Revolution Cosmopolite*; he had taken part in the '89 anarchist conference held at the start of September in the Commerce Hall: it was those that on one occasion, in the face of widespread confusion, he had attempted along with Jean Grave and Pouget (Pere Peinard) to centralise information concerning the various European groups in the hope of improving the coordination of their actions. But he had had to renounce this plan; in the name of individualism, each militant aimed to act only according to his own whim. Even at this stage was one going to go on dying for nothing?

In '92 and '93 he had seen the "bloody years" of anarchy from too close quarters not to have misgivings about this. '92 alone had seen 1,123 dynamite outrages throughout Europe. To what end? Had the yearned for insurrection broken out?

In Spain there had been the revolt by the peasants of Jerez, with unspeakable tortures inflicted upon the ringleaders. In France, to avenge Decamps, Ravachol had planted his two bombs, one

at the home of the president of the Assizes, the other at the home of the public prosecution who had had him sentenced to death. Already in his case, Malato had had the depressing impression of watching splendid energy squandered. He had written... 'He was one of those disconcerting personalities who may bequeath to posterity the reputation of a hero or of a bandit, according to the age in which they live and the circumstances in which they operate.' Guillotined.

To avenge Ravachol, Meunier, the carpenter whom he had seen so hard working and sober *with his handsome features and the pure features of a cold-blooded zealot, the most remarkable breed of revolutionary illuminism*, had blown up the Very restaurant. Shipped out to Cayenne.

In Spain, to avenge Jerez, Pallas had hurled a bomb at Marshal Martinez Campos. He had been first tortured and then garrotted. To avenge him, two bombs had been planted in the Liceo theatre in Barcelona: 22 had lost their lives and 50 odd had been injured, a state of siege had been introduced and hundreds of innocent persons mutilated, flayed alive, spiked and burned.

In France, Vaillant, whom he had known in his capacity as secretary of the Independants de

Montmartre, with his “thoughtful features, melting eyes, dreaming of escape”, only to set off to establish a libertarian colony in Argentina’s Gran Chaco, and mortally disappointed in the endeavour, had thrown his bomb, packed with nails, during a sitting of the “aquarium”. He had neither killed nor sought to kill anyone. He had wanted only to utter *the cry of an entire class which demands its rights and which will soon add action to words*. Guillotined.

To be sure, such heroics were not without a certain flair. Certainly, all these acts had led to a closing of anarchist ranks, putting spirit into the more timid souls. Moreover, one only had to open at random in the archives any issue of *L’ Agitateur* of the time. The 1 March 1892 issue for instance:

She has spoken again this week, la belle! The recent attacks have been intelligently directed, the first against the aristocratic millionaire Hotel de la Princesse de Sagan: the second against the apartments inhabited by counsellor Benoit; the third against the Lobau barracks inhabited by the military police. Since, millions of the victims of plunder have felt elated, gripped by mad hopes... If a few gestures are all it takes to strike fear

into the leaders what will it be like when such acts spread like a contagion? And the time is not far off! Tragic times draw near! It was war to the death that the bourgeois declared on us in Fourmies: we will reply to it with war to the death, without quarter or clemency, with all of its ghastliness, all its consequences. Let the responsibility fall on those who declared it!...

In this war of one against a hundred thousand, the advantage lay with the enemy. The terror-stricken bourgeoisie had hastily voted through the *lois scelerates*: an extra 800,000 francs for the police budget; confiscation of newspapers, searches, arrests for a suspect newspaper article, for the merest gesture of propaganda; the charges to be heard by a petty sessions tribunal rather than by an assize jury "for the sake of greater speed"; a ban on the advertising of debates, those found guilty removed promptly to Guyane.

Several militants had doggedly carried on. Emile Henry, unfortunately still convinced of the effectiveness of acts of brutal revolt which ... *arouse the mass, shake them with a whip lash and show them the vulnerable side of the bourgeoisie, all tremble still as the Rebel steps up to the scaffold*, had

thrown his bomb at the Terminus SaintLazare on 12 February 1894. A bloody mistake. That too Malato had lamented:

The action of Emile Henry who is, moreover, a highly intelligent anarchist of great courage, has stricken anarchy above all else. I endorse any violence which takes aim at the obstacle, which strikes at the enemy, but not that which strikes out blindly.

The dagger-blow delivered by Caserio on the following 24 June against President Sadi Carnot whom anarchists had sentenced to death for his failure to reprieve Henry did not bring him any greater satisfaction. Today he did not feel that he was close to changing his mind.

However the *lois scelerates* had forced him into exile in England along with the likes of good old Louise, Kropotkin, and Malatesta. Over there they had met up with Italian, Russian, and German militants and joined with them in founding a paper, *L'Avant-Garde*, thanks to which they had been able to stand back and take stock of “propaganda by the deed”. The balance was a negative one. Sure, the exploiters had been made to shake in their boots. But they had regained their self-possession, and tightened the screw a turn. As for the work-

ing class, maybe in time they would discover that the explosions had roused them from their slumbers. Meanwhile, they had quite simply fought shy of the anarchists. The bombs had made them the pawns of the “government socialists”.

Consequently, how could one persist with the amusement of hurling sardine cans filled with green powder at inoffensive monuments to the dead? Sinister jokes indeed when the point was to do all in one’s power to win back one’s audience among the populace. A humble, thankless, subterranean striving, the only currently efficacious endeavour, was vitally necessary today instead.

‘To do everything to lure the toiling masses away from the self-styled socialists who today make use of the people in order to carve out a niche for themselves and who, as the masters of tomorrow, would harness the people with an even more burdensome yoke than that of the bourgeoisie...

To play an active part in strikes as in every labour agitation, constantly to refuse to accept any starring role.

When, in spite of everything, some comrades may wish to engage in individual acts, it is vital that those acts be such that the masses

may readily understand them as the handiwork of people who struggle and sacrifice themselves for the good of all.

To tell the truth, but for the personal prestige he enjoyed, many of the militants around *L' Agitateur* would not have embraced ideas so hard to swallow. They would have walked out, slamming the door behind them-or, rather, they would have thrown him out for a police infiltrator. What! Were they to fold their arms precisely when they were most dogged, spied upon and persecuted? Give up the fight? Turn the other cheek? Very possibly on the threshold of success?

So once again Malato launched into his argument, mixing into it the personal anecdotes, likely to sweeten all their minds. Fascinated, Alexandre listened to him until sunrise sometimes, remaining alone with him so as to learn more, pressing him with endless questions and leaving him only to scurry off to Juge's work to resume his employment.

These attacks on the immoderate use of bombs did not prevent Malato from dragging his young disciple and some other comrades along many an evening to the cramped attic which he had rented and converted into a chemistry laboratory. For a

refusal to take pointless risks today did not preclude one's preparing for the 'Great Day' when the general uprising would come—an uprising that everyone hoped was imminent—indeed, quite the contrary. The bourgeois had cannons and rifles. The revolutionaries did not. They had to make good the deficit with imagination; to instruct themselves, starting right now, in the manufacture of nitrobenzene, of bitrobenzene and of priming fuses and possibly to build up stocks.

I will teach you to make bombs, he would grin at them, but on condition that you do not use them. Not right away.

Naturally, Alexandre's hot-blooded adolescence was intoxicated by acids, powders, retorts, and pots. One evening in a supreme act of trust Malato lent him what he called his "cookery book", a red-backed notebook containing complete recipes for blowing the whole earth asunder. Alexandre took it home with him. Exultantly he read through the preface, intoxicating in its romanticism, and the conclusion, which was apocalyptic:

One important task will be to level all buildings of symbolic oppression. No remnant of the past is to be spared. Let all monuments which might serve as rallying points for any

authority be levelled pitilessly and without remorse... Blow up the churches, the convents, the barracks, the prisons, the prefectures and town halls... Burn all the administrative paper mountains wherever they may be. Put a torch to the title-deeds! Put a torch to the great register of the public debt! Burn the registrar-general's records, recruitment papers, army quartermaster's papers, direct and indirect tax records! Burn these diseased pages, the title-deeds of human enslavement, defended by thousands of soldiers and policemen of every sort. Notre Dame and the ancient Gothic cathedrals where our forefathers gave of their souls and their very life are masterpieces... But as long as they remain standing, human conscience will not be able to rid itself of the prejudices of which it is the petrified expression... Being unable to place them under glass in the museums, the best course is still to destroy them despite the clamours against revolutionary vandalism, and despite the curses of archaeologists to be.

What matter the naivety of such lyricism: the recipes held good.

Shortly after his reading them, Alexandre had a discussion with Roques in the Flory bar apropos of the strategic points which, they felt, would need to be blown up come the famous Great Day. Apparently intrigued, a comrade by the name of Leca joined them. The two colleagues were unaware that, under police pressure, Leca in turn had become a police informant. Carried away by his enthusiasm, Alexandre intimated that he was taking it upon himself alone to level all of Marseille's monuments. For good measure, Leca, purporting to believe that he was being tailed, slipped to Alexandre, under the table, a small package containing what crushed carbon, sulphur and saltpetre were needed to make one pound of explosive powder. He would retrieve it in a few days, once the surveillance on him had been relaxed.

At daybreak the next day, a squad of inspectors, armed to the teeth and brandishing a search warrant, forced the door of the little Vieux-Port house where Alexandre was living. Pushing past Marie and Joseph, still bleary-eyed with sleep, they dashed into the room. 'They rifled everything: they trampled, overturned and thundered; only to discover finally, between Jules Verne, Victor Hugo and Kropotkin, the famous red notebook and the

package, which was still tied up with its string. Whereupon they put the cuffs on Alexandre and dragged him off to the station.

Questioning revealed nothing, except that Monsieur Jacob loudly proclaimed himself an anarchist. So they offered him an alternative: either he “turned in his gang” or they would jug him for manufacture and possession of explosives. He was frothing with rage. His curses threatened to make things worse for him. The dogged silence which ensued carried him all the way to the Chave prison.

Worried by Alexandre’s failure to show up, Roques raced out that morning to ask after him. He returned ‘with tears in his eyes’ according to what he himself said. Monsieur Juge then scurried in person to the police station. He did everything and said everything he could do and say on his employee’s behalf. His pleas were of no avail. They needed to make examples and Alexandre was the victim of that.

Marie called up the services of the whole town. Through a customer, she even managed to reach Vulliez, the public prosecutor. Vulliez, full of goodwill, paid the arrested man a visit in his cell. With an indulgent smile he heard out the young man’s story.

Then he concluded:

Had you carried out a robbery, at your age it wouldn't be too serious. But you are an anarchist, my young friend, and that... !

At the assizes, Alexandre's lawyer, Maitre Pianello strove in vain to plead ignorance and claim his client was chastened but failed to secure a reprieve. As for Leca, he was never sighted again in Marseilles.

On 9 June 1890 you were sentenced to six years by the Varassizes in your absence.

How should I know if I wasn't there?

You appealed against this sentence and in the meantime were placed in the Aix asylum for observation, the incoherence of your language and your actions having raised suspicions that you were unbalanced. Instead you were only shamming, acting out a charade the more easily to attempt an escape.

Everyone defends himself how he can.

In short, you admit the facts?

Sure. I know what I am doing. I am not attempting to shirk any blame.

The jurors complained that they could hear only snatches of what was being said and the accused was interrupted and asked to draw nearer. Handcuffed to his gendarme, Jacob had difficulty in getting out of his seat.

It's a disgrace to be treated thus in a Republic, in so-called progressive times, he grunted.

Having made his way laboriously to the bar, he continued,

I openly acknowledge responsibility for my actions. I am not the sort to repent. Moreover, one can repent only if properly mischievous acts. I am

honestly convinced and believe in all conscience that I acted well. What I did, I did with every justification. The proletariat is no longer liable to enslavement, but to taxation, yes. No longer are the masses content merely to eat: now they want to think. And because they think, castes must be destroyed. I have opted for theft as a weapon. Since reaching the age of reason, I have discovered who my enemies are: the well-to-do, the property owners, the industrialists, the military and the clergy. Which is to say all of you who would pass judgment on me.

By the time he emerged from Chave prison in April 1898, he had matured. In the secret world of cells, in the course of protracted conversations with the libertarians who abounded there, he had learnt a lot and a lot had passed through his mind. So much so that had he not been a rebel before his sojourn behind bars, he would have become one then.

After embracing his mother who greeted him with the fire and enthusiasm reserved for the victims of miscarried justice and for martyrs, he went back to luge's. With eyes more tear-filled than ever, the employer welcomed him with a hangdog man-

ner. Some inspectors had been to question him about his employees. And grilled him like some lawbreaker. They had threatened to make trouble for him: in short, despite all the affection he felt for him, he had had to let Roques go. Taking Alexandre on again was out of the question. Ah, damn it, he was very sorry about it. What his employees did outside their working hours did not concern him. But one had to put oneself in his shoes! Fear made him a pathetic sight. Saying not one word, Alexandre accepted the glowing reference handed him by way of apology. Then set off to seek out his comrades.

In the Flory bar he came across Roques seated at a table with a group of strangers who made much of Alexandre as soon as they heard his name: he had “done time” for the Cause. Now he was in the know!

These newcomers were Parisians, almost the entire editorial staff of *Le Libertaire*. Intrigued by enthusiastic letters from Malato who, while complaining of the fact that he had been faced with some problems following Alexandre’s “incident”, had meantime opted to leave on a trip, they had journeyed down to settle in Marseilles. The *L’Agitateur* group, whose paper had petered out shortly

before, amalgamated with them. Sebastien Faure, presently on a lecture tour, was expected. From the outset solid friendships were struck up. A breath of fresh air after his time inside. Present were Ernest Girault, Henri Dhorr, Prost, and 'Imanus'.

And, above all, Louis Matha, the man who had taken over from Sebastien Faure in charge of *Le Libertaire* when he was away, a low-set, stocky fellow with an angular beard, a one-time hairdresser dressed with painstaking affectation. A Gascon, from Casteljaloux.

The initial contact did not go beyond politeness: Matha seemed a cold fish, distant and deliberately close-mouthed. One had to penetrate a whole breastwork of modesty and shyness in order to reach him. Only then was the effort rewarded.

Alexandre was already aware of Matha as manager, along with Zo d'Axa, of *L' En-Dehors*. Of his having been sentenced to a two year term of imprisonment in 1893, for an article which had had the misfortune to displease the government. Of his having fled to London. And of his hasty return in early February 1 894 when he had learned of Emile Henry's having thrown his bomb. The way in which he had followed Henry everywhere, beseeching him in the name of the Cause, to forego

that act. But, with nerves shattered and all hope gone, Henry had dismissed him out of hand.

He was very shortly to learn of the sequel to that obscure episode from the lips of the manager of *Le Liberaire* himself. Immediately Matha had learned of the sinister news and the horror of the 20 wounded, he had forgotten his disagreement with the act and attempted to do his friend one last good turn. With Millet and Ortiz (the fin de siecle dandy-housebreaker with the impeccable parting in his wavy hair) in tow, he had raced to the unfortunate hero's home in the rue des Envierges, in order to spirit away any trace of explosives before the police would arrive. Since Henry had proudly admitted what he had done, having planned it deliberately he said, as a way of striking a blow at *that pretentious and thoughtless mass of 300 or 500 franc a month white-collar workers, more reactionary than their bourgeois masters*, Matha's expedition had proved futile. On the other hand, the "Surete" had got wind of him through informers unknown.

They had promptly tried to implicate him in the bombing of the Foyot restaurant in which Laurent Tailhade had lost an ear. They had arrested him repeatedly. In the end, for lack of evidence, they had had to make do with having him appear

at the "trial of the Thirty". The double-dealing Bulot, the implacable prosecutor of Decamp and Ravachol, had targeted him. And then had had to set him free along with the rest.

Matha was the very opposite of Mala too: a perfectly lubricated precision-instrument which was on the go day and night, imperturbable, without any apparent strain, even if one always had the impression that he looked lazy. In reality, Alexandre was drawn by him into a real maelstrom.

The elections were imminent. Every effort had to be made to capitalise upon the excitement which these inspired in people, so as to hold the "charade" up to ridicule. Just one watchword: sabotage.

Almost as soon as he had been found a place in a printshop by Roques, one in which Roques too had found work, Alexandre committed himself wholeheartedly. From La Belle du Mai to Mèpentri and from La Madrague to La Croix-Rouge, he roved the city and its suburbs, popping up right in the middle of election rallies, whether by radicals, socialists, or Catholics, haranguing, heckling, working himself up into fever pitch, sneering. On occasion he came to blows with the apaches whose services as stewards the good gentlemen had taken care to hire. Elsewhere he had merely

to chat with the workers and peasants. Wherever he was the first to arrive.

His greatest success was in La Ciotat on the very polling day when Antide Boyer took on the socialist Eugene Rostand against whom Alexandre had borne something of a grudge ever since Rostand's supporters had given him a kicking in his earliest days as an anarchist. Followed by three comrades, he burst like a whirlwind into the polling-hall only minutes before the polls were due to close, slipped an incendiary device³ into the box and beat a retreat before the gendarmes on duty there had had time to react. There was tremendous rejoicing in the Flory bar when it was learned that the poll had had to be declared annulled.

After a few undertakings in this vein, he earned considerable prestige among the comrades. He had gained in self-assurance. Although he was

3 For whoever might be interested, the recipe found in the *Balai Social* issue No2: take a big pin head sized bit of phosphorus (also called stick of phosphorus that one might find in almost every drugstore or dye shops) and fold it inside a ballot paper, making sure it is not air tight, as a stick of phosphorus will only be flammable in open air and at twenty degrees celsius; but wrapped up in any piece of paper, after a length of time, it will inevitably burst into flames and burn all the ass-wipes in the ballot box into which one would have left this new kind of ballot paper.

the youngest, they heeded him, obeyed him, and sought his advice. No meeting was ever started until he had arrived. He had become a leader.

But he spent the bulk of his days at work and was always somewhat serious in his approach. It never occurred to him to do otherwise. It never had. It was the police who made the decision for him.

Scarcely one month after his release from jail, four policemen had turned up at the Jacob household, brandishing a search warrant. One word of objection from him, and they were ready to haul him away again and he knew it. So he looked on without opening his mouth as they ransacked his mother's wardrobes. By the time they left, it looked as if a horde of Huns had passed through. Joseph, as he did after one of his binges, spent a long time slouched on a chair in the kitchen, meditating upon the mayhem all about him.

A frantic Marie was scuttling between one ransacked room and another.

Something must be done! She moaned between stifled sobbing. *This cannot be! They have no right! This is a Republic!*

Only Alexandre seemed to have retained his sang-froid. A fortnight later the ransacking was repeated.

And a fortnight after that. And so on, on a regular basis, every fortnight.

The neighbours, at first moved to pity by the plight of Madame Jacob, then began to shun the shop on the basis that there is no smoke without a fire. Some, like Rolande and her father, the post-office clerk, being especially jealous of their good name even avoided saying hello to her. Others made snide innuendos or asked after him with hypocritically wounding remarks. Marie let fly at this pack of dogs. She was carried away with anger, deliberately sometimes. Nerves on edge, she could not bear comments being passed on her son. She hurled a box of chickpeas into the face of her dearest friend. Head held high she strode along the street, braving the tittle-tattle, and following with her most radiant smile and in a provocative manner any who altered course so as to bypass her, forcing them to shake hands with her.

Not for a moment did she ever query whether the surveillance to which Alexandre was being subjected was justified or not. He had explained the import of his activities to her. Had given her his version of the facts. That was sufficient for her. He was no liar. He was well-meaning. It was up to her to play her part in the ordeals he was

undergoing. At the start, she had failed to understand his fits of rage and the violence of some of his aims. Now, in view of the widespread baseness which she saw about her, she herself had the same feelings. Her revolt did not spring from any deep convictions, but from the unbearable revelation that the very ones for whom Alexandre and his friends were working so hard were the first to persecute them. The upshot was the same... to wit, rebellion.

Joseph, watching his wife turn into a revolutionary, did not dare say anything: which was doubtless the wisest policy.

During the police's fifth visit, Alexandre at last spoke up:

And you reckon this will make me renounce my beliefs? he asked as calmly as possible.

He was advised to refer to the station. Which he did. The implications of what was said were very clear. The inspector was only doing this to protect Jacob from himself. To induce him to stay on the straight and narrow. In short, for Jacob's own good. Anarchists who proclaimed themselves the enemies of society ought not to have been surprised to find society defending itself against them how it could.

Alexandre pointed out that his parents were blameless in an episode in which they were among the chief victims. At which the inspector seemed to reflect.

There might be a way he said, *Make honourable amends. Write to the prefect. Then we shall see what we will be able to do in response to whatever tokens of good will you may have offered.*

Such as?

Interpret that how you like, the man answered coldly.

Come on. A little common sense! An intelligent lad like yourself won't want his life ruined with such folk at your age! Work for us! Nobody need ever know a thing...

Alexandre flew into a rage.

The other one stopped him abruptly.

I could have you taken away for insulting behaviour if you prefer.

The exchange was at an end.

The following week, having set off for work at 8.00 am, as usual, Alexandre spotted his employer awaiting him on the threshold.

Inspector Fabre sought me out a short time ago, the printer began.

With a measure of sadistic curiosity to see

how the man's courage would hold up, Alexandre allowed him to ramble on. His speech concluded with the offer of a 50-franc note and some accompanying sweet-talk.

And so, aged 19, he again found himself without work and with little likelihood of finding any, most likely spied upon by people who had succumbed to blackmail by Fabre, hounded by the police, his parents systematically ruined and pointed to in the district, annoyed, an ex-con who would surely be starving before too long (where was he to get the money to live on?)... all because he had imagined that he might with impunity ventilate his criticism of society's injustice. He had neither killed nor stolen nor hurled bombs. He had sent some polling boxes up in flames, but nobody knew that. The only crime with which he might be charged was the crime of wanting to free men of the very tyranny which he was being subjected to.

Cheeks flushed, he tramped the streets of Marseilles, pounding the pavements in his anger, thirsting for revenge, desperate. Laden with debts, Marie had but one course left to follow: to seek out what she referred to as 'the monkey', the pawnbroker who had, for a derisory sum, bought from her the titles to everything that she had mortgaged al-

ready to the Credit Municipal, which is to say all that she possessed⁴. Unless she could pay off the interest due (about 60% of the total sum) within one year, she and Joseph would find themselves back on the pavement with nothing. Like tramps.

The oddest notions came to him as he tramped the streets. One above all: the simplest and most seductive one... that he get hold of a couple of revolvers (simplicity itself since these were on open sale) and on that final day when he had tried everything but to no avail, whenever they had come to empty the house, carry out the furniture and vacate the shop, he would go back to the police station, ask to see Fabre, fill him full of lead and gaze on his startled expression, not without first having blithely explained to him how Fabre himself had

4 Back in the days, pawnbrokers used to make good business, protected by the article 411 of the *Code Penal*, which declares any unauthorised person establishing or running a pawnshop to be sentenced to prison and fined. Any miserable wretch unable to bring back onto an even keel with the Credit Municipal loans would go to them. The brokers would then lend him a few more farthings in exchange for the full ownership of his goods, in case he would not be able to give back the money on time: which happened nine times out of ten. Then all they had to do was to sell all the goods with a substantial benefit. This profession was prohibited shortly before the war began in 1914.

armed the hand which was killing him. Then he would sell his life dear.

It is a sorry thing; he said out loud, pushing his way through the throng, a sorry thing to be 19 when life might be so beautiful.

With a few words he put Marie in the picture. She burst out crying.

Would you rather see me go to Fabre and accept his proposition? he asked.

She thought for a moment, unsure what to reply, unsure which words to use. Then she unburdened herself.

If she strode like a wild beast through the streets, it was because she was proud of him. Dignity was all they had left. There was no need to besmirch it. She had a higher regard for him on account of what he had done than for that other lad Brun who had gone to the Poly technique and become a general. How they would come out of it all she did not know. But they would come through with heads held high. If begging were necessary, she would have begged and so would his father, who was not in the know. Events had opened her eyes. She had been loath to believe the world contained so much wickedness. And she had been wrong. Now she had never achieved

much... but he just had to succeed. And she did not mean social success, as he well knew. If tomorrow he would make the revolution with his comrades, she would have gone to the barricades beside him and would have passed rifles to them. And if he would not go, she would have gone alone.

She collapsed, sobbing into his arms, overcome by a nervous breakdown. Alexandre had to calm her. She wanted to take a drum of petrol and set the district ablaze. She wanted to seek out her son's comrades to organise an uprising, seize the town hall, the prefect's office, the tax offices, the pawn shops, the gendarmerie post and raze it all to the ground. He wore himself out explaining to her that things were not that simple.

However, he did not abandon his idea. Roques obtained the revolvers for him. He felt for them beneath his clothing every time he crossed paths with municipal police. Then he arrogantly used to cut across them, hoping to be challenged so as to get the chance to open fire. He was obsessed with visions of catastrophe. Ready for anything.

Matha did his best to calm him:

Be careful in what you do, he told him. You're more use to us alive than dead. What your intentions are I don't know and I don't

wish to know. But spare a thought for the consequences. Remember Emile Henry.

The comment was a sensible one. He would have liked to be able to heed it. But was not in a position to. He was seething with rage. And fine talks would not cure that.

It was at this point that the girl in the veil reappeared one evening in the backroom of the Brasserie du Midi at the end of the meeting, just as they were dispersing. Pale, face-drawn as if exhausted, whenever she made straight for them exclamations escaped from their throats.

Her name was Rose. They all knew her. After his having searched high and low for her in Marseilles! She had also been Clarenson's girl—Clarenson, the comrade who was now serving three years for theft in Chave prison, where Alexandre had run across him.

She recognised him immediately.
You're the one who took a knock on the head from a stool meant for me, in the Brasserie de Noailles! she burst out.

He blushed and stammered something banal. She walked over to sit close by him. How long had he been active? How come they had never run across one another before? The others drifted

off one by one without their noticing, until they found themselves alone.

Alexandre spilled out his fury. He talked about his death wish and the sense of powerlessness by which he was beset, and his aversion from the whole conspiracy of self satisfied, smug, bloated, selfish, prattling; shrewd, subtle, and hypocritical mediocrities: on and on he ranted.

Do nothing, she murmured. *You do not have the right to throw yourself into the wolf's jaws.*

Then they talked of Clarenson, whose nickname was The Baron on account of the fastidiousness of his dress and his speech, due to undue familiarity with the casinos. Alexandre had shared a cell with him for two weeks. He remembered from then a queer fish, courageous but consumed by vice, rebellious but only out of an urge to rise in society, sometime incoherent but Machiavellian in his guile: anarchic, to be sure, but hardly a revolutionary. And this was the very Rose whom Clarenson had accused of ruining his life.

He walked her home to a squalid furnished room in an old building near the docks and obtained her permission to see her again the next day. She intrigued him. She was the very first woman that... But not for anything in the world would he

have admitted as much to her. His libertarian theories, exacerbated by his Latin temperament made him clumsy in the seducer's role.

He conducted his siege like a general of note. A softly-softly bombardment of appointments and seemingly casual encounters. Entrenched in cafes, a whole network of trenches and counter-trenches, a whirl of chats, passions; hopes and complicity. The final assault was launched. He wormed his way into her room (a hovel more than a room) and took her in his arms.

His ardour disturbed her, but he was afraid of her too. She had been through too much not to be afraid of further suffering.

Resolutely, she broke free of his embrace, doing violence to herself rather than to him. He wanted too much and all at once... body, heart, and spirit. He did not even know who she was. What if he were to despise her once he found out?..

Once he found out what?

Then, in a slightly rasping voice, half-reclining beside him on the bed, the only place to sit in the room, she told him her story, as commonplace as any 50 centimes penny dreadful.

Her mother had abandoned her and her sister Jeanne. The sisters had reared them with blows at

the Girls' Reformatory. At the age of 15, she had been sent out to work as a chambermaid. Being pretty, she was harassed in the aisles by the sweaty-handed employers. And very often by the sons of pimply-faced and empty-headed bigwigs. That was not to her liking. She aimed to keep herself pure for Love. They dismissed her. The sisters punished her. And so it went until she came of age.

Two years after that, she remembered, she had been working near Carcassone, in the rue Condorcet and had fallen for a fellow who had promised her the sun and the stars. An anarchist. A gambler, more than anything else. Clarenson. With him, she had been happy for a time. While he was on a winning streak, they lived high. The next day the cupboards were bare. It had had the better of him. He would have sold his mother to get a stake to risk at the tables. He had begun to do a spot of house-breaking, along with Bonnefoy who followed him everywhere. They had pulled some big jobs. Twice they had had to open fire on police. In the end, Clarenson had been captured. In 1891, before she had met him, they had wanted to give him three years in Bordeaux. He had been removed from the prison to an asylum. He was not really mad, but nor was he normal, she recalled now. Highly iras-

cible. Given to losing his self-control. Used to roll on the ground, with terrifying headaches when he was sick. Especially in the left temple. Sometimes she had only to touch him—barely to brush against him for him to start screaming. Then he calmed down. He was hysterical, the doctors said. His father had been epileptic.

In '94, five years before, he had been sentenced to another three years, in Aix this time. No longer could he be held in prison. The doctors had committed him to the Saint-Pierre asylum in Marseilles. During this time she had found herself penniless. To begin with, her sister had helped her out a little. Then she had gone looking for work. With no educational qualifications she had had to take what she could get. Two jobs, three jobs, then nothing. The street. The pavement. She had lived like that for six months. Had not even earned that much. She had been ashamed. Frightened. Ran away when men approached. The “working girls” treated her as an amateur. They despised her. When Clarenson got out the following year they had stayed together. But he had become a tyrant. With weasel words he had urged her back on to the streets. She felt contempt for him because of his failure to beat the gambling bug. So, when he had been arrested four

months later she had walked out on him. And been taken on again as a chambermaid. But, upon discovering her past, her employer had shown her the door without even paying her what she was owed. This had happened a fortnight ago. The other day, when she had dropped into the Brasserie du Midi, it had been her intention to borrow some money of someone... Bonnefoy, say. But Bonnefoy was not there... And then the two of them had got to chatting. Now, how was she to make ends meet unless she was to go back to that life?

Alexandre had desired her from that first day in the Brasserie de Noailles. Just then, she was the dearest thing in all the world to him. He had imagined her a queen in exile: she was a whore. Nobler than any duchess, than all their respectable virgins and beauties. Pure, despite her social degradation. Persecuted like him, and a rebel like him. Doubtless, an honest girl, she was equally pleased with him. But the intensity was not the same. She had had to pass through an ordeal which he had been spared.

The injustice aroused an urge to protect her. He swore to her that she would not have to sell her body again. He would see to everything. He would find money. Would make her happy. She

smiled indulgently at the naivety of this 20 year old who believed he could change the world with an oath. He was open: she had the scruples and inhibitions of a bourgeois. She was tainted by caste prejudices: he had an open mind. She was ashamed of what she had done. He would have taught her to walk tall.

The workman prostitutes his own arms to the employer. The seamstress prostitutes her eyes to the needle, for a miserable wage. All prostitution is much of a muchness. Only bourgeois morality, which deemed the sexual act sinful, drew any distinctions. Christ himself had loved and respected Mary Magdalen. Priests generally preferred to forget that chapter in the life of their chosen paradigm. It upset bishops and gave them indigestion beneath their silken robes, their gold, and their jewels, to think of the possibility of their God's having loved a fallen woman! But that was in fact the only edifying episode of their parasite religion.

Ah, proper morality! Love one another only within the sacred bonds of matrimony! A sacrament of the traders in the Temple! Virginity as an asset to be traded for social status: a vulgar contract of sale! That was the real prostitution, ugly, hypocritical, insidious, and sordid! Respectable girls

bartered their body against a name, a coach, some clothes, a castle: they called that love, those high society types! True love, into which they retreated in order to deceive their own husbands, (that ignoble word) in order to commit adultery (an ever more squalid one!). Alexandre was fighting to demolish all this and to restore things to their former beauty. If Rose failed to believe and doubted him, if she failed to trust him in everything, on everything, then it meant that he had been mistaken about her. She was nothing but one of the vanquished. He was ready to pick up his hat and be off.

She clung to him. And let herself go. She became his lover and from that moment on he became her man. Whereas his fate had not yet altered anything, she had allowed him to open up a little glimmer of hope in her life as a girl resigned to her fate.

Alexandre was absolutely sincere in what he was saying: the remainder of his life was to be enough to prove that. Rose had been driven to prostitution only occasionally. Her true trade was misery. Before incurring any blame, she had been a victim. It was this which entitled her to Alexandre's consideration. He found her beautiful, she pleased him, he believed in the worthiness of free

love: what could be more natural than that he should take her as his companion?

We should add that undoubtedly no other woman would have been so devoted, nor so well qualified to assist him in the perilous battle which he had joined. He loved her: of that there was no doubt. But above all he loved, through her, a certain view of the world. For her, the opposite was the case: she was to be enamoured primarily of the man and then, through him, of anarchy. Judges, unless they are also poets, are not wont to interest themselves in such details, however: they simply wrinkle up their noses at the mention of such illicit love between a thief and a disagreeable woman ten years his senior.

A few days later, Alexandre informed his mother that he would no longer be sleeping at home. The alleged reason was that, in this way, inspector Fabri might call off the searches. But he still smelled of Rose's perfume. As Marie pointed out to him. Whereupon he told all.

Some lingering residue of Catholicism in her made her a little scandalised by this biblical union. But he pointed out to her that there could be no half measures in the embracing of libertarian ideas. If she agreed with him about the rest, she

had to accept this as well. In short, she asked if she might see the object of this quite unexpected passion. Rose displayed her best features, all softness and attention. To Joseph, she was introduced as Alexandre's fiancée. Not that he was taken in. But the old sot was so excited at the fetching figure of his daughter-in-law in anarchism that he forgot his scruples.

Some days afterwards, a comrade found new employment for Alexandre as a pharmacist's assistant. If he applied himself, in three years he might obtain a diploma and become a pharmacist, second class. Seeing this as a way to repay his mother's debts, he set about his researches into new remedies for human suffering. Clutching at straws he immersed himself in pharmacy.

This was a period of intense happiness. His plans for revenge were forgotten. Of his friends, he saw little: he had not the time. Matha had headed back to Paris with his group. Malato, who had come on a week's visit, did not overstay that period: along with Sebastian Faure, Pouget, Octave Mirbeau and so many others, he had committed himself completely to the Dreyfus affair. Publication of *Le Libertaire* and *Le Pere Peinard* had been suspended from the start of that year, to release

them to spend all their time on a new daily paper, *Le Journal du Peuple* which was rabidly pro-Dreyfus. Malato was as busy as could be. The bourgeoisie was displaying an anti-Semitism so despicable that the defence of the wretched captain Dreyfus struck him as a yearned-for opportunity at last to seize upon a real campaign issue. He was preparing this campaign with (for once) some republicans... Alexandre heard all this distractedly.

Only Roques worried him a little. Likewise a victim of inspector Fabre who had had him driven out of his new printworks, Roques had embarked upon individual expropriation. Since they were making life within the law impossible for him, he had decided to step outside the law. He was urging Alexandre to do likewise. Alexandre approved wholeheartedly of what Roques was about: snatching back from the rich what they had stolen from the poor... it was almost their duty. In any case, as a line of behaviour, it was perfectly justified and worthwhile. But just at that time, not without the occasional regret, he preferred to go on Sunday picnics in the country with Rose, pick examples of the flora and press them in his botanical album, after having made love under the sun.

In the evening he would return to his fur-

nished room. She was waiting for him. And had prepared something to eat. The comrades used to come to dinner. They whiled away the time on plans for the future. They put the world to rights. Laid plans for the struggles to come which would make mankind happy.

But this idyllic interlude was short-lived. One morning in 1899, a man entered the pharmacy. He asked to speak to the boss and engaged him in conversation for a few minutes in the back of the shop. Alexandre realised what that meant. He took off the white overalls and set them down on a bench.

You know, if my customers were to learn... the pharmacist told him. You are handling some dangerous substances here.

Two hours after that, Marie joined Rose in her tears. Fabre had come back with his men. They had wrecked everything, as was their wont. In addition, this time an inspector had confiscated her only item of jewellery, an engagement ring, on the grounds that it was too good for the likes of her and that she must have stolen it.

Alexandre listened without batting an eyelid. Then there was the beginning of a strange smile. *Very well, he said, now to amuse ourselves.*

4

Your occupation?

I'm in the demolition business.

Where do you live?

Pretty well everywhere.

Have you had to rely upon many informants?

You talk like a magistrate. If you were a house-breaker, you'd know that we need nobody. Upon arrival in a city, if I see chimneys, I say to myself working folk here, nothing doing. But whenever I see bourgeois residences all closed up, I have no need of further information.

You make an especial target of churches.

Right. If you were to have to set out all the crimes perpetrated by priests in the name of God... the Inquisition, the wars of religion, the murders of the friends of truth... several hearings would not suffice. Religion is dead. Science has killed it off. I will not trample on a corpse.

Because they can supposedly obtain delights in the world beyond with their buffoonery, they enjoy riches. I know of what I speak. I have robbed a number of priests. In every instance I found a strongbox, and sometimes more than one. Take it from me, they did not contain smoked herrings. While they contained a morsel of bread for the

hosts, they also held the enormous sums of money which imbeciles had offered to God and which the soutane-wearers were looking after. Such are the charlatans who dare call me thief. Such are the frauds who invoke the full rivers of the law against me! One has to admit that they have a tremendous cheek!

Anyway, since I am magnanimous, I want to offer them my absolution.

Amen.

On 31 March 1899, a police inspector wearing a tricolour sash, followed by two more inspectors and brandishing a search warrant, introduced himself at 2 pm to Monsieur Gille, agent at the rue Petit-Saint-Jean pawnshop. Gille was suspected of having in his possession a watch which had been stolen following a quadruple murder. He was not yet being charged with complicity and receiving but this might follow.

Distraught and clutching his heart, Monsieur Gille readily produced his account books. The policeman bolted the front door shut, pulled the curtains across and then turned the card until it read Closed.

Then they had his strongboxes opened. One at

a time, they removed the jewels, watches, earrings, candelabras, bonds, policies, plate, and cutlery. One of them sorted through the items. The other accurately copied their descriptions and estimated value on a sheet of paper bearing the heading of the Prefecture. The third then placed them in some bags set aside for the purpose. The inventories, punctuated by sarcastic comments, lasted for three full hours under the pained and powerless gaze of Madame Gille and an employee. In all, there were articles there to the value of 400,000 gold francs.

So, my fine fellow, sneered one of the inspectors by the name of Pons, once everything had been emptied, are you going to dare deny that you are a swindler?

Monsieur Gille*** swore that his good faith had been abused, that he was an honest businessman and that if any irregularity had found its way into his accounts, his employee bore the sole responsibility for that.

Inspector, send for some carriages, the superintendent cut him short, you can explain everything to the public prosecutor and then we shall see if he believes you.

In the little shop, the dejection affected them all. Gille and his clerk limply allowed the handcuffs to be placed on them without resisting. Two black Marias drew up outside the door and the prisoners, in the secure custody of inspector Pons, jumped into the first one as the neighbours looked on mockingly. The superintendent, the other inspector, and the bags containing the controversial items took their places in the one behind.

Wait for me here, he ordered.

Then he went into the judges chambers, from which he emerged a few seconds later only to tell them as he took back his handcuffs:

The prosecutor is busy. He will be interrogating you. I'll step out for a moment. There's no point in attempting to escape, understand? You won't get far.

For a long time the pair stayed there motionless, sitting on the bench as if they were sitting on burning coals. One hour passed, then two. Evening fell. The superintendent failed to return. The coming and going on the premises was continually diminishing. The time when the offices were due to close passed.

The concierge, on his daily tour of inspection, eventually showed up with his bunch of keys in

his hand: *What the devil are you doing here?* he burst out.

Stammering, gesticulating angrily and hopelessly, the pawnbroker tried to explain that he was innocent, that somebody... and he knew well enough who... up there was out to get him, but that he had friends in even higher places. The concierge, worried by this anger which struck him as suspect, and by these somewhat incoherent ranting, set off in search of some magistrates or other. In the end he unearthed an examining magistrate, loaded with work... eager to get home, the magistrate signed an order for the imprisonment of "these rogues". He would clear up the matter the next day at a reasonable hour.

The jailed pawnbroking agent, put behind bars without further explanation, ranted and begged so much and so well that at dawn on 1 April a gendarme sergeant became exasperated and took an interest in his plight. He made a few inquiries and, somewhat baffled, reported the case, which was beyond his competence, to his lieutenant. The latter inquired as to the name of the superintendent who had made the search of his premises. Laurent. He did not know any Laurent. What brigade was he from? A mystery. And his inspectors? One was

called Jules Pons. He checked that out. Made inquiries. Then he really lost his way. There was no trace of Laurent nor of any Jules Pons anywhere. He was forced to face facts: the whole episode had been nothing but one tremendous take-on. There was only one thing that did not have any hint of April foolery about it: those 400,000 stolen francs.

Marseille and very soon all of France was rocked by irrepressible laughter. Everybody (and there were many) who had ever had any dealings with a pawnbroker felt avenged.

With one amazing stroke that afforded a glimpse of his style, Alexandre Marius Jacob had opened hostilities against a society which had victimised him. Battle was joined in an unbelievable Punch and Judy show in which Mr. Policeman would be regularly and voluptuously clobbered. A four-penny opera whose hero stole millions from the rich to return to the poor, reserving for himself but one luxury: laughter. The insolent laughter of the Robin Hood of the Belle Epoque (some had drawn this comparison) who robbed the pawnbroker to get his own back, because the pawnbroker had unscrupulously robbed the unfortunate generally, and Marie in particular, and then to take the charade to the lengths of hauling him right into

the Palace of Justice... what a delicate touch, what sheer aesthetic delight!

This was the style that was to be adopted by Arsène Lupin, but that vaguely aristocratic big bourgeois operated, all in all, in the high society circles which his creator, author Maurice Leblanc, used to frequent and which Jacob regarded with the greatest of contempt.

Leblanc was loathe to acknowledge the source of his inspiration. Not without reason. We are dealing here with an admirable example of a rehashing, with a dash of literary art, of an embarrassing individual: shorn of all that was frightening about him, equipped with a monocle, dressed in tail-coat, his derby replaced by a top hat, Jacob was a hit under the alias of Lupin. The easily scared subconscious of the turn-of-the-century readership, most of whom were certainly not drawn from the ranks of labor and who had been unnerved by the anarchists, was reassured by this highly suave, monocled fellow. Moreover, there is little to show, some seventy years on, that the situation has changed any.

Anyway, the only tinge of regret which Alexandre felt concerning the rue du Petit-Saint-Jean episode was that he had not been able to act out the

superintendent's role in person: a 20 year old with such an exalted rank would have been less than convincing. With his grizzled hair, Roque was better suited to the part. As for the third thief, Morel, a comrade from *L' Agitateur*... he had been the one who, while imprisoned, had heard from the lips of a criminal the story of the quadruple killing and the stolen watch left with Gille. Morel had passed it on to Jacob, who had drawn up his plan and let the others in on it. One final detail: Roques' tricolour sash had been dyed by Marie herself and adorned with the end of Alexandre's first communion arm-let sewn in by way of a cockard as a final touch.

Police inquiries yielded absolutely nothing. Twenty four hours after their escapade, the trio of jokers were on Spanish soil. Morel returned a short time later. Alexandre, with Roques in tow, continued on his journey. They had no difficulty in disposing of their share of the loot. Payments to the order of Marie Jacob and of Rose Roux began to pour into a variety of post-restante locations, in sums sufficiently large to enable Marie to pay off her debts and latter to have no further need to walk the streets. A fair amount of what was left found an immediate use.

In Spain the struggle had assumed a terrify-

ing proportion. Even the liberals (whom the two Frenchmen had occasion to meet), freethinkers... bourgeois, sure, but humane with it... showed that they were caught up in it. Money could not cauterise the wounds sustained by the Iberian comrades. But it might ease their material and moral wretchedness and help them prepare for future rounds. Alexandre donated unstintingly: to the tune of about 50,000 francs in all, surely the largest sum to be received by the fighting funds at that time. Roques was less open-handed: in the name of an individualism which his friend dismissed as common selfishness, he was reluctant to empty his pockets just for the benefit of strangers.

Their eyes goggled at the unbearable accounts of the tortures inflicted by the police. In Montjuich, prisoners had had to drink their own urine: others had had to lap the foul paraffin from lamps. Some had undergone the torment of drowning: tied to stretchers, with arms and legs tied behind their backs, they had been tossed into the sea and lifted out only on the point of asphyxiation. Others bridled like horses and gagged, had been whipped into a gallop. Still others had been denied sleep for several days through beatings. It was the Great Inquisition all over again, except for the pretext: these

modern persecutions were made not in the name of religion but in the name of *raison d'état*. Every wretch suspected of having queried the single article which made up the dogma of modern states... "come what may, respect the established order" was liable to preliminary interrogation. The grand inquisitors still watched the sufferings of their patients. Some still passed out, out of 'sympathy' with these souls whom they were striving to save at the cost 'of fleshly mortification'. Here, governors, dukes and generals were still living a life of luxury in their splendid palaces, while their goons, themselves the sons of workers and peasants, carried out tortures at their instructions. What, other than the degraded catholicism of capitalism could have reduced a man to a condition baser than a dog? What filthy instincts had been unleashed here? The burning of flesh with a red-hot poker; fingernails pulled out after steel splinters had been slipped beneath them; the crushing of sexual organs. They even used the good old medieval iron helm which was fitted around the head and, thanks to a vice, compressed the cranium and tore the nose and mouth asunder. Some, like Luis Mas, had gone mad under torture. Lots of innocent men had been accused of offences which had never been committed. Most died he-

roes' deaths, albeit with their bodies destroyed. Of course, all of them were depicted by government propaganda, reiterated by the respectable press, as bandits with no ambitions beyond pillage, arson and murder. Abetted by a conspiracy financed from abroad, their sole aim was apparently to bring Spain to ruination as a prelude to anarchic chaos.

The survivors (among whom Francisco Ferrer was beginning to make a name for himself) tried to re-establish the *Federacion de Trabajadores de la Region Espanola* (Spanish Regional Workers' Federation) in Madrid, Barcelona and in Asturias. In addition to funds, what they lacked desperately was contacts with the French movement. During meetings which he had with them, Alexandre promised to do what he could.

He resolved to do something the moment he was back in France, a nation which seemed to him, in the wake of his journey into the depths of hellishness, a beacon of civilisation; as he wrote in a lengthy letter to Matha.

Elsewhere he had arranged an assignation with Rose in Aix.

He scarcely had time to snatch a few short nights of lovemaking before events crowded in: he soon learned from a chambermaid with whom Rose had

worked some time previously, of the dealings of a certain local notary with his clients' money and of the treatment meted out to his servants.

Heeding only his sense of duty, he slipped into the gentleman's house at the earliest opportunity. His good intentions, though, were not matched by his dexterity and the safe resisted his efforts like a leg of lamb resists a toothless person. He had to make do with the 30,000 francs' worth (not a bad sum) of bonds discovered in a drawer, and with a watch that brought him a lot of problems.

The day after the robbery, two inspectors arrested him in a cafe where he was waiting for Rose: it occurred to him that he had mentioned the origins of the watch to a local activist. This "good comrade" had turned him in. And that was all the more regrettable because he had the item on him, and the bonds as well.

He devised a way of jettisoning this compromising evidence by popping it through a small window at foot level while pretending to lace up his shoes.

Then, just a few minutes before interrogation, he was lucky enough to find himself in a holding all along with a tramp who was due for release, a good sort overtaken by bad luck.

Ever found 30,000 francs in your pocket? he asked him hurriedly.

Never, replied the tramp, taken aback at the thought of such a dazzling sum.

Would you like to?

The old man would only have to tell Rose that, for his birthday, she had made him a present of a silver watch very different from the rotary's. Then Alexandre tipped him off as to the money's whereabouts. The tramp gave his word.

Only seconds later, Alexandre, under police questioning, was sticking steadfast to his story. In front of the examining magistrate, he kept up the denials. They confronted him with the notary: the watches did not correspond. He was confronted with Rose: their descriptions corresponded: the old tramp had kept his word. Before the criminal court, lawyer Cabassol had no problem in showing that the whole thing was a complete fabrication by the spy, aimed at obtaining the bonus he had been promised for every one he turned in. Such phoney denunciations were very rife, of course. The moment that Alexandre was released, the mark had dropped out of circulation. He can hardly be blamed for doing so.

The trial had been a talking point in Aix, how-

ever. The local comrades had expressed themselves satisfied with the sight of a traitor unmasked at such slight cost: but the police were hopping mad. Alexandre, though, would gladly have preferred less publicity. He decided to move away. Anyway, some parcels of leaflets and pamphlets from the Spaniards had just arrived from Paris.

Rose was given the job of getting instructions to Marie concerning means of communication which Rose, too, was to use. She received the proceeds from his thefts, which had been obtained meanwhile from the fences, and she was to share this with Jacob's mother in accordance with each of their needs. Then he took off with a light heart, with some money in his pocket, and with Roques, who had resumed his activities, along.

Into the melting-pot with the holy sacraments! Break up the plaster gods for mortar! Into the saw-mills with the confession boxes, so that firewood can be made of them! If that means being iconoclasts, then anarchists are just that. As for the corpse of the church, it can be used as a school or as a public granary: he was following Malato's advice literally. He found the overnight stay in the church in Al-lauch, some twenty kilometres outside Marseilles, especially amusing: the great door had proved to

be desperately robust and he had had to clamber on to the roof, climb the length of a lamppost and tie a rope to it, down which to reach the ground. It was then that he gave thanks to the boatswain who had once put him through so much suffering by sending him to climb the mizzenmast. These acrobatics netted him only 28 pence: hardly worth the bother.

In the Var department he took his revenge on the church in Puget-Ville and then the Sainte Christine chapel near Cuers. The haul there was more satisfying.

This time the road to Spain was a roundabout one. On the night of 2-3 May 1899, Roques and Alexandre paid a visit to Monsieur Couderc in Poillies near Lodeve in the Herault. They had slight reward for their pains: the small sum of money, some elegant clothing, the latest fashion elasticated boots, some bed linen, towels, blankets: enough to fill one's bathroom drawer. Anyway, Rose was staggered by the parcels she received.

Arriving in Beziers, the pair had only a few centimes to their names. They spent two pence on bread, seven on cheese, eight on a jemmy and twelve on a file. And took a room with Madame Barthes. That left them penniless. But comrades

whom they met at the Fourastie cafe gave them the key to wealth: news that the counts of Cassagne were away from their castle home.

The wrought iron gate to the grounds was easily opened: the kitchen door yielded to the gimlet: the rooms gave up their riches, 8855 francs in bonds, jewels and silver. Only the strongbox gave any trouble. Alexandre lost his temper. He could not go on in this line of business without familiarising himself with the rudiments of it at least. By way of an apology, he left a note on a sideboard.

You are lucky, filthy aristocrat, that we had not enough time: otherwise your strongbox would be much lightened by now. Until the next time. Let us hope it may go better.

Surely with the police raids on Marie's home in mind he signed it: *Attila*.

Since Roques was feeling nostalgic for Marseilles again, Alexandre went on alone. Three days later, on 19 May, in Narbonne he fell in with an Italian comrade by the name of Fossati, who had told him that he was acquainted with a special technique.

And it was the truth. As Monsieur Tournier, sugar refiner, learned to his cost. Tournier lost 7890 francs in place of which he discovered a victory communique: *Had we had the requisite time*

at the countess', we would have done the same to her. Regards to all. Attila. Post-Scriptum: Forcing method patented.

Then, without too much trouble, he clandestinely crossed the frontier that was a lot more accessible than today. And he renewed his contacts with the Spanish militants. This time he was bringing them not earthly sustenance but considerable spiritual manna. Not that he had any faith in the power of words. He was mistrustful of ideology. He was all too well aware of the futility of discussions by which nothing was solved. He believed that only action achieved anything. But in this instance he had family news to pass on to the exiles.

In the course of his travels he found himself in the home of the mayor of Santiago de Compostela, a sympathiser, whom he had visited on his first trip. Then, they had talked in general terms about an amazing scheme which had at the time seemed impracticable to them: stealing, for the good of the Cause, the solid gold four hundred kilo statue of Saint James which towered over the main altar of the church, a brazen affront to poverty. This time Alexandre had a plan all ready. All that was needed was that the mayor do nothing, and it might proceed.

In Cassis, he was to steal a cutter. Along with two confederates, he would bring it into the port of Bilbao. From there the trio would make its way to Santiago, capture the statue, break it up into small sections and ship it to the cutter on a cart, having dressed up as peasants. The mayor enthused about what he saw as a superb anticlerical stunt. And he in fact despised the curate.

However, he saw fit to speak his excitement to his two daughters, whom he believed to be as liberated from religious belief as himself, these screamed with horror at the plan to mutilate the idol. Stealing the statue was fine. Basically, they had no objection to that. But they were against its being broken up: after such a moral sin, they would wind up burning in hell fire. A whole night's argument failed to shake their opinion. They threatened to report their own father.

Alexandre left the mayor beside himself with fury. Spain was a land of savages. He swore to himself that he would not be back again.

In Toulon, a letter from his mother awaited him: it was addressed to one Juste Meunier at the Bar des Glaces in the place Puget. It contained some rude news: several comrades had been arrested by the police and Morel was among them,

his accomplice in the pawnshop job. Morel had revealed everything. Alexandre had been sentenced in his absence by the Marseilles assizes to 5 years' imprisonment plus a 3,000 franc fine on 8 June.

By return of post he replied by advising Marie not to worry. He was about to pull off something that the newspapers would be talking about. As soon as he had succeeded, he would send money to her and the hapless comrades. For reasons of caution he would rather that Rose did not travel to join him.

The job was attempted along with an anarchist by the name of Manille. It involved the superb Lecompte jewellery store in the place d'Armi, whose boss was in the habit of going away regularly every weekend. He had to pass through the adjacent cafe, which was temporarily closed. Go down into the cellar and drill a hole in the dividing wall. Extraordinary mole's work, which kept him busy for more than 24 hours, only to come up in the wine cellar of the public prosecutor: the cellars of the two buildings were not on the same level!

Marie was desolated and worried by rumours current in Marseilles just then about possible treachery by rogues. She wrote him using their agreed code: every letter from the word *portugaise*

which had the advantage of containing all five vowels and ten letters in all, were numbered 1 to o. P was 1; 0, 2; R, 3; T, 4 and so on. To this day this code is still employed by certain businessmen who do not want their customers to know their real sale prices. It may be deemed lamentably straightforward, but the art of ciphery was in those days in its infancy and Jacob one of its pioneers. 'My dear nephew,' wrote Marie 'your uncle (a Marseille comrade it seems) would certainly like to see you, above all because, he has something very urgent to communicate to you concerning 734453 (Arthur, which is to say, Roques). Having seen nothing in the press, I thought that you did not get the job you had mentioned (the jewellery store). Let me assure you that 3290 (Rose) would have liked to come. If, by any chance, you come across 734453, do nothing with him before you have learned what we have to say to you. You must realise that this is in your interest. Above all, do not worry whether you should send something to the young men who have fallen, who have turned bad (they had 'fallen' into prison), maybe you know of whom I mean to speak.'¹

Alexandre took his mother's advice and went back to Beziers, where the De Cassagnes had dis-

played such hospitality.

This letter was confiscated by the police in Jacob's room in June 1899.

The Galabrunns, wealthy vine growers, were even more hospitable. Not only was the door to their cellar easy to open, but the opening of the ground floor safe proved child's play to the new expert who had joined him. It had contained no less than 22,000 francs in cash and 200,000 in easily convertible earner bonds. What is more, there was the most delicate touch, a purse packed with gems of great value. It was a huge haul.

But infinitely less of a sensation than it should have been: he learned from the following day's papers of the existence in the cellar of another two safes containing two million francs. Two million: that represented entire truckloads of arms, and daily papers! Notwithstanding his theories about inequality of wealth he had never imagined that one individual could possess such a sum. At that level, money became an obstruction, almost. How many thousands of starveling wretches did that represent?

He told Rose about it in Montecarlo, where they were united once more. Two million! He could not forgive himself for having so stupidly let it slip

through his fingers.

You'll do better next time, she encouraged him. For a novice you have not done at all badly. Your mother is very proud of you.

To tell the truth, she had not ever believed that he might one day be in a position to meet their needs. She had taken him for a child. Now, in view of his daring, tenacity and above his kindness, it was just one surprise after another. She had given in to him a little because of her kindheart, a little out of weakness and largely out of weariness. By way of showing her gratitude at his showing an interest in her. Out of loneliness too. Now she was deeply, deeply attached to this young man barely more than a teenager yet so mature. She obeyed him without so much as a second thought. He saw to everything, just as he had promised. He decided on everything. Thought of everything. Even of offering her flowers... roses, of course... something no one had ever done with her. He was so insistent and so zealous in his insistence that he would change the world that she wound up finding the whole thing quite natural. He had grand dreams. But he acted big too. His uncommon liveliness knew no pause. How long ago they seemed, her stays in Monaco with Clarenson, and the argu-

ments after a luckless evening on the tables!

Alexandre took her to the Casino. Sat at the roulette tables. But risked only a little money. Dressed like a gentleman, he observed the high society he so despised. And mused. How could he get his hands on a little of their insolent wealth?

Fossati's arrival got him out of difficulty. One evening, just at the time when the stakes were beginning to be raised, and the croupier was calling out: 'No more bets,' Alexandre fell back in the throes of an epileptic fit as unexpected as it was spectacular. Maybe the idea had come to him while thinking about Clarenson and of the illness by which his father was beset. The fact is that the ploy worked perfectly: while the crowd gathered around him as he sprawled on the ground, the Italian scooped up everything he could lay hands on.

Scarcely had he been discharged from the hospital where they had taken him than Alexandre raced to the rendezvous point arranged with his accomplice: there was no one there. He waited an hour to no avail.

Then he had to face facts, he had been double-crossed. This made him mad. It was the same icy wrath he had felt when his father beat his mother or when the boatswain had humiliated him in

front of everyone. The same urge to kill. He found injustice physically unbearable.

It had to happen, Rose told him philosophically in the inn, *Marie is forever telling you: you attract people to you who are not sufficiently dependable.*

Saying not a word he took his Browning out of a suitcase, checked that it was loaded and slipped it into his jacket. Then ordered her to go and wait for him in Toulon.

He jumped a train for Italy. Fossati, dishonest but naive, had spoken to him at length of his future plans in his native city, should the job succeed. And so Alexandre made straight for Naples.

Here there are two versions of events. According to the first, Fossati had already been murdered by another of his victims by the time Jacob arrived. If this hypothesis is true, Alexandre surely bemoaned this unfortunate coincidence. The second hypothesis, according to which Alexandre murdered Fossati, even if it has not been shown to be true, is more in keeping with his temperament. Normally tenderhearted and easy-going, he was nonetheless not a man to let an affront go unpunished.

In point of fact on the return journey he had money enough to lend 100 francs to a comrade

from Toulon who was in especially dire straits. This generosity cost him dear. The “comrade” was yet another spy, one of the many operating in libertarian circles. Alexandre had scarcely set foot in Toulon when a horde of police pounced on him.

Had it happened out in the open to militants of the first magnitude like Sebastian Faure, Louise Michel, and Matha, being accosted by a police inspector in some railway station or knowing that the lecture halls were packed with spies would have been merely a slight inconvenience and an inevitability to boot. But it was painful to find oneself the victim of a nark just when one was throwing oneself into clandestine activity. Leca had sold him out in the business of the explosives for a handful of francs, Morel had named him for the pawnshop job, the anarchist from Aix had sold him out over the notary, and Fossati had betrayed him. Now he was behind bars for having done a favour to someone who had passed himself off as a friend. Marie had been right: he was surrounded by untrustworthy people. But how was it to be changed?

He could hardly ask comrades for stamped references showing them to be members of the group and at the same time oppose any sort of centralism and bureaucracy. Derelicts, the wretched victims

of society could hardly be regarded as the only valid revolutionary force and at the same time denied acceptance. Nor could demands be made of a man in need when hospitality was at all times a duty. Then again, the systematic openness of all anarchist circles undoubtedly played into police hands. By the time a provocateur was exposed it was too late. They could always be taken out, but by then they would have done their filthy work.

Jacob in his cell pondered this question above all others. But other more pressing concerns immediately crowded in on him. Morel's deposition was crucial to the framing of the indictment. Monsieur Gille would assuredly recognise him. This time, there was no way of avoiding another guilty verdict.

Yet he had still so much work to do for the revolution... So many friends awaited him in every city in France... No, he, Alexandre Marius Jacob, could not resign himself to languishing on damp straw like some common criminal... A solution had to be found.

Remembering the imaginative Clarenson helped him a second time. He had been locked up barely a few hours when he took off his cap and ate it.

The warder was dumbfounded. As were the magistrates when they saw him recoil on the chair, terrified at the sight of them, before throwing himself at their feet, wringing his hands with wild eyes, beseeching them not to have him burned.

Aix prison, to which he was promptly removed, turned into a real Babylon in just a few days. Prisoner Jacob spent the night ranting: ghastly Jesuits in black vestments especially, haunted him, aiming to roast him on a spit. Nobody could get any sleep. His cell neighbours hammered on the walls with every object that came to hand. A tiny group of anarchists, including one Joseph Ferrand, who had just been arrested for stealing, were in on the plot. They made a hellish din. Making enough screaming noise for a thousand.

Most, ignorant of what was afoot, aped their example and created an uproar. The distracted gaolers scuttled hither and tither.

Jacob was placed in the underground cells. Given a nice cold shower. They bundled him into a strait jacket. It was rough.

He received his lawyer on his knees in the middle of the cell, absorbed in his Pater Noster, which he broke off only to yelp with terror at the sight of him. The man could get nothing else out of him.

He embraced and kissed the cheeks of the prison director whom he hailed as his saviour: in no time at all, the three psychiatrists who examined his case pronounced him incurably afflicted with mystical delirium. Marie, tipped off by Ferrand who was less closely watched, turned up to confirm that her poor son (she had not told this to anyone else up to that time) was a complete imbecile.

The army, who had intended to avail of these circumstances to lay hands on him, since he had failed to present himself for military service, resigned themselves to letting him slip. In addition, the medical certificates submitted by Marie, who had held on to them ever since the “fevers” of Dakar and which had been endorsed by fresh examinations, banished all doubts: the subject was in poor health. Tuberculous for sure. Probably would not survive long. Alexandre, firmly resolved never to perform his military service, could in fact, on the basis of this diagnosis, have avoided being classified as a draft dodger.

Finally on 29 June 1899, the jury of the Aix-en-Provence assizes, irked by this queer man possessed decided, before confirming the existing five year sentence passed on him in his absence, to place him in an asylum for observation... The

Mont-Perril asylum in Marseilles.

There the shower and the straight jacket were regarded as the cures for all ills. The regime was severe. However, Alexandre wrestled for all his might against the assailing Jesuits: it was too late now to go back.

A nurse by the name of Royere showed himself extremely understanding towards this new, eccentric patient. He confided to him that he too had no love for the priests, although he kept his dislike within more reasonable limits. After that, Jacob sounded him out, discreetly. Royere confessed his sympathies for anarchism. He mentioned enough specific references, names, places, and dates so that Alexandre was convinced, and Alexandre then took a chance and let him in on the truth.

Royere was out of the ordinary. He advised the faker to exaggerate his fits. To turn violent, if need be. He offered advice on how to behave before the doctors, warders and other inmates. The aim to be achieved at all costs was to have oneself locked up in the deranged sector inside a padded cell. A spell there would be hard, but at least Jacob would be on his own and nearer the perimeter wall. Royere would also take charge of ensuring that contact was maintained with Marie for any purposes.

And so the great day arrived. Alexandre bit anybody who came close to him. The Jesuits were more numerous and fiercer than ever. In the parlatory he acted out the charade so convincingly with his mother that the next day Royere had his work cut out to convince her that it had indeed been faking.

It was a protracted, onerous, painful experiment. But he managed to achieve his object. Above all, Marie began to receive medical bulletins pitched somewhere between alarmed and sceptical. Tremendously anxious, she no longer knew what to fear more: that her son might genuinely go crazy, or that his feigning might be discovered. One of the letters received from the director of Mont-Perriil dated 14 January 1900, has come down to us!

Monsieur Jacob's condition is unchanged. He believes himself persecuted by Jesuits, suffers from hallucinatory visions and wishes no mention to be made of his family. Monsieur Jacob is under observation and we are not at all certain that we have identified the nature of his delirium.

The doctors were not even sure three months later, when "Monsieur Jacob" was still not discharged from the asylum. So far as he was con-

cerned time had not passed at all. Nor had it for Rose and Marie.

Marie had embarked upon an intense drive to prepare her husband psychologically. *They've locked your son up in an asylum. They want to pass him off as mad and you say nothing!* she told him. *You'd rather play manille with your mates!*

Joseph felt uncomfortable. He no longer had any taste for anything. He led a miserable and feckless existence between the house and the drugstore and then on to the cafe. Despite the Pernod which he drank like a fish, he was shaken at the idea of his child among the mentally deranged. An unknown feeling slowly warmed its way between the clouds of alcohol: a sense of blame.

Of the many Marseilles comrades of her son, Marie spared no effort in recruiting the pair she considered the most dependable. This selected general staff would meet regularly of an evening around the sketches made by Alexandre and passed on by Royere. The necessary material was very soon amassed. Joseph withdrew into a corner during these get-togethers with the increasing feeling of uselessness, that he was pathetic and contemptible. One evening, at the most unexpected juncture, he suddenly got to his feet:

Count me in, he said, blushing with unexpected shyness. After a moment's amazement, he was made a fuss of. Marie hugged him... something that had not happened for some time. And she was weeping: something she did daily.

And so it was that on the night of 18-19th April, 1900, a gig carrying three people headed towards Mont Perril. It drew up some distance from the asylum. One of the men stayed near the buggy on lookout duty. The other two scaled the perimeter wall at the agreed spot, thanks to a ladder which they had brought along as instructed. They climbed down into the courtyard and used it to clamber on to the roof, across which they followed the trail prescribed.

At the agreed hour, they smashed the glass in the window on the ceiling of Alexandre's cell... the only access, aside from the door. Losing no time, they fed in a knotted rope.

The glass had made a tremendous din as it crashed on to the floor. A warder rushed to the spot. He opened the Judas-hole, surveyed the scene and began to unlock the cell door. The game was up. Jacob would face at least five years in solitary. And a ban on residence. Perhaps even assigned residence in Cayenne. Then, displaying that *sang froid*

which sets great leaders apart, Jacob called out:

Throw me the revolver... Then, pretending to have really received a gun... *Thanks! I've got it...*

The warder froze in his tracks. Alexandre grasped the rope. He shinned up it as quickly as he could, cutting himself on some glass splinters on his way out, galloped across the roofs, jumped down to ground level, scaled the perimeter wall along with his two confederates, as shrill whistle blasts rent the air and; bleeding all over, fell into the buggy with his arms around his father.

The following day, dressed as a joiner and disguised with a beard, with a little money in his pocket and perfectly in order documents in the name of one Jean Concorde he turned up in Sete at the home of Caserio's friend, Sorel.

Inspector Fabre, mounting another raid on the Jacob home, found there a couple of peaceable small shopkeepers amazed to learn of their son's escape. As for the courts, all they could do was to take note officially of the break-out and sentence him in his absence to a year's imprisonment on 22nd November 1900 for "... aggravated vagrancy."

end of volume 1

Basically we too, the hard, dauntless ones with our refusal to accommodate, even we, who are not discouraged by the threats of the institutions, nor by the far more terrible ones of imbecility disguised as rebellion, also need our iconography. That is why we collect memories, sympathies, friendship—sometimes no more than a simple handshake—storing them up in our minds as sharing and support when not direct participation.

...

Rigorous science is no longer possible: remember? So how can we put any criteria in our fantasy. Let's leave it at full gallop, far from the sepsis that used to confuse us not long ago. Let's warm our hearts with tales of adventure like the one we are presenting here...

from the introduction

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ardent

