

## THE ELIXIR OF LIFE

BY HONORE DE BALZAC

In a sumptuous palace of Ferrara, one winter evening, Don Juan Belvidéro was entertaining a prince of the house of Este. In those days a banquet was a marvelous affair, which demanded princely riches or the power of a nobleman. Seven pleasure-loving women chatted gaily around a table lighted by perfumed candles, surrounded by admirable works of art whose white marble stood out against the walls of red stucco and contrasted with the rich Turkey carpets. Clad in satin, glittering with gold and laden with gems which sparkled only less brilliantly than their eyes, they all told of passions, intense, but of various styles, like their beauty. They differed neither in their words nor their ideas; but an expression, a look, a motion or an emphasis served as a commentary, unrestrained, licentious, melancholy or bantering, to their words.

One seemed to say: "My beauty has power to rekindle the frozen heart of age." Another: "I love to repose on soft cushions and think with rapture of my adorers." A third, a novice at these fêtes, was inclined to blush. "At the bottom of my heart I feel compunction," she seemed to say. "I am a Catholic and I fear hell; but I love you so--ah, so dearly--that I would sacrifice eternity to you!" The fourth, emptying a cup of Chian wine, cried: "Hurrah, for pleasure! I begin a new existence with each dawn. Forgetful of the past, still intoxicated with the violence of yesterday's pleasures, I embrace a new life of happiness, a life filled with love."

The woman sitting next to Belvidéro looked at him with flashing eyes. She was silent. "I should have no need to call on a bravo to kill my lover if he abandoned me." Then she had laughed; but a comfit dish of marvelous workmanship was shattered between her nervous fingers.

"When are you to be grand duke?" asked the sixth of the prince, with an expression of murderous glee on her lips and a look of Bacchanalian frenzy in her eyes.

"And when is your father going to die?" said the seventh, laughing and throwing her bouquet to Don Juan with maddening coquetry. She was an innocent young girl who was accustomed to play with sacred things.

"Oh, don't speak of it!" cried the young and handsome Don Juan. "There is only one immortal father in the world, and unfortunately he is mine!"

The seven women of Ferrara, the friends of Don Juan, and the prince himself gave an exclamation of horror. Two hundred years later, under Louis XV, well-bred persons would have laughed at this sally. But perhaps at the beginning of an orgy the mind had still an unusual degree of lucidity. Despite the heat of the candles, the intensity of the emotions, the gold and silver vases, the fumes of wine, despite the vision of ravishing women, perhaps there still lurked in the depths of the heart a little of that respect for things human and divine which struggles until the revel has drowned it in floods of sparkling wine. Nevertheless, the flowers were already crushed, the eyes were steeped with drink, and intoxication, to quote Rabelais, had reached even to the sandals. In the pause that followed a door opened, and, as at the feast of Balthazar, God manifested himself. He seemed to command recognition now in the person of an old, white-haired servant with unsteady gait and drawn brows; he entered with gloomy mien and his look seemed to blight the garlands, the ruby cups, the pyramids of fruits, the brightness of the feast, the glow of the astonished faces and the colors of the cushions dented by the white arms of the women; then he cast a pall over this folly by saying, in a hollow voice, the solemn words: "Sir, your father is dying!"

Don Juan rose, making a gesture to his guests, which might be translated: "Excuse me, this does not happen every day."

Does not the death of a parent often overtake young people thus in the fulness of life, in the wild enjoyment of an orgy? Death is as unexpected in her caprices as a woman in her fancies, but more faithful--Death has never duped any one.

When Don Juan had closed the door of the banquet hall and walked down the long corridor, which was both cold and dark, he compelled himself to assume a mask, for, in thinking of his rôle of son, he had cast off his merriment as he threw down his napkin. The night was black. The silent servant who conducted the young man to the death chamber, lighted the way so insufficiently that Death, aided by the cold, the silence, the gloom, perhaps by a reaction of intoxication, was able to force some reflections into the soul of the spendthrift; he examined his life, and became thoughtful, like a man involved in a lawsuit when he sets out for the court of justice.

Bartholomeo Belvidéro, the father of Don Juan, was an old man of ninety, who had devoted the greater part of his life to business. Having traveled much in Oriental countries he had acquired there great wealth and learning more precious, he said, than gold or diamonds, to which he no longer gave more than a passing thought. "I value a tooth more than a ruby," he used to say, smiling, "and power more than knowledge." This good father loved to hear Don Juan relate his youthful adventures, and would say, banteringly, as he lavished money upon him: "Only amuse yourself, my dear child!" Never did an old man find such pleasure in watching a young man. Paternal love robbed age of its terrors in the delight of contemplating so brilliant a life.

At the age of sixty, Belvidéro had become enamored of an angel of peace and beauty. Don Juan was the sole fruit of this late love. For fifteen years the good man had mourned the loss of his dear Juana.

His many servants and his son attributed the strange habits he had contracted to this grief. Bartholomeo lodged himself in the most uncomfortable wing of his palace and rarely went out, and even Don Juan could not intrude into his father's apartment without first obtaining permission. If this voluntary recluse came or went in the palace or in the streets of Ferrara he seemed to be searching for something which he could not find. He walked dreamily, undecidedly, preoccupied like a man battling with an idea or with a memory. While the young man gave magnificent entertainments and the palace re-echoed his mirth, while the horses pawed the ground in the courtyard and the pages quarreled at their game of dice on the stairs, Bartholomeo ate seven ounces of bread a day and drank water. If he asked for a little poultry it was merely that he might give the bones to a black spaniel, his faithful companion. He never complained of the noise. During his illness if the blast of horns or the barking of dogs interrupted his sleep, he only said: "Ah, Don Juan has come home." Never before was so untroublesome and indulgent a father to be found on this earth; consequently young Belvidéro, accustomed to treat him without ceremony, had all the faults of a spoiled child. His attitude toward Bartholomeo was like that of a capricious woman toward an elderly lover, passing off an impertinence with a smile, selling his good humor and submitting to be loved. In calling up the picture of his youth, Don Juan recognized that it would be difficult to find an instance in which his father's goodness had failed him. He felt a newborn remorse while he traversed the corridor, and he very nearly forgave his father for having lived so long. He reverted to feelings of filial piety, as a thief returns to honesty in the prospect of enjoying a well-stolen million.

Soon the young man passed into the high, chill rooms of his father's apartment. After feeling a moist atmosphere and breathing the heavy air and the musty odor which is given forth by old tapestries and furniture covered with dust, he found himself in the antique room of the old man, in front of a sick bed and near a dying fire. A lamp standing on a table of Gothic shape shed its streams of uneven light

sometimes more, sometimes less strongly upon the bed and showed the form of the old man in ever-varying aspects. The cold air whistled through the insecure windows, and the snow beat with a dull sound against the panes.

This scene formed so striking a contrast to the one which Don Juan had just left that he could not help shuddering. He felt cold when, on approaching the bed, a sudden flare of light, caused by a gust of wind, illumined his father's face. The features were distorted; the skin, clinging tightly to the bones, had a greenish tint, which was made the more horrible by the whiteness of the pillows on which the old man rested; drawn with pain, the mouth, gaping and toothless, gave breath to sighs which the howling of the tempest took Tip and drew out into a dismal wail. In spite of these signs of dissolution an incredible expression of power shone in the face. The eyes, hallowed by disease, retained a singular steadiness. A superior spirit was fighting there with death. It seemed as if Bartholomeo sought to kill with his dying look some enemy seated at the foot of his bed. This gaze, fixed and cold, was made the more appalling by the immobility of the head, which was like a skull standing on a doctor's table. The body, clearly outlined by the coverlet, showed that the dying man's limbs preserved the same rigidity. All was dead, except the eyes. There was something mechanical in the sounds which came from the mouth. Don Juan felt a certain shame at having come to the deathbed of his father with a courtesan's bouquet on his breast, bringing with him the odors of a banquet and the fumes of wine.

"You were enjoying yourself!" cried the old man, on seeing his son.

At the same moment the pure, high voice of a singer who entertained the guests, strengthened by the chords of the viol by which she was accompanied, rose above the roar of the storm and penetrated the chamber of death. Don Juan would gladly have shut out this barbarous confirmation of his father's words.

Bartholomeo said: "I do not grudge you your pleasure, my child."

These words, full of tenderness, pained Don Juan, who could not forgive his father for such goodness.

"What, sorrow for me, father!" he cried.

"Poor Juanino," answered the dying man, "I have always been so gentle toward you that you could not wish for my death?"

"Oh!" cried Don Juan, "if it were possible to preserve your life by giving you a part of mine!" ("One can always say such things," thought the spendthrift; "it is as if I offered the world to my mistress.")

The thought had scarcely passed through his mind when the old spaniel whined. This intelligent voice made Don Juan tremble. He believed that the dog understood him.

"I knew that I could count on you, my son," said the dying man. "There, you shall be satisfied. I shall live, but without depriving you of a single day of your life."

"He raves," said Don Juan to himself.

Then he said, aloud: "Yes, my dearest father, you will indeed live as long as I do, for your image will be always in my heart."

"It is not a question of that sort of life," said the old nobleman, gathering all his strength to raise himself to a sitting posture, for he was stirred by one of those suspicions which are only born at the bedside of the dying. "Listen, my son," he continued in a voice weakened by this last effort. "I have no more desire to die than you have to give up your lady loves, wine, horses, falcons, hounds and money----"

"I can well believe it," thought his son, kneeling beside the pillow and kissing one of Bartholomeo's cadaverous hands. "But, father," he said aloud, "my dear father, we must submit to the will of God!"

"God! I am also God!" growled the old man.

"Do not blaspheme!" cried the young man, seeing the menacing expression which was overspreading his father's features. "Be careful what you say, for you have received extreme unction and I should never be consoled if you were to die in a state of sin."

"Are you going to listen to me?" cried the dying man, gnashing his toothless jaws.

Don Juan held his peace. A horrible silence reigned. Through the dull wail of the snowstorm came again the melody of the viol and the heavenly voice, faint as the dawning day.

The dying man smiled.

"I thank you for having brought singers and music! A banquet, young and beautiful women, with dark locks, all the pleasures of life. Let them remain. I am about to be born again."

"The delirium is at its height," said Don Juan to himself.

"I have discovered a means of resuscitation. There, look in the drawer of the table--you open it by pressing a hidden spring near the griffin."

"I have it, father."

"Good! Now take out a little flask of rock crystal."

"Here it is."

"I have spent twenty years in----"

At this point the old man felt his end approaching, and collected all his energy to say:

"As soon as I have drawn my last breath rub me with this water and I shall come to life again."

"There is very little of it," replied the young man.

Bartholomeo was no longer able to speak, but he could still hear and see. At these words he turned his head toward Don Juan with a violent wrench. His neck remained twisted like that of a marble statue doomed by the sculptor's whim to look forever sideways, his staring eyes assumed a hideous fixity. He was dead, dead in the act of losing his only, his last illusion. In seeking a shelter in his son's heart he had found a tomb more hollow than those which men dig for their dead. His hair, too, had risen with horror and his tense gaze seemed still to speak. It was a father rising in wrath from his sepulchre to demand vengeance of God.

"There, the good man is done for!" exclaimed Don Juan.

Intent upon taking the magic crystal to the light of the lamp, as a drinker examines his bottle at the end of a repast, he had not seen his father's eye pale. The cowering dog looked alternately at his dead master and at the elixir, as Don Juan regarded by turns his father and the phial. The lamp threw out fitful waves of light. The silence was profound, the viol was mute. Belvidéro thought he saw his father move, and he trembled. Frightened by the tense expression of the accusing eyes, he closed them, just as he would have pushed down a window-blind on an autumn night. He stood motionless, lost in a world of thought.



Suddenly a sharp creak, like that of a rusty spring, broke the silence. Don Juan, in his surprise, almost dropped the flask. A perspiration, colder than the steel of a dagger, oozed out from his pores. A cock of painted wood came forth from a clock and crowed three times. It was one of those ingenious inventions by which the savants of that time were awakened at the hour fixed for their work. Already the daybreak reddened the casement. The old timepiece was more faithful in its master's service than Don Juan had been in his duty to Bartholomeo. This instrument was composed of wood, pulleys, cords and wheels, while he had that mechanism peculiar to man, called a heart.

In order to run no further risk of losing the mysterious liquid the skeptical Don Juan replaced it in the drawer of the little Gothic table. At this solemn moment he heard a tumult in the corridor. There were confused voices, stifled laughter, light footsteps, the rustle of silk, in short, the noise of a merry troop trying to collect itself in some sort of order. The door opened and the prince, the seven women, the friends of Don Juan and the singers, appeared, in the fantastic disorder of dancers overtaken by the morning, when the sun disputes the paling light of the candles. They came to offer the young heir the conventional condolences.

"Oh, oh, is poor Don Juan really taking this death seriously?" said the prince in la Brambilla's ear.

"Well, his father was a very good man," she replied.

Nevertheless, Don Juan's nocturnal meditations had printed so striking an expression upon his face that it commanded silence. The men stopped, motionless. The women, whose lips had been parched with wine, threw themselves on their knees and began to pray. Don Juan could not help shuddering as he saw this splendor, this joy, laughter, song, beauty, life personified, doing homage thus to Death. But in this adorable Italy religion and revelry were on such good terms that religion was a sort of debauch and debauch religion. The prince

pressed Don Juan's hand affectionately, then all the figures having given expression to the same look, half-sympathy, half-indifference, the phantasmagoria disappeared, leaving the chamber empty. It was, indeed, a faithful image of life! Going down the stairs the prince said to la Rivabarella:

"Heigho! who would have thought Don Juan a mere boaster of impiety? He loved his father, after all!"

"Did you notice the black dog?" asked la Brambilla.

"He is immensely rich now," sighed Bianca Cavatolini.

"What is that to me?" cried the proud Veronese, she who had broken the comfit dish.

"What is that to you?" exclaimed the duke. "With his ducats he is as much a prince as I am!"

At first Don Juan, swayed by a thousand thoughts, wavered toward many different resolutions. After having ascertained the amount of the wealth amassed by his father, he returned in the evening to the death chamber, his soul puffed up with a horrible egoism. In the apartment he found all the servants of the household busied in collecting the ornaments for the bed of state on which "feu monseigneur" would lie to-morrow--a curious spectacle which all Ferrara would come to admire. Don Juan made a sign and the servants stopped at once, speechless and trembling.

"Leave me alone," he said in an altered voice, "and do not return until I go out again."

When the steps of the old servant, who was the last to leave, had died away on the stone flooring, Don Juan locked the door hastily, and, sure that he was alone, exclaimed:

"Now, let us try!"

The body of Bartholomeo lay on a long table. To hide the revolting spectacle of a corpse whose extreme decrepitude and thinness made it look like a skeleton, the embalmers had drawn a sheet over the body, which covered all but the head. This mummy-like figure was laid out in the middle of the room, and the linen, naturally clinging, outlined the form vaguely, but showing its stiff, bony thinness. The face already had large purple spots, which showed the urgency of completing the embalming. Despite the skepticism with which Don Juan was armed, he trembled as he uncorked the magic phial of crystal. When he stood close to the head he shook so that he was obliged to pause for a moment. But this young man had allowed himself to be corrupted by the customs of a dissolute court. An idea worthy of the Duke of Urbino came to him, and gave him a courage which was spurred on by lively curiosity. It seemed as if the demon had whispered the words which resounded in his heart: "Bathe an eye!" He took a piece of linen and, after having moistened it sparingly with the precious liquid, he passed it gently over the right eyelid of the corpse. The eye opened!

"Ah!" said Don Juan, gripping the flask in his hand as we clutch in our dreams the branch by which we are suspended over a precipice.

He saw an eye full of life, a child's eye in a death's head, the liquid eye of youth, in which the light trembled. Protected by beautiful black lashes, it scintillated like one of those solitary lights which travelers see in lonely places on winter evenings. It seemed as if the glowing eye would pierce Don Juan. It thought, accused, condemned, threatened, judged, spoke--it cried, it snapped at him! There was the most tender supplication, a royal anger, then the love of a young girl imploring mercy of her executioners. Finally, the awful look that a man casts upon his fellow-men on his way to the scaffold. So much life shone in this fragment of life that Don Juan recoiled in terror. He

walked up and down the room, not daring to look at the eye, which stared back at him from the ceiling and from the hangings. The room was sown with points full of fire, of life, of intelligence. Everywhere gleamed eyes which shrieked at him.

"He might have lived a hundred years longer!" he cried involuntarily when, led in front of his father by some diabolical influence, he contemplated the luminous spark.

Suddenly the intelligent eye closed, and then opened again abruptly, as if assenting. If a voice had cried, "Yes," Don Juan could not have been more startled.

"What is to be done?" he thought

He had the courage to try to close this white eyelid, but his efforts were in vain.

"Shall I crush it out? Perhaps that would be parricide?" he asked himself.

"Yes," said the eye, by means of an ironical wink.

"Ah!" cried Don Juan, "there is sorcery in it!"

He approached the eye to crush it. A large tear rolled down the hollow cheek of the corpse and fell on Belvidéro's hand.

"It is scalding!" he cried, sitting down.

This struggle had exhausted him, as if, like Jacob, he had battled with an angel.

At last he arose, saying: "So long as there is no blood--"

Then, collecting all the courage needed for the cowardly act, he crushed out the eye, pressing it in with the linen without looking at it. A deep moan, startling and terrible, was heard. It was the poor spaniel, who died with a howl.

"Could he have been in the secret?" Don Juan wondered, surveying the faithful animal.

Don Juan was considered a dutiful son. He raised a monument of white marble over his father's tomb, and employed the most prominent artists of the time to carve the figures. He was not altogether at ease until the statue of his father, kneeling before Religion, imposed its enormous weight on the grave, in which he had buried the only regret that had ever touched his heart, and that only in moments of physical depression.

On making an inventory of the immense wealth amassed by the old Orientalist, Don Juan became avaricious. Had he not two human lives in which he should need money? His deep, searching gaze penetrated the principles of social life, and he understood the world all the better because he viewed it across a tomb. He analyzed men and things that he might have done at once with the past, represented by history, with the present, expressed by the law, and with the future revealed by religion. He took soul and matter, threw them into a crucible, and found nothing there, and from that time forth he became Don Juan.

Master of the illusions of life he threw himself--young and beautiful--into life; despising the world, but seizing the world. His happiness could never be of that bourgeois type which is satisfied by boiled beef, by a welcome warming-pan in winter, a lamp at night and new slippers at each quarter. He grasped existence as a monkey seizes a nut, peeling off the coarse shell to enjoy the savory kernel. The poetry and sublime transports of human passion touched no higher than his instep. He never made the mistake of those strong men who, imagining that little Souls believe in the great, venture to exchange

noble thoughts of the future for the small coin of our ideas of life. He might, like them, have walked with his feet on earth and his head among the clouds, but he preferred to sit at his ease and sear with his kisses the lips of more than one tender, fresh and sweet woman. Like Death, wherever he passed, he devoured all without scruple, demanding a passionate, Oriental love and easily won pleasure. Loving only woman in women, his soul found its natural trend in irony.

When his inamoratas mounted to the skies in an ecstasy of bliss, Don Juan followed, serious, unreserved, sincere as a German student. But he said "I" while his lady love, in her folly, said "we." He knew admirably how to yield himself to a woman's influence. He was always clever enough to make her believe that he trembled like a college youth who asks his first partner at a ball: "Do you like dancing?" But he could also be terrible when necessary; he could draw his sword and destroy skilled soldiers. There was banter in his simplicity and laughter in his tears, for he could weep as well as any woman who says to her husband: "Give me a carriage or I shall pine to death."

For merchants the world means a bale of goods or a quantity of circulating notes; for most young men it is a woman; for some women it is a man; for certain natures it is society, a set of people, a position, a city; for Don Juan the universe was himself! Noble, fascinating and a model of grace, he fastened his bark to every bank; but he allowed himself to be carried only where he wished to go. The more he saw the more skeptical he became. Probing human nature he soon guessed that courage was rashness; prudence, cowardice; generosity, shrewd calculation; justice, a crime; delicacy, pusillanimity; honesty, policy; and by a singular fatality he perceived that the persons who were really honest, delicate, just, generous, prudent and courageous received no consideration at the hands of their fellows.

"What a cheerless jest!" he cried. "It does not come from a god!"

And then, renouncing a better world, he showed no mark of respect to holy things and regarded the marble saints in the churches merely as works of art. He understood the mechanism of human society, and never offended too much against the current prejudices, for the executioners had more power than he; but he bent the social laws to his will with the grace and wit that are so well displayed in his scene with M. Dimanche. He was, in short, the embodiment of Molière's Don Juan, Goethe's Faust, Byron's Manfred, and Maturin's Melmoth--grand pictures drawn by the greatest geniuses of Europe, and to which neither the harmonies of Mozart nor the lyric strains of Rossini are lacking. Terrible pictures in which the power of evil existing in man is immortalized, and which are repeated from one century to another, whether the type come to parley with mankind by incarnating itself in Mirabeau, or be content to work in silence, like Bonaparte; or to goad on the universe by sarcasm, like the divine Rabelais; or again, to laugh at men instead of insulting things, like Maréchal de Richelieu; or, still better, perhaps, if it mock both men and things, like our most celebrated ambassador.

But the deep genius of Don Juan incorporated in advance all these. He played with everything. His life was a mockery, which embraced men, things, institutions, ideas. As for eternity, he had chatted for half an hour with Pope Julius II., and at the end of the conversation he said, laughing:

"If it were absolutely necessary to choose, I should rather believe in God than in the devil; power combined with goodness has always more possibilities than the spirit of evil."

"Yes; but God wants one to do penance in this world."

"Are you always thinking of your indulgences?" replied Belvidéro.  
"Well, I have a whole existence in reserve to repent the faults of my first life."

"Oh, if that is your idea of old age," cried the Pope, "you are in danger of being canonized."

"After your elevation to the papacy, one may expect anything."

And then they went to watch the workmen engaged in building the huge basilica consecrated to St. Peter.

"St. Peter is the genius who gave us our double power," said the Pope to Don Juan, "and he deserves this monument. But sometimes at night I fancy that a deluge will pass a sponge over all this, and it will need to be begun over again."

Don Juan and the Pope laughed. They understood each other. A fool would have gone next day to amuse himself with Julius II at Raphael's house or in the delightful Villa Madama; but Belvidéro went to see him officiate in his pontifical capacity, in order to convince himself of his suspicions. Under the influence of wine della Rovere would have been capable of forgetting himself and criticising the Apocalypse.

When Don Juan reached the age of sixty he went to live in Spain. There, in his old age, he married a young and charming Andalusian. But he was intentionally neither a good father nor a good husband. He had observed that we are never so tenderly loved as by the women to whom we scarcely give a thought. Doña Elvira, piously reared by an old aunt in the heart of Andalusia in a castle several leagues from San Lucas, was all devotion and meekness. Don Juan saw that this young girl was a woman to make a long fight with a passion before yielding to it, so he hoped to keep from her any love but his until after his death. It was a serious jest, a game of chess which he had reserved for his old age.

Warned by his father's mistakes, he determined to make the most trifling acts of his old age contribute to the success of the drama



which was to take place at his deathbed. Therefore, the greater part of his wealth lay buried in the cellars of his palace at Ferrara, whither he seldom went. The rest of his fortune was invested in a life annuity, so that his wife and children might be interested in keeping him alive. This was a species of cleverness which his father should have practiced; but this Machiavellian scheme was unnecessary in his case. Young Philippe Belvidéro, his son, grew up a Spaniard as conscientiously religious as his father was impious, on the principle of the proverb: "A miserly father, a spendthrift son."

The Abbot of San Lucas was selected by Don Juan to direct the consciences of the Duchess of Belvidéro and of Philippe. This ecclesiastic was a holy man, of fine carriage, well proportioned, with beautiful black eyes and a head like Tiberius. He was wearied with fasting, pale and worn, and continually battling with temptation, like all recluses. The old nobleman still hoped perhaps to be able to kill a monk before finishing his first lease of life. But, whether the Abbot was as clever as Don Juan, or whether Doña Elvira had more prudence or virtue than Spain usually accords to women, Don Juan was obliged to pass his last days like a country parson, without scandal. Sometimes he took pleasure in finding his wife and son remiss in their religious duties, and insisted imperiously that they should fulfil all the obligations imposed upon the faithful by the court of Rome. He was never so happy as when listening to the gallant Abbot of San Lucas, Doña Elvira and Philippe engaged in arguing a case of conscience.

Nevertheless, despite the great care which the lord of Belvidéro bestowed upon his person, the days of decrepitude arrived. With this age of pain came cries of helplessness, cries made the more piteous by the remembrance of his impetuous youth and his ripe maturity. This man, for whom the last jest in the farce was to make others believe in the laws and principles at which he scoffed, was compelled to close his eyes at night upon an uncertainty. This model of good breeding, this duke spirited in an orgy, this brilliant courtier, gracious toward

women, whose hearts he had wrung as a peasant bends a willow wand, this man of genius, had an obstinate cough, a troublesome sciatica and a cruel gout. He saw his teeth leave him, as, at the end of an evening, the fairest, best dressed women depart one by one, leaving the ballroom deserted and empty. His bold hands trembled, his graceful limbs tottered, and then one night apoplexy turned its hooked and icy fingers around his throat. From this fateful day he became morose and harsh. He accused his wife and son of being insincere in their devotion, charging that their touching and gentle care was showered upon him so tenderly only because his money was all invested. Elvira and Philippe shed bitter tears, and redoubled their caresses to this malicious old man, whose broken voice would become affectionate to say:

"My friends, my dear wife, you will forgive me, will you not? I torment you sometimes. Ah, great God, how canst Thou make use of me thus to prove these two angelic creatures! I, who should be their joy, am their bane!"

It was thus that he held them at his bedside, making them forget whole months of impatience and cruelty by one hour in which he displayed to them the new treasures of his favor and a false tenderness. It was a paternal system which succeeded infinitely better than that which his father had formerly employed toward him. Finally he reached such a state of illness that manoeuvres like those of a small boat entering a dangerous canal were necessary in order to pus him to bed.

Then the day of death came. This brilliant and skeptical man, whose intellect only was left unimpaired by the general decay, lived between a doctor and a confessor, his two antipathies. But he was jovial with them. Was there not a bright light burning for him behind the veil of the future? Over this veil, leaden and impenetrable to others, transparent to him, the delicate and bewitching delights of youth played like shadows.

It was on a beautiful summer evening that Don Juan felt the approach of death. The Spanish sky was gloriously clear, the orange trees perfumed the air and the stars cast a fresh glowing light. Nature seemed to give pledges of his resurrection. A pious and obedient son regarded him with love and respect. About eleven o'clock he signified his wish to be left alone with this sincere being.

"Philippe," he began, in a voice so tender and affectionate that the young man trembled and wept with happiness, for his father had never said "Philippe" like this before. "Listen to me, my son," continued the dying man. "I have been a great sinner, and all my life I have thought about death. Formerly I was the friend of the great Pope Julius II. This illustrious pontiff feared that the excessive excitability of my feelings would cause me to commit some deadly sin at the moment of my death, after I had received the blessed ointment. He made me a present of a flask of holy water that gushed forth from a rock in the desert. I kept the secret of the theft of the Church's treasure, but I am authorized to reveal the mystery to my son 'in articulo mortis.' You will find the flask in the drawer of the Gothic table which always stands at my bedside. The precious crystals may be of service to you also, my dearest Philippe. Will you swear to me by your eternal salvation that you will carry out my orders faithfully?"

Philippe looked at his father. Don Juan was too well versed in human expression not to know that he could die peacefully in perfect faith in such a look, as his father had died in despair at his own expression.

"You deserve a different father," continued Don Juan. "I must acknowledge that when the estimable Abbot of San Lucas was administering the viaticum' I was thinking of the incompatibility of two so wide-spreading powers as that of the devil and that of God."

"Oh, father!"

"And I said to myself that when Satan makes his peace he will be a great idiot if he does not bargain for the pardon of his followers. This thought haunted me. So, my child, I shall go to hell if you do not carry out my wishes."

"Oh, tell them to me at once, father!"

"As soon as I have closed my eyes," replied Don Juan, "and that may be in a few minutes, you must take my body, still warm, and lay it on a table in the middle of the room. Then put out the lamp--the light of the stars will be sufficient. You must take off my clothes, and while you recite 'Paters' and 'Aves' and uplift your soul to God, you must moisten my eyes, my lips, all my head first, and then my body, with this holy water. But, my dear son, the power of God is great. You must not be astonished at anything."

At this point Don Juan, feeling the approach of death, added in a terrible voice: "Be careful of the flask!"

Then he died gently in the arms of his son, whose tears fell upon his ironical and sallow face.

It was nearly midnight when Don Philippe Belvidéro placed his father's corpse on the table. After kissing the stern forehead and the gray hair he put out the lamp. The soft rays of the moonlight which cast fantastic reflections over the scenery allowed the pious Philippe to discern his father's body dimly, as something white in the midst of the darkness. The young man moistened a cloth in the liquid and then, deep in prayer, he faithfully anointed the revered head. The silence was intense. Then he heard indescribable rustlings, but he attributed them to the wind among the tree-tops. When he had bathed the right arm he felt himself rudely seized at the back of the neck by an arm, young and vigorous--the arm of his father! He gave a piercing cry, and dropped the phial, which fell on the floor and broke. The liquid flowed out.

The whole household rushed in, bearing torches. The cry had aroused and frightened them as if the trumpet of the last judgment had shaken the world. The room was crowded with people. The trembling throng saw Don Philippe, fainting, but held up by the powerful arm of his father, which clutched his neck. Then they saw a supernatural sight, the head of Don Juan, young and beautiful as an Antinoüs, a head with black hair, brilliant eyes and crimson lips, a head that moved in a blood-curdling manner without being able to stir the skeleton to which it belonged.

An old servant cried: "A miracle!"

And all the Spaniards repeated: "A miracle!"

Too pious to admit the possibility of magic, Doña Elvira sent for the Abbot of San Lucas. When the priest saw the miracle with his own eyes he resolved to profit by it, like a man of sense, and like an abbot who asked nothing better than to increase his revenues. Declaring that Don Juan must inevitably be canonized, he appointed his monastery for the ceremony of the apotheosis. The monastery, he said, should henceforth be called "San Juan de Lucas." At these words the head made a facetious grimace.

The taste of the Spaniards for this sort of solemnities is so well known that it should not be difficult to imagine the religious spectacle with which the abbey of San Lucas celebrated the translation of "the blessed Don Juan Belvidéro" in its church. A few days after the death of this illustrious nobleman, the miracle of his partial resurrection had been so thoroughly spread from village to village throughout a circle of more than fifty leagues round San Lucas that it was as good as a play to see the curious people on the road. They came from all sides, drawn by the prospect of a "Te Deum" chanted by the light of burning torches. The ancient mosque of the monastery of San Lucas, a wonderful building, erected by the Moors, which for three hundred

years had resounded with the name of Jesus Christ instead of Allah, could not hold the crowd which was gathered to view the ceremony. Packed together like ants, the hidalgos in velvet mantles and armed with their good swords stood round the pillars, unable to find room to bend their knees, which they never bent elsewhere. Charming peasant women, whose dresses set off the beautiful lines of their figures, gave their arms to white-haired old men. Youths with glowing eyes found themselves beside old women decked out in gala dress. There were couples trembling with pleasure, curious-fiancées, led thither by their sweethearts, newly married couples and frightened children, holding one another by the hand. All this throng was there, rich in colors, brilliant in contrast, laden with flowers, making a soft tumult in the silence of the night. The great doors of the church opened.

Those who, having come too late, were obliged to stay outside, saw in the distance, through the three open doors, a scene of which the tawdry decorations of our modern operas can give but a faint idea. Devotees and sinners, intent upon winning the favor of a new saint, lighted thousands of candles in his honor inside the vast church, and these scintillating lights gave a magical aspect to the edifice. The black arcades, the columns with their capitals, the recessed chapels glittering with gold and silver, the galleries, the Moorish fretwork, the most delicate features of this delicate carving, were all revealed in the dazzling brightness like the fantastic figures which are formed in a glowing fire. It was a sea of light, surmounted at the end of the church by the gilded choir, where the high altar rose in glory, which rivaled the rising sun. But the magnificence of the golden lamps, the silver candlesticks, the banners, the tassels, the saints and the "ex voto" paled before the reliquary in which Don Juan lay. The body of the blasphemer was resplendent with gems, flowers, crystals, diamonds, gold, and plumes as white as the wings of a seraphim; it replaced a picture of Christ on the altar. Around him burned wax candles, which threw out waves of light. The good Abbot of San Lucas, clad in his pontifical robes, with his jeweled mitre, his surplice and his golden crozier reclined, king of the choir, in a large armchair, amid all his

clergy, who were impassive men with silver hair, and who surrounded him like the confessing saints whom the painters group round the Lord. The precentor and the dignitaries of the order, decorated with the glittering insignia of their ecclesiastical vanities, came and went among the clouds of incense like planets revolving in the firmament.

When the hour of triumph was come the chimes awoke the echoes of the countryside, and this immense assembly raised its voice to God in the first cry of praise which begins the "Te Deum."

Sublime exultation! There were voices pure and high, ecstatic women's voices, blended with the deep sonorous tones of the men, thousands of voices so powerful that they drowned the organ in spite of the bellowing of its pipes. The shrill notes of the choir-boys and the powerful rhythm of the basses inspired pretty thoughts of the combination of childhood and strength in this delightful concert of human voices blended in an outpouring of love.

"Te Deum laudamus!"

In the midst of this cathedral, black with kneeling men and women, the chant burst forth like a light which gleams suddenly in the night, and the silence was broken as by a peal of thunder. The voices rose with the clouds of incense which threw diaphanous, bluish veils over the quaint marvels of the architecture. All was richness, perfume, light and melody.

At the moment at which this symphony of love and gratitude rolled toward the altar, Don Juan, too polite not to express his thanks and too witty not to appreciate a jest, responded by a frightful laugh, and straightened up in his reliquary. But, the devil having given him a hint of the danger he ran of being taken for an ordinary man, for a saint, a Boniface or a Pantaléon, he interrupted this harmony of love by a shriek in which the thousand voices of hell joined. Earth lauded, heaven condemned. The church trembled on its ancient foundations.

"Te Deum laudamus!" sang the crowd.

"Go to the devil, brute beasts that you are! 'Carajos demonios!' Beasts! what idiots you are with your God!"

And a torrent of curses rolled forth like a stream of burning lava at an eruption of Vesuvius.

"Deus sabaoth! sabaoth!" cried the Christians.

Then the living arm was thrust out of the reliquary and waved threateningly over the assembly with a gesture full of despair and irony.

"The saint is blessing us!" said the credulous old women, the children and the young maids.

It is thus that we are often deceived in our adorations. The superior man mocks those who compliment him, and compliments those whom he mocks in the depths of his heart.

When the Abbot, bowing low before the altar, chanted: "Sancte Johannes, ora pro nobis!" he heard distinctly: "O coglione!"

"What is happening up there?" cried the superior, seeing the reliquary move.

"The saint is playing devil!" replied the Abbot.

At this the living head tore itself violently away from the dead body and fell upon the yellow pate of the priest.

"Remember, Doña Elvira!" cried the head, fastening its teeth in the head of the Abbot.



The latter gave a terrible shriek, which threw the crowd into a panic. The priests rushed to the assistance of their chief.

"Imbecile! Now say that there is a God!" cried the voice, just as the Abbot expired.