

BOOK VI

THE ABSOLUTION:--FIRST PHASE: THE 7,500,000 VOTES

I

THE ABSOLUTION

Some one says to us: "You do not consider! All these facts, which you call crimes, are henceforth 'accomplished facts,' and consequently to be respected; it is all accepted, adopted, legitimized, absolved."

"Accepted! adopted! legitimized! absolved! by what?"

"By a vote."

"What vote?"

"The seven million five hundred thousand votes."

"Oh! true. There was a plebiscite, and a vote, and seven million five hundred thousand eyes. Let us say a word of them."

II

THE DILIGENCE

A brigand stops a diligence in the woods.

He is at the head of a resolute band.

The travellers are more numerous, but they are separated, disunited, cooped up in the different compartments, half asleep, surprised in the middle of the night, seized unexpectedly and without arms.

The brigand orders them to alight, not to utter a cry, not to speak a word, and to lie down with their faces to the ground.

Some resist: he blows out their brains.

The rest obey, and lie on the road, speechless, motionless, terrified, mixed up with the dead bodies, and half dead themselves.

The brigand, while his accomplices keep their feet on the ribs of the travellers, and their pistols at their heads, rifles their pockets, forces open their trunks, and takes all the valuables they possess.

The pockets rifled, the trunks pillaged, the coup d'état completed,
he says to them:--

"Now, in order to set myself right with justice, I have written down on paper a declaration, that you acknowledge that all I have taken belonged to me, and that you give it to me of your own free will. I propose that this shall be your view of the matter. Each of you will have a pen given you, and without uttering a syllable, without making the slightest movement, without quitting your present attitude" (belly on ground, and face in the mud) "you will put out your arms, and you will all sign this paper. If any one of you moves or speaks, here is the muzzle of my pistol. Otherwise, you are quite free."

The travellers put out their arms, and sign.

The brigand thereupon tosses his head, and says:--

"I have seven million five hundred thousand votes."

III

SCRUTINY OF THE VOTE.--A REMINDER OF PRINCIPLES.--FACTS

M. Louis Bonaparte is president of this diligence. Let us recall a few principles.

For a political ballot to be valid, three absolute conditions must exist: First, the vote must be free; second, the vote must be intelligent; third, the figures must be accurate. If one of these three conditions is wanting, the ballot is null. How is it when all three are wanting?

Let us apply these rules.

First. That the vote must be free.

What freedom there was in the vote of the 20th of December, we have just pointed out; we have described that freedom by a striking display of evidence. We might dispense with adding anything to it. Let each of those who voted reflect, and ask himself under what moral and physical violence he dropped his ballot in the box. We might cite a certain commune of the Yonne, where, of five hundred heads of families, four hundred and thirty were arrested, and the rest voted "aye;" or a commune of the Loiret, where, of six hundred and thirty-nine heads of

families, four hundred and ninety-seven were arrested or banished; the one hundred and forty-two who escaped voted "aye." What we say of the Loiret and the Yonne might be said of all the departments. Since the 2nd of December, each town has its swarm of spies; each village, each hamlet, its informer. To vote "no" was imprisonment, transportation, Lambessa. In the villages of one department, we were told by an eye-witness, they brought "ass-loads of 'aye' ballots." The mayors, flanked by gardes-champêtres, distributed them among the peasants. They had no choice but to vote. At Savigny, near Saint-Maur, on the morning of the vote, some enthusiastic gendarmes declared that the man who voted "no" should not sleep in his bed. The gendarmerie cast into the house of detention at Valenciennes M. Parent the younger, deputy justice of the peace of the canton of Bouchain, for having advised certain inhabitants of Avesne-le-Sec to vote "no." The nephew of Representative Aubry (du Nord), having seen the agents of the prefect distribute "aye" ballots in the great square of Lille, went into the square next morning, and distributed "no" ballots. He was arrested and confined in the citadel.

As to the vote of the army, a part of it voted in its own cause; the rest followed.

But even as to the freedom of this vote of the soldiers, let us hear the army speak for itself. This is what is written by a soldier of the 6th Regiment of the Line, commanded by Colonel Garderens de Boisse:--

"So far as our company was concerned, the vote was a roll-call. The subaltern officers, the corporals, the drummers, and the soldiers, arranged in order of rank, were named by the quartermaster in presence of the colonel, the lieutenant-colonel, the major, and the company officers; and as each man named answered, 'Here!' his name was inscribed by the sergeant-major. The colonel, rubbing his hands, was saying, 'Egad, gentlemen, this is going on wheels!' when a corporal of the company to which I belong approached the table at which the sergeant-major was seated, and requested him to let him have the pen, that he might himself inscribe his name on the 'no' register, which was intended to remain blank.

"'What!' cried the colonel; 'you, who are down for quartermaster, and who are to be appointed on the first vacancy,--you formally disobey your colonel, and that in the presence of your company! It would be bad enough if this refusal of yours were simply an act of insubordination, but know you not, wretched man, that by your vote you seek to bring about the destruction of the army, the burning of your father's house, the annihilation of all society! You hold out your hand to debauchery! What! X----, you, whom I intended to urge for promotion, you come here to-day and admit all this?'

"The poor devil, it may be imagined, allowed his name to be inscribed with the rest."

Multiply this colonel by six hundred thousand, and the product is the

pressure of the functionaries of all sorts--military, political, civil, administrative, ecclesiastical, judicial, fiscal, municipal, scholastic, commercial, and consular--throughout France, on the soldier, the citizen, and the peasant. Add, as we have above pointed out, the fictitious communist Jacquerie and the real Bonapartist terrorism, the government imposing by phantasmagoria on the weak, and by dictatorship on the refractory, and brandishing two terrors together. It would require a special volume to relate, expose, and develop the innumerable details of that immense extortion of signatures, which is called "the vote of the 20th of December."

The vote of the 20th of December prostrated the honour, the initiative, the intelligence, and the moral life of the nation. France went to that vote as sheep go to the slaughter-house.

Let us proceed.

Second. That the vote must be intelligent.

Here is an elementary proposition. Where there is no liberty of the press, there is no vote. The liberty of the press is the condition sine quâ non, of universal suffrage. Every ballot cast in the absence of liberty of the press is void ab initio. Liberty of the press involves, as necessary corollaries, liberty of meeting, liberty of publishing, liberty of distributing information, all the liberties engendered by the right--antedating all other rights--of informing

one's self before voting. To vote is to steer; to vote is to judge. Can one imagine a blind pilot at the helm? Can one imagine a judge with his ears stuffed and his eyes put out? Liberty, then,--liberty to inform one's self by every means, by inquiry, by the press, by speech, by discussion,--this is the express guarantee, the condition of being, of universal suffrage. In order that a thing may be done validly, it must be done knowingly. Where there is no torch, there is no binding act.

These are axioms: outside of these axioms, all is ipso facto null.

Now, let us see: did M. Bonaparte, in his ballot of the 20th of December, obey these axioms? Did he fulfil the conditions of free press, free meetings, free tribune, free advertising, free inquiry. The answer is an immense shout of laughter, even from the Élysée.

Thus you are yourself compelled to admit that it was thus that "universal suffrage" was exercised.

What! I know nothing of what is going on: men have been killed, slaughtered, murdered, massacred, and I am ignorant of it! Men have been arbitrarily imprisoned, tortured, banished, exiled, transported, and I scarcely glimpse the fact! My mayor and my curé tell me: "These people, who are taken away, bound with cords, are escaped convicts!" I am a peasant, cultivating a patch of land in a corner of one of the provinces: you suppress the newspaper, you stifle information, you prevent the truth from reaching me, and then you make me vote! in the

uttermost darkness of night! gropingly! What! you rush out upon me from the obscurity, sabre in hand, and you say to me: "Vote!" and you call that a ballot.

"Certainly! a 'free and spontaneous' ballot," say the organs of the coup d'état.

Every sort of machinery was set to work at this vote. One village mayor, a species of wild Escobar, growing in the fields, said to his peasants: "If you vote 'aye,' 'tis for the Republic; if you vote 'no,' 'tis against the Republic." The peasants voted "aye."

And let us illuminate another aspect of this turpitude that people call "the plebiscite of the 20th of December." How was the question put? Was any choice possible? Did he--and it was the least that a coup d'état man should have done in so strange a ballot as that wherein he put everything at stake--did he open to each party the door at which its principles could enter? were the Legitimists allowed to turn towards their exiled prince, and towards the ancient honour of the fleurs-de-lys? were the Orleanists allowed to turn towards that proscribed family, honoured by the valued services of two soldiers, M. de Joinville and d'Aumale, and made illustrious by that exalted soul, Madame la Duchesse d'Orleans? Did he offer to the people--who are not a party, but the people, that is to say, the sovereign--did he offer to the people that true republic before which all monarchy vanishes, as night before day; that republic which is the manifest and

irresistible future of the civilized world; the republic without dictatorship; the republic of concord, of learning, and of liberty; the republic of universal suffrage, of universal peace, and of universal well-being; the republic, initiator of peoples, and liberator of nationalities; that republic which after all and whatever any one may do, "will," as the author of this book has said elsewhere,[1] "possess France to-morrow, and Europe the day after." Did he offer that? No. This is how M. Bonaparte put the matter: there were in this ballot two candidates; first candidate, M. Bonaparte; second candidate--the abyss. France had the choice. Admire the adroitness of the man, and, not a little, his humility. M. Bonaparte took for his opponent in this contest, whom? M. de Chambord? No! M. de Joinville? No! The Republic? Still less. M. Bonaparte, like those pretty Creoles who show off their beauty by juxtaposition with some frightful Hottentot, took as his competitor in this election a phantom, a vision, a socialistic monster of Nuremberg, with long teeth and talons, and a live coal in its eyes, the ogre of Tom Thumb, the vampire of Porte Saint-Martin, the hydra of Theramenes, the great sea-serpent of the Constitutionnel, which the shareholders have had the kindness to impute to it, the dragon of the Apocalypse, the Tarask, the Drée, the Gra-ouili, a scarecrow. Aided by a Ruggieri of his own, M. Bonaparte lit up this pasteboard monster with red Bengal fire, and said to the scared voter: "There is no possible choice except this or myself: choose!" He said: "Choose between beauty and the beast; the beast is communism; the beauty is my dictatorship. Choose! There is no medium! Society prostrate, your house burned, your barn pillaged, your cow stolen, your fields confiscated, your wife

outraged, your children murdered, your wine drunk by others, yourself devoured alive by the great gaping-jaws yonder, or me as your emperor! Choose! Me or Croque-mitaine!"

[1] Littérature et Philosophie Mêlées 1830.

The citizen, affrighted, and consequently a child; the peasant, ignorant, and consequently a child, preferred M. Bonaparte to Croque-mitaine. Such is his triumph!

Observe, however, that of ten millions of voters, five hundred thousand would, it seems, have preferred Croque-mitaine.

After all, M. Bonaparte only had seven million five hundred thousand votes.

Thus, then, and in this fashion,--freely as we see, knowingly as we see,--that which M. Bonaparte is good enough to call universal suffrage, voted. Voted what?

Dictatorship, autocracy, slavery, the republic a despotism, France a pachalik, chains on all wrists, a seal on every mouth, silence, degradation, fear, the spy the soul of all things! They have given to a man--to you!--omnipotence and omniscience! They have made that man the supreme, the only legislator, the alpha of the law, the omega of power! They have decreed that he is Minos, that he is Numa, that he is Solon,

that he is Lycurgus! They have incarnated in him the people, the nation, the state, the law! and for ten years! What! I, a citizen, vote, not only for my own dispossession, my own forfeiture, my own abdication, but for the abdication of universal suffrage for ten years, by the coming generations, over whom I have no right, over whom you, an usurper, force me to usurp power, which, by the way, be it said in passing, would suffice to nullify that monstrous ballot, if all conceivable nullities were not already piled, heaped and welded upon it. What! is that what you would have me do? You make me vote that all is finished, that nothing remains, that the people is a slave! What! you say to me: "Since you are sovereign, you shall give yourself a master; since you are France, you shall become Haiti!" What an abominable farce!

Such is the vote of the 20th of December,--that sanction, as M. de Morny says; that absolution, as M. Bonaparte says.

Assuredly, a short time hence,--in a year, in a month, perhaps in a week,--when all that we now see has vanished, men will be ashamed of having, if only for an instant, bestowed upon that infamous semblance of a ballot, which they call the ballot of seven million five hundred thousand votes, the honour of discussing it. Yet it is the only basis, the only support, the only rampart of this prodigious power of M. Bonaparte. This vote is the excuse of cowards, this vote is the buckler of dishonoured consciences. Generals, magistrates, bishops, all crimes, all prevarications, all degrees of complicity, seek refuge for their

ignominy behind this vote. France has spoken, say they: vox populi, vox Dei, universal suffrage has voted; everything is covered by a ballot.--That a vote! that a ballot? One spits on it, and passes by.

Third. The figures must be accurate. I admire that figure: 7,500,000! It must have had a fine effect, through the fog of the 1st of January, in letters of gold, three feet high, on the portal of Notre-Dame.

I admire that figure. Do you know why? Because I consider it humble. Seven million five hundred thousand. Why seven million five hundred thousand? It is not many. No one refused M. Bonaparte full measure. After what he had done on the 2nd of December, he was entitled to something better than that. Tell us, who played him that trick? Who prevented him from putting down eight millions, or ten millions,--a good round sum? As for myself, I was quite disappointed in my hopes. I counted on unanimity. Coup d'état, you are indeed modest!

How now! a man has done all we have recalled or related: has taken an oath and perjured himself; was the guardian of a constitution and destroyed it, was the servant of a republic and betrayed it, was the agent of a sovereign assembly and violently crushed it; used the military pass-word as a poignard to kill military honour, used the standard of France to wipe away mud and shame, put handcuffs on the generals of Africa, made the representatives of the people travel in prison-vans, filled Mazas, Vincennes, Mont Valérien, and Sainte-Pélagie

with inviolable men, shot down point-blank, on the barricade of the law, the legislator girt with that scarf which is the sacred and venerable symbol of the law; gave to a colonel, whom we could name, a hundred thousand francs to trample duty under foot, and to each soldier ten francs a day; distributed in four days forty thousand francs' worth of brandy to each brigade; covered with the gold of the Bank the card-tables of the Élysée, and said to his friends, "Help yourselves!" killed M. Adde in his own house, M. Belval in his own house, M. Debaecque in his own house, M. Labilte in his own house, M. de Couvercelle in his own house, M. Monpelas in his own house, M. Thirion de Mortauban in his own house; massacred on the boulevards and elsewhere, shot anybody anywhere, committed numerous murders, of which he modestly confesses to only one hundred and ninety-one; changed the trenches about the trees on the boulevards into pools of blood; spilt the blood of the infant with the blood of the mother, mingling with both the champagne of the gendarmes!--a man has done all these things, has taken all this trouble; and when he asks the nation: "Are you satisfied?" he obtains only seven million five hundred thousand voters!--Really, he is underpaid.

Sacrifice one's self "to save society," indeed! O, ingratitude of nations!

In truth, three millions of voices replied "No." Who was it, pray, who said that the South Sea savages call the French the "oui-ouis?"

Let us speak seriously. For irony is painful in such tragic matters.

Coup d'état men, nobody believes in your seven million five hundred thousand votes.

Come, be frank, and confess that you are more or less swindlers, that you cheat a little. In your balance-sheet of the 2nd of December you set down too many votes,--and not enough corpses.

Seven million five hundred thousand! What figure is that? Whence comes it? What do you want us to do with it?

Seven million, eight million, ten million, what does it matter? We concede you everything, and we contest everything with you.

The seven million you have, plus the five hundred thousand; the round sum, plus the odd money; you say so, prince, you affirm it, you swear it; but what proves it?

Who counted? Baroche. Who examined? Rouher. Who checked? Piétri. Who added? Maupas. Who certified? Troplong. Who made the proclamation? Yourself!

In other words, servility counted, platitude examined, trickery checked, forgery added, venality certified, and mendacity proclaimed.

Very good.

Whereupon, M. Bonaparte ascends to the Capitol, orders M. Sibour to thank Jupiter, puts a blue and gold livery on the Senate, a blue and silver livery on the Corps Législatif, and a green and gold livery on his coachman; lays his hand on his heart, declares that he is the product of "universal suffrage," and that his "legitimacy" has issued from the ballot-box. That box is a wine-cup.

IV

WHO REALLY VOTED FOR M. BONAPARTE?

We declare therefore, we declare simply this, that on the 20th of December, 1851, eighteen days after the 2nd, M. Bonaparte put his hand into every man's conscience, and robbed every man of his vote. Others filch handkerchiefs, he steals an Empire. Every day, for pranks of the same sort, a sergent-de-ville takes a man by the collar and carries him off to the police-station.

Let us be understood, however.

Do we mean to declare that nobody really voted for M. Bonaparte? That no one voluntarily said "Aye?" That no one knowingly and willingly accepted that man?

By no means.

M. Bonaparte had for him the crowd of officeholders, the one million two hundred thousand parasites of the budget, and their dependents and hangers-on; the corrupt, the compromised, the adroit; and in their train the crétins, a very considerable party.

He had for him Messieurs the Cardinals, Messieurs the Bishops, Messieurs the Canons, Messieurs the Curés, Messieurs the Vicars, Messieurs the Arch-deacons, Deacons, and Sub-deacons, Messieurs the Prebendaries, Messieurs the Churchwardens, Messieurs the Sextons, Messieurs the Beadles, Messieurs the Church-door-openers, and the "religious" men, as they say. Yes, we admit, without hesitation, M. Bonaparte had for him all those bishops who cross themselves like Veuillot and Montalembert, and all those religious men, a priceless, ancient race, but largely increased and recruited since the landholders' terrors of 1848, who pray in this wise: "O, my God! send up the Lyons shares! Dear Lord Jesus, see to it that I make a profit of twenty-five per cent, on my Rothschild-Neapolitan bonds! Holy Apostles, sell my wines for me! Blessed Martyrs, double my rents! Holy Mary, Mother of God, immaculate Virgin, Star of the Sea, Enclosed Garden, Hortus Conclusus, deign to cast a favouring eye on my little business at the

corner of Rue Tire-chape and Rue Quincampoix! Tower of Ivory, cause the shop over the way to lose trade!"

These really and incontestably voted for M. Bonaparte: first category, the office-holder; second category, the idiot; third category, the religious Voltairian--land-owner--tradesman.

The human understanding in general, and the bourgeois intellect in particular, present singular enigmas. We know, and we have no desire to conceal it, that from the shopkeeper up to the banker, from the petty trader up to the stockbroker, great numbers of the commercial and industrial men of France,--that is to say, great numbers of the men who know what well-placed confidence is, what a trust faithfully administered is, what a key placed in safe hands is,--voted after the 2nd of December for M. Bonaparte. The vote given, you might have accosted one of these men of business, the first you met by chance; and this is the dialogue that you might have exchanged with him:

"You have elected Louis Bonaparte President of the Republic?"

"Yes."

"Would you engage him as your cashier?"

"Certainly not!"

CONCESSION

And this is the ballot,--let us repeat it--insist on it--never be tired of uttering it; "I cry the same things a hundred times," says Isaiah, "so that they may be heard once;" this is the ballot, this is the plebiscite, this is the vote, this is the sovereign decree of "Universal Suffrage," beneath whose shadow take shelter--of which they make a patent of authority, a diploma of government--those men who now hold France, who command, who dominate, who administer, who judge, who reign: their arms in gold up to the elbows, their legs in blood up to the knees!

And now, to have done with it, let us make a concession to M. Bonaparte. No more quibbling. His ballot of the 20th of December was free; it was intelligent; all the newspapers printed whatever they pleased; he who says the contrary is a slanderer; electoral meetings were held; the walls were hidden beneath placards; the promenaders in Paris swept with their feet, on the boulevards and on the streets, a snow of ballots, white, blue, yellow, red; everybody spoke who chose, wrote who chose; the figures were accurate; it was not Baroche who counted, it was Barême; Louis Blanc, Guinard, Félix Pyat, Raspail, Caussidière, Thorné, Ledru-Rollin, Etienne Arago, Albert, Barbès, Blanqui, and Gent, were the inspectors; it was they themselves who

announced the seven million five hundred thousand votes. Be it so. We concede all that. What then? What conclusion does the coup d'état thence derive?

What conclusion? It rubs its hands, it asks nothing further; that is quite sufficient; it concludes that all is right, all complete, all finished, that nothing more is to be said, that it is "absolved."

Stop, there!

The free vote, the actual figures--these are only the physical side of the question; the moral side remains to be considered. Ah! there is a moral side, then? Undoubtedly, prince, and that is precisely the true side, the important side of this question of the 2nd of December. Let us look into it.

THE MORAL SIDE OF THE QUESTION

First, M. Bonaparte, it is expedient that you should acquire a notion what the human conscience is.

There are two things in this world--learn this novelty--which men call good and evil. You must be informed that lying is not good, treachery is evil, assassination is worse. It makes no difference that it is useful, it is prohibited. "By whom?" you will add. We will explain that point to you, a little farther on; but let us proceed. Man--you must also be informed--is a thinking being, free in this world, responsible in the next. Singularly enough--and you will be surprised to hear it--he is not created merely to enjoy himself, to indulge all his fancies, to follow the hazard of his appetites, to crush whatever he finds before him in his path, blade of grass or plighted oath, to devour whatever presents itself when he is hungry. Life is not his prey. For example, to pass from nothing a year to twelve hundred thousand francs, it is not permitted to take an oath which one has no intention to keep; and, to pass from twelve hundred thousand francs to twelve millions, it is not permitted to crush the constitution and laws of one's country, to rush from an ambush upon a sovereign assembly, to bombard Paris, to transport ten thousand persons, and to proscribe forty thousand. I continue your initiation into this singular mystery.

Certes, it is agreeable to give one's lackeys white silk stockings; but, to arrive at this grand result, it is not permitted to suppress the glory and the thought of a people, to overthrow the central tribune of the civilized world, to shackle the progress of mankind, and to shed torrents of blood. That is forbidden. "By whom?" you repeat, who see before you no one who forbids you anything. Patience: you shall know presently.

What!--here you begin to be disgusted, and I can understand it--when one has, on the one hand, one's interest, one's ambition, one's fortune, one's pleasures, a fine palace to maintain in Faubourg Saint-Honoré; and, on the other side, the jeremiads and whining of women from whom one takes their sons, of families from whom one tears their fathers, of children from whom one takes their bread, of the people whose liberty one confiscates, of society from whom one takes its support, the laws; what! when these clamours are on one side and one's own interest on the other, is it not permitted to condemn the uproar, to let all these people "vociferate" unheeded, to trample on all obstacles, and to go naturally where one sees one's fortune, one's pleasures, and the fine palace in Faubourg Saint-Honoré? A pretty idea, truly! What! one is to trouble one's self to remember that, some three or four years ago, one cannot now say when or where, one day in December, when it was very cold, and rained, and one felt it desirable to leave a chamber in an inn for a better lodging, one pronounced, one no longer knows in relation to what, in an indifferently lighted room,

before eight or nine hundred imbeciles who chose to believe what one said, these eight letters, "I swear it!" What! when one is meditating "a great act," one must needs waste one's time asking one's self what will be the result of the course that he is taking! must worry because one man may be eaten up by vermin in the casemates, or another rot in the hulks, or another die at Cayenne; or because another was killed with bayonets, or another crushed by paving-stones, or another idiot enough to get himself shot; because these are ruined, and those exiled; and because all these men whom one ruins, or shoots, or exiles, or massacres, who rot in the hulks, or die in the hold, or in Africa, are, forsooth, honest men who have done their duty! Is one to be stopped by such stuff as that? What! one has necessities, one has no money, one is a prince, chance places power in one's hands, one makes use of it, one authorizes lotteries, one exhibits ingots of gold in the Passage Jouffroy; everybody opens his pocket, one takes all one can out of it, one shares what one gets with one's friends, with the devoted comrades to whom one owes gratitude; and because there comes a moment when public indiscretion meddles in the matter, when that infamous liberty of the press seeks to fathom the mystery, and justice fancies that it is its business, one must needs leave the Élysée, lay down the power, and take one's seat, like an ass, between two gendarmes on the prisoners' bench in the sixth chamber! Nonsense! Isn't it much more simple to take one's seat on the throne of the emperor? Isn't it much more simple to destroy the liberty of the press? Isn't it much more simple to crush justice? Isn't it a much shorter way to trample the judges under foot? Indeed, they ask nothing better! they are quite

ready! And this is not permitted! This is forbidden!

Yes, Monseigneur, this is forbidden!

Who opposes it? Who does not permit it? Who forbids it?

Monsieur Bonaparte, you are master, you have eight millions of votes for your crimes, and twelve millions of francs for your pleasures; you have a Senate, with M. Sibour in it; you have armies, cannon, fortresses, Troplongs flat on their bellies, and Baroches on all fours; you are a despot; you are all-potent; some one lost in the obscurity, unknown, a mere passer-by, rises before you, and says to you: "Thou shalt not do this."

This some one, this voice that speaks in the darkness, not seen but heard, this passer-by, this unknown, this insolent intruder, is the human conscience.

That is what the human conscience is.

It is some one, I repeat, whom one sees not, and who is stronger than an army, more numerous than seven million five hundred thousand votes, more lofty than a senate, more religious than an archbishop, more learned in law than M. Troplong, more prompt to anticipate any sort of justice than M. Baroche, and who thee-and-thous your majesty.

VII

AN EXPLANATION FOR M. BONAPARTE'S BENEFIT

Let us go a little deeper into all these novelties.

Pray learn this also, M. Bonaparte: that which distinguishes man from brute, is the notion of good and of evil--of that good and that evil of which I was speaking to you just now.

There is the abyss.

The animal is a complete being. That which constitutes the grandeur of man is the being incomplete; it is the feeling one's self to be many degrees removed from completion; it is the perceiving something on that side of one's self, something on this side. This something is mystery; it is--to make use of those feeble human expressions which always come one by one, and never express more than one side of things--the moral world. This moral world man bathes in, as much as, more than, in the material world. He lives in what he feels, more than in what he sees. Creation may beset him, want may assail him, pleasure may tempt him, the beast within him may torment him, but all in vain; a sort of incessant aspiration toward another world impels him irresistibly beyond creation, beyond want, beyond pleasure, beyond the beast. He glimpses everywhere, at every moment, the upper world, and he fills his

soul with that vision, and regulates his actions by it. He does not feel complete in this life on earth. He bears within him, so to speak, a mysterious pattern of the anterior and ulterior world--the perfect world--with which he is incessantly, and despite himself, comparing the imperfect world, and himself, and his infirmities, and his appetites, and his passions, and his actions. When he perceives that he is approaching this ideal pattern, he is overjoyed; when he sees that he is receding from it, he is sad. He understands thoroughly that there is nothing useless or superfluous in this world, nothing which does not proceed from something, and which does not lead to something. The just, the unjust, good, evil, good works, evil deeds, fall into the abyss, but are not lost there, passing on into the infinite, for the benefit or the burden of those who have accomplished them. After death they are collected, and the sum-total cast up. To disappear, to vanish, to be annihilated, to cease to be, is no more possible for the moral atom than for the material atom. Hence, in man, that great twofold sense of his liberty and of his responsibility. It is given him to be good or to be bad. It is an account that will have to be settled. He may be guilty, and therein--a striking circumstance upon which I dwell--consists his grandeur. There is nothing similar for the brute. With the brute it is all instinct: to drink when thirsty, to eat when hungry, to procreate in due season, to sleep when the sun sets, to wake when it rises, or vice versa, if it be a beast of night. The brute has only an obscure sort of ego, illumined by no moral light. Its entire law, I repeat, is instinct: instinct, a sort of railway, along which inevitable nature impels the brute. No liberty, therefore, no

responsibility, and consequently no future life. The brute does neither evil nor good; it is wholly ignorant. Even the tiger is innocent.

If, perchance, you were innocent as the tiger!

At certain moments one is tempted to believe that, having no warning voice within, any more than the tiger, you have no more sense of responsibility.

Really, at times I pity you. Who knows? perhaps after all, you are only a miserable blind force!

Louis Bonaparte, you have not the notion of good and evil. You are, perhaps, the only man of all mankind who has not that notion. This gives you a start over the human race. Yes, you are formidable. It is that which constitutes your genius, it is said; I admit that, at all events, it is that which at this moment constitutes your power.

But do you know what results from this sort of power? Possession, yes; right, no.

Crime essays to deceive history as to its true name; it says, "I am success."--Thou art crime!

You are crowned and masked. Down with the mask! Down with the crown!

Ah! you are wasting your trouble, you are wasting your appeals to the people, your plebiscites, your ballots, your footings, your executive committees proclaiming the sum total, your red or green banners, with these figures in gold paper,--7,500,000! You will derive no advantage from this elaborate mise-en-scène. There are things about which universal sentiment is not to be gulled. The human race, taken as a whole, is an honest man.

Even by those about you you are judged. There is not one of your domestics, whether in gold lace or in embroidered coat, valet of the stable, or valet of the Senate, who does not say beneath his breath that which I say aloud. What I proclaim, they whisper; that is the only difference. You are omnipotent, they bend the knee, that is all. They salute you, their brows burning with shame.

They feel that they are base, but they know that you are infamous.

Come, since you are by way of hunting those whom you call "the rebels of December," since it is on them you are setting your hounds, since you have instituted a Maupas, and created a ministry of police specially for that purpose, I denounce to you that rebel, that recusant, that insurgent, every man's conscience.

You give money, but 'tis the hand receives it, not the conscience.

Conscience! while you are about it, inscribe it on your lists of exiles. It is an obstinate opponent, pertinacious, persistent,

inflexible, making a disturbance everywhere. Drive it out of France.
You will be at ease then.

Would you like to know what it calls you, even among your friends?
Would you like to know in what terms an honourable chevalier of
Saint-Louis, an octogenarian, a great antagonist of "demagogues," and a
partisan of yours, cast his vote for you on the 20th of December? "He
is a scoundrel," said he, "but a necessary scoundrel."

No! there are no necessary scoundrels. No! crime is never useful! No!
crime is never a good. Society saved by treason! Blasphemy! we must
leave it to the archbishops to say these things. Nothing good has evil
for its basis. The just God does not impose on mankind the necessity
for scoundrels. There is nothing necessary in this world but justice
and truth. Had that venerable man thought less of life and more of the
tomb, he would have seen this. Such a remark is surprising on the part
of one advanced in years, for there is a light from God which
enlightens souls approaching the tomb, and shows them the truth.

Never do crime and the right come together: on the day when they should
meet, the words of the human tongue would change their meaning, all
certainty would vanish, social darkness would supervene. When, by
chance, as has been sometimes seen in history, it happens that, for a
moment, crime has the force of law, the very foundations of humanity
tremble. "Jusque datum sceleri!" exclaims Lucan, and that line
traverses history, like a cry of horror.

Therefore, and by the admission of your voters, you are a scoundrel. I omit the word necessary. Make the best of this situation.

"Well, be it so," you say. "But that is precisely the case in question: one procures 'absolution' by universal suffrage."

Impossible.

What! impossible?

Yes, impossible. I will put your finger on the impossibility.

VIII

AXIOMS

You are a captain of artillery at Berne, Monsieur Louis Bonaparte; you have necessarily a smattering of algebra and geometry. Here are certain axioms of which you have, probably, some idea.

Two and two make four.

Between two given points, the straight line is the shortest way.

A part is less than the whole.

Now, cause seven million five hundred thousand voters to declare that two and two make five, that the straight line is the longest way, that the whole is less than a part; cause eight millions, ten millions, a hundred millions of voters so to declare, and you will not have advanced a single step.

Well--you will be surprised to hear it--there are axioms in probity, in honesty, in justice, as there are axioms in geometry; and moral truth is no more at the mercy of a vote than is algebraic truth.

The notion of good and evil is insoluble by universal suffrage. It is

not given to a ballot to make the false true, or injustice just. Human conscience is not to be put to the vote.

Now, do you understand?

Look at that lamp, that little obscure light, unnoticed, forgotten in a corner, lost in the darkness. Look at it, admire it. It is hardly visible; it burns in solitude. Make seven million five hundred thousand mouths breathe upon it at once, and you will not extinguish it. You will not even cause the flame to flicker. Cause a hurricane to blow; the flame will continue to ascend, straight and pure, towards Heaven.

That lamp is Conscience.

That flame is the flame which illumines, in the night of exile, the paper on which I now write.

IX

WHEREIN M. BONAPARTE HAS DECEIVED HIMSELF

Thus then, be your figures what they may, counterfeit or genuine, true

or false, extorted or not, it matters little; they who keep their eyes steadfastly on justice say, and will continue to say, that crime is crime, that perjury is perjury, that treachery is treachery, that murder is murder, that blood is blood, that slime is slime, that a scoundrel is a scoundrel, that the man who fancies he is copying Napoleon en petit, is copying Lacenaire en grand; they say that, and they will repeat it, despite your figures, seeing that seven million five hundred thousand votes weigh as nothing against the conscience of the honest man; seeing that ten millions, that a hundred millions of votes, that even the whole of mankind, voting en masse, would count as nothing against that atom, that molecule of God, the soul of the just man; seeing that universal suffrage, which has full sovereignty over political questions, has no jurisdiction over moral questions.

I put aside for the moment, as I said just now, your process of balloting, with eyes bandaged, gag in mouth, cannon in the streets and squares, sabres drawn, spies swarming, silence and terror leading the voter to the ballot-box as a malefactor to the prison; I put these aside; I assume (I repeat) genuine universal suffrage, free, pure, real; universal suffrage controlling itself, as it ought to do; newspapers in everybody's hands, men and facts questioned and sifted, placards covering the walls, speech everywhere, enlightenment everywhere! Very good! to universal suffrage of this sort submit peace and war, the strength of the army, the public credit, the budget, the public aid, the penalty of death, the irremovability of judges, the

indissolubility of marriages, divorce, the civil and political status of women, free education, the constitution of the commune, the rights of labour, the payment of the clergy, free trade, railways, the currency, colonisation, the fiscal code,--all the problems, the solution of which does not involve its own abdication--for universal suffrage may do everything except abdicate; submit these things to it and it will solve them, not without error, perhaps, but with the grand total of certitude that appertains to human sovereignty; it will solve them masterfully. Now, put to it the question whether John or Peter did well or ill in stealing an apple from an orchard. At that, it halts; it is at fault. Why? Is it because this question is on a lower plane? No: it is because it is on a higher plane. All that constitutes the proper organization of societies, whether you consider them as territory, commune, state, as country, every political, financial, social matter, depends on universal suffrage and obeys it; the smallest atom of the smallest moral question defies it.

The ship is at the mercy of the ocean, the star is not.

It has been said of M. Leverrier and of yourself, Monsieur Bonaparte, that you were the only two men who believed in your star. You do, in fact, believe in your star; you look for it above your head. Well, that star which you seek outside of yourself, other men have within themselves. It shines beneath the vaulted roof of their brain, it enlightens and guides them, it shows them the true outlines of life; it exhibits to them, in the obscurity of human destiny, good and evil, the

just and the unjust, the real and the false, ignominy and honour, honesty and knavery, virtue and crime. This star, without which the human soul is but darkness, is moral truth.

Wanting this light, you have deceived yourself. Your ballot of the 20th of December is, in the eyes of the thinker, merely a sort of monstrous simplicity. You have applied what you call "universal suffrage" to a question to which universal suffrage did not apply. You are not a politician, you are a malefactor. The question what is to be done with you is no concern of universal suffrage.

Yes, simplicity; I insist on the term. The bandit of the Abruzzi, his hands scarcely laved of the blood which still remains under his nails, goes to seek absolution from the priest; you have sought absolution from the ballot, only you have forgotten to confess. And, in saying to the ballot, "Absolve me," you put the muzzle of your pistol to its forehead.

Ah, wretched, desperate man! To "absolve you," as you call it, is beyond the popular power, is beyond all human power.

Listen:

Nero, who had invented the Society of the Tenth-of-December, and who, like yourself, employed it in applauding his comedies, and even, like you again, his tragedies,--Nero, after he had slashed his mother's

belly a hundred times with a dagger, might, like you, have appealed to his universal suffrage, which had this further resemblance to yours, that it was no more impeded by the license of the press; Nero, Pontiff and Emperor, surrounded by judges and priests prostrate at his feet, might have placed one of his bleeding hands on the still warm corpse of the Empress, and raising the other towards Heaven, have called all Olympus to witness that he had not shed that blood, and have adjured his universal suffrage to declare in the face of gods and of men that he, Nero, had not killed that woman; his universal suffrage, working much as yours works, with the same intelligence, and the same liberty, might have affirmed by 7,500,000 votes that the divine Cæsar Nero, Pontiff and Emperor, had done no harm to that woman who lay dead; understand, monsieur, that Nero would not have been "absolved;" it would have sufficed for one voice, one single voice on earth, the humblest and most obscure, to lie raised amid that profound night of the Roman Empire, and to cry: "Nero is a parricide!" for the echo, the eternal echo of the human conscience to repeat for ever, from people to people, and from century to century: "Nero slew his mother!"

Well, that voice which protests in the darkness is mine. I exclaim to-day, and, doubt not that the universal conscience of mankind repeats with me: "Louis Bonaparte has assassinated France! Louis Bonaparte has slain his mother!"