

ARRIVAL IN THE STARS

Let there be light!

A Few Words, If You Please

For some time, a spiritual tide has been rising, which is pushing humanity toward all kinds of new churches. These churches bear various names—Theosophy, Occult Science, Spiritualism, Metaphysics—but although they have different rites they have the same origin and tend to the same goal. The fervor of their devotees demonstrates that many of us are weary of the dense materialism with which we have been overwhelmed for a hundred years, and that we are trying to liberate ourselves, to breathe more deeply on higher plateaux. It seems that the reign of matter is ending and that of the spirit is beginning.

It is the war to which we owe that. The millions of men that it has killed are acting upon the living. Their souls are drawing us, and we are trying to renew links with them that an odious fatality has broken. We do not want to admit that they are entirely dead. Of a rose that is no more, a perfume remains in a bottle if one carries out certain laboratory operations. Why should we not succeed in making, for a dear departed, that which we make for a plucked flower?

“Return them to us, at least return something!” cry millions of desperate individuals, raising their arms to the heavens in a gesture of supplication.

And from all directions, one sees the columns of a new religion, which is trying to render them to us. Will it succeed? Its apostles are certain. They declare that we are marching toward the total light, and that the world will be saved again. They profess that it will soon be proven, mathematically, on the blackboard of every school, that the soul is veritably immortal, that it is responsible, and that we ought to be good to our peers if we want them to be to us. On the day when that principle is scientifically established, mores will change and it will be pleasant to live on this planet that has gone astray, where the materialism of the last century is in the process of rendering the civilized people of today more cruel, more ignoble and more stupid than the wild beasts of the jungle.

In this book, which he has entitled *L'Arrivée aux étoiles*, the author has tried to show where the works of the new church are at present. Once, he had not much belief in its definitive edification, since he remembers having published, twenty years ago, another book, *Les Chevaliers de l'Au-delà*, in which he described the underside of spiritualism, occultism and magic, unmasking the faces of a few exploiters of the Mystery, then in vogue. Now, he remains convinced that Mystery has always had its bad priests, but he no longer doubts that there are good ones therein. And he says his prayers for the advent of that new religion, which ought to console and regenerate us.

But he will also be permitted to regret that so many unfortunates have been turned away from the old religion, so beautiful and so pure, and perhaps no less scientific, which has already brought us all the consolations and all the hopes, while advising us to practice all the virtues.

J.R.,
April 1922.

I. Eve's Apples

She is a beautiful young woman. She is blonde and flourishing. She has eyes the color of a dewy meadow, and a healthy flesh with a scent of the harvest. Distracted passers-by would like to put her mouth in their button-hole like a red carnation. Her smile has the radiance of a rising nascent star. Her name is Eve Illiberri and she is twenty years old.

What do Eves who twenty years old ordinarily do? They eat apples. This one, therefore, will eat apples. She will not fail in her mission. Her name, her beauty and her youth offer her that counsel; and summer imposes it upon her: an exceedingly hot summer, which is harassing the apple trees and exciting them to hasty ripeness.

And indeed, in the orchard of La Floride—that is the name of the villa in the Basque country where Eve is staying for a few days—there is an apple tree whose fruits are already round, perfumed and tempting. What is that delicious variety? Eve does not know. She rarely ruffles through horticultural catalogues.

Doubtless one of those pedantic papers would reveal it to her, the name of the puerile apple that has the god taste to ripen first. She would find it in the chapter *Malus*, for scientists have had the Latin insolence to name the divine tree that bears apples *Malus*. (Perhaps that is because they can no longer bite into it.)

But those papers do not interest Mademoiselle Eve Illiberri. She is content with the enlightenment of her gardener.

“Mademoiselle, it’s a Saint John’s apple tree,” the worthy Etchecopo has told her.¹

And he is right, that man. It is now 24 June, St. John’s day, the precise day. And since the apples are ripe, the apple-tree is well-named.

“I wish you a good festival, my beautiful friend,” says Eve to the tree.

And her arms hug the furry trunk, familiarly, like the carcass of a genteel ancestor.

Oh the apple tree! Does it not have a scent a little like the roundness of those two other apples leaning on its bark? And its own, less tender, will they not be perfumed up there?

The weather is mild. The first flies are buzzing. There are noisy ones that have blue gleams, as if they had rubbed their wings against the sky, which are carrying out bold investigations around the ripe fruits. Can their probosces be planted therein?

Eve chases them away by agitating her scarf. Those apples are for her, for alone.

At twenty years old, can one imagine that fruits, flowers the sun and all the good things of the earth also belong to others? They are one’s own. But the gnat that takes off from a blade of grass needs to believe that the universe was created for it.

Eve picks an apple and eats it, without peeling it, avidly. What heresy it is to peel a country fruit, a fruit that one has detached from the tree oneself! The skin is the velvet, it is the perfume, almost the smile. One might as well scalp the head of a lover before oppressing him beneath one’s lips.

Eve Illiberri even swallows the pips. Everything that one loves is good. The tree is vigorous and healthy. It is not one of those invalids of the espalier, pruned into a palmate form, as there are in Northern gardens. It is an apple tree, not of the Empire style but of the terrestrial paradise style. The first man and the first woman must have found one of that appearance between them.

What a pity it is that not the slightest grandson of Adam is visible on the horizon! The granddaughter of Eve would perhaps have welcoming smiles for him this evening, even if no fallacious serpent invited her.

Saint John’s Day is the season of fires. In Gascony there is one near every house and in every breast.

Eve’s eyes close for a few seconds and her lips part instinctively, as if the charming breeze were laden with kisses. And are there not, in fact, in the wind of certain days, unknown kisses escaped from tremulous, appealing, sighing mouths?

¹ i.e. *Malus pumilia*, also known as the Joannine apple or the Paradise apple.

Young women sometimes start to weep, all alone, without knowing why, and it must be because one of those kisses has reached their lips.

Eve does not weep; on the contrary, she starts to sing. But a song almost always signals a heart for the taking. This young woman's does not belong to anyone yet.

"It is only yours, handsome apple-tree," she says, resuming picking apples.

And there is a certain melancholy in that confession.

She feels the apples that are within arm's reach. Not many of them are ripe. In any case, almost all of them are dishonored by the thumbprints of Etchecopo or the maidservants. The gardener's children must also have undertaken investigations, as well as the furry wasps.

But there are beautiful ones higher up! Why is everything that is tempting so high up? Does Nature want to counsel effort, climbing, violence and rape? Perverse!

Eve gazes at the mocking apples that shine overhead, seven or eight meters from the ground.

"Well, I shall have you!" she says, unlacing her sandals.

She will climb the tree. It is no big deal. She's lithe and strong. Like the majority of young women of her society, she practices various sports; she plays tennis and dances.

But she is not content to take off her sandals; she takes off her stockings. Oh, the pleasure of feeling the wind on her bare legs! That above all is what she ought to have: kisses.

She throws her stockings in the air, as a squirrel thrown away almond shells. And one of them hooks on to a branch of the apple tree. That makes a funny patch on the tree, a kind of pink decoration. Intrigued, a cockchafer comes to investigate.

For some months, elegant women have been wearing short skirts. But if the fashion in Paris is to show one's calves, in the Basque country it is to show one's knees, for everything is exaggerated in the South.

Eve is a Southerner, and her legs are shapely. Why should she not follow the fashion?

Her extra-short skirt is a great help to her in that climb; a boy could not do any better. In a matter of seconds, she arrives at the top of the tree. There she sighs with pleasure. How pleasant it is! What fine weather! She has kept her straw hat, but that also inconveniences her. She takes it off and throws it away. Then she lets her hair down so that the wind can play with it. She has a crazy desire to do that; it tickles the nape of her neck pleasantly.

"Go on, amuse yourself," she says to the wind, taking out her combs.

She knows, too, that she has beautiful hair. Why deprive the cockchafers of the sight of it, its perfume, its gold? And, suddenly finding her sleeves too long, Eve rolls them up all the way to her shoulders.

Oh, how glad the wind must be! It has all of her. Eve feels it on her legs, on her arms, in her armpits, on her back—all the way to her wings, perhaps, for this evening she surely has wings.

"My God! If Madame Hirigoria could see me!" she says, with a burst of laughter.

It is her governess that she names thus. Fortunately, the lady has gone to the market in Bayonne today. There are only the cockchafers to watch over Eve.

How good it is to be free, alone, all alone with the universe! Today, there is nothing to do anywhere: no reception, no garden party, not the slightest dress-fitting. One can stay at home, vagabonding under the trees, read, think, by quiet, get bored. And that is good, from time to time.

But how can one be bored? From the top of this tree she can see so many things: the road that runs alongside the orchard; the cedars of the park; a cow in the meadow; white houses in the green countryside. And that pinch of gray powder over there is Bayonne; and that thread of silver is the Nive; and that plate of glass shining in the sunlight is the sea; and those fragile blue bubbles, which the wind seems capable of bursting with a breath, are mountains.

Eve is tempted to blow kisses to all that, to shout to the four points of the horizon, like a general to a valourous army: "Fields and meadows, towns and forests, mountains and sea, I'm content with you!"

She has the impression that all those things have been created for her pleasure. She admires them, and thus makes them her own. In the distance, in the sharp gulf that introduces itself, like an azure caress, between ocher cliffs, there is a host of blue sails—fishing-boats tacking toward the Spanish coast. Perhaps

they imagine, those brave fishermen, that they have set forth to catch herrings or sardines, to make rich hauls at sea and bring home bags of coins, or at least wads of paper? What an error! They have no other mission than to enchant the eyes of a young unknown whose name is Eve Illiberri. And those towns, where so many people are busy; those mountains, where so many flocks are wandering; that railway, where passing trains are carrying a thousand feverish individuals: all of that is nothing but an ingenious spectacle organized for the distraction of one little girl.

At that moment, so much force is seething in that exuberant blonde head that she has the illusion of being all of life, of filling the world and absorbing God.

Each of us has lived at least one of those magnificent hours, and it is ordinarily when amour approaches. Amour, being divine, enlarges proportionately the souls that it comes to visit.

Eve sings and frolics, as unconscious as the blackbirds in the vicinity. She has taken a branch of the apple tree with her left hand and is leaning her bare neck upon it; with her right hand she picks apples. She eats one, two, three. How her teeth sink into their pulp! She thinks about Jean's cheeks, with have a slightly similar odor.

One apple seems to her to be too green; has she not found the same acidity in Georges' smiles? Yes, a few kisses, here and there. And what young woman of twenty has not collected a few of those in the course of her days? But none has reached into her depths, none has truly brought her the juice of a heart.

In the fourth apple that Eve attacks, her teeth sink to the middle at the first thrust.

"Oh, I'm going mad!" she says to herself, grunting with anger, impatience and who knows what.

And, as she is no longer hungry for apples, she contents herself with biting into them and then throwing them away. She bites all the beautiful ones, all the gilded ones, for no reason, for the pleasure of tearing them beneath her gums, of branding them with her mouth, of snatching them from the covetousness of others. By what right would any other living being eat apples? They have only ripened for her, those apples, and those she cannot crunch become useless.

"There! There! There!" she says, between two bites, between two throws. "All for me! For no one but me! Get away!"

She throws them at her hat, at her sandals, at the road. She would like to throw them all the way to the town, to pepper the mountains with them, to fill the sea with them.

Abruptly, however, a cry goes up from the road. Eve turns her head and sees a passer-by.

"Oh, my God! I've hit that man!" she says to herself, ashamed.

She remains motionless in her tree. The man has stopped. He seems old and infirm. He puts his hands to his eyes.

I've injured him! Eve thinks.

She descends from the apple tree, without making a noise, with the ease of a marauding weasel. She says to herself: *It's the scholar, the stranger who goes past every day. I must have hurt him.*

She leaps over the grass at the foot of the apple tree, picks up her sandals and runs toward the boundary wall. That wall overlooks the road.

"Have I hurt you, Monsieur?" she asks, fearfully, leaning over the wall.

The man raises his head. He glimpses that beautiful young woman with semi-naked arms, her hair loose, of whom the setting sun seems to make a golden idol. He picks up his stick and continues on his way, tentatively, without responding.

"Oh, Monsieur, I didn't do it on purpose! Tell me that you forgive me! Monsieur, Monsieur!?"

He does not say a word, and continues to draw away.

Then Eve returns to the apple tree, picks the most beautiful apple that her hand can reach, and starts running along the wall in the direction taken by the man. There is a wooden gate at the end of the wall. She opens it with a push and catches up with the man on the road.

"Monsieur, I beg you to forgive me. I'll be so unhappy if you don't forgive me. I didn't see you. I was throwing apples at random. One fell on you, perhaps in your eye. How I regret it, Monsieur. Will you accept this apple? Oh, I beg you to take it!"

He sees the apple in the bare hand at the end of the bare arm. And he sees the bare legs...

He turns his eyes away and moves aside slightly in order to continue on his way.

But then Eve gets down on her knees in front of him, on the road.

“I beg you...,” she says, in a low voice, smiling.

And her two hands present the apple to him.

What can he do? He accepts it. He takes it in his stiff, wrinkled, colorless hand, which, it seems, ought no longer to be touching a single fruit of terrestrial orchards.

“Thank you, Mademoiselle,” he says, lowering his eyes.

“Oh, you don’t hold it against me anymore! It’s me who thanks you.”

And she stands up again, patting down her skirt with a prompt hand, in order to lower it slightly, and then curtsies.

“I wish you *bonsoir*, Monsieur. I hope that your eye will be better tomorrow. It’s a Saint John apple that I’ve given you. It’s good. Taste it, you’ll give me pleasure. And until tomorrow! I’ll watch to see whether you go past tomorrow. I’ll bring you more apples.”

He went away, slowly, leaning on his cane—but he did not taste the apple.

Eve followed him with her eyes. Soon, she saw him sniff the apple. Doubtless he found its perfume agreeable, but he did not eat it.

Ten paces further on, he sniffed the apple again, stopped, and appeared to hesitate for a quarter of a minute. Then he threw the apple on to the road, in the direction of three little pigs being guided by a child. One of the animals ate the apple.

“Oh!” Eve complained, raising her bare arms, as if to summon a celestial thunderbolt.

And, furious, she returned to her apple tree.