

**AMILEC**  
**Or, The Human Seed that Serves to Populate the Planets**

It was seven o'clock when I shut myself in my study. I was stubbornly intent on a rather ample volume in which there was a discussion of generation. I was reading it with all the avidity of a man who knows nothing and is anxious to learn.

What remained to me from that study? What remains of all works of that sort: doubts. Discouraged by the difficult exercise, as ignorant as I had been before, I threw the book away and hurled abuse at everyone who calls himself a physicist,<sup>1</sup> a naturalist, a physician, a philosopher, and so on.

“O human creature,” I cried, “how defective your reasoning is, how inactive your penetration, how limited your science! You enter into life by an obscure path and only leave it to plunge into a darkness even more profound. You find yourself on the earth, without knowing how you got here, and you still do not know when you quit it, without knowing where you are going. You do not know anything about yourself, except that you know no more. You sometimes rise up in our midst, however, like a Pedant in the midst of a group of children. ‘Shut up,’ you say, ‘and listen to me; I shall take up the chain of beings and move along it from one end to the other; I shall unveil Nature, and enable you to see the fabric of plants, animals, humans and the entire world.’ All right! Speak—we’re listening. But scarcely have you taken a step than you are surrounded by darkness; you take yourself for a guide and you lead every child astray; you claim to be enabling us to see the truth, but you show us nothing but chimeras.”

The gate was open; the field was vast; I would doubtless have taken these reflections further—but in the midst of my philosophical whimsy, a sensation of lassitude suddenly spread throughout my body; my weakened eyelids closed; my heavy head fell upon a pile of folio volumes beside me.

I went to sleep; more than that, I dreamed.

I thought I saw a young man coming toward me, of very fine figure, who had something more than human in his physiognomy.

“My name is Amilec,” he told me, “and I am the genie that presides over the multiplication of the human species. I noticed the difficulty you were in with regard to the subject of generation. I took pity on your embarrassment and came to offer you all the enlightenment on that matter that you might wish.”

I wanted to mark the gratitude that I owed such generosity. Either by virtue of astonishment or awkwardness, I embarked upon a rather poor compliment, which, fortunately, he did not give me time to complete.

“Don’t stand on ceremony,” he went on. “Since you want to learn, simply pay attention.

“There are unique phenomena in Nature, and others that resemble one another in many respects. The former are particular mechanisms, the latter are common causes, and operate in very nearly the same manner.

“Of all the beings that surround you, only humans reflect, reason and act in consequence. There is, therefore, a mechanism within them, a particular principle, which, in order to be explained, must be examined in itself, without any other example being found elsewhere.

“As well as humans, however, animals move, see and hear, are healthy or ill. Those are as many phenomena that are similar in humans and brutes; their causes and mechanisms are, therefore, general; whoever understands them in one instance understands them in the other.

“Furthermore, like humans and animals, plants are born, live and die; like them, they grow and multiply; all of that is common to all of them, and must therefore follow certain general rules, to which the variations raise no objection. Thus, when one knows how the generation of plants is carried out,

---

<sup>1</sup> Tiphaigne does not use the word *physicien* [physicist] as a modern French writer would, but more broadly, effectively equivalent to the modern English term “scientist” (which had not yet been coined in 1753). The term subsequently adopted in French to serve as a synonym for the English “scientist” was, however, *savant*, which Tiphaigne also uses in a broader sense, more akin to the modern English term “intellectual.” I have transcribed it directly herein.

one knows approximately how that of animals and humans takes place. In general, plants come from seeds; humans and animals must do so too.

“The seeds of vegetables are principally noticeable in two important places: in flowers or parts of a fruit that are like their reservoirs, and in little cavities, tiny voids, that one encounters between the body of a plant and its bark. Those located in flowers are fecundated there, grow there, ripen there, and subsequently fall or are gathered by humans. Those located in the little cavities at the surface of the plant make more progress, developing there and soon giving birth to other little plants—budding, in a manner of speaking, from the first—which are called shoots. Around these shoots, and by the same mechanisms, others are born, and so on.

“One sees, in consequence, that what we call a tree—an oak, for example—is not a single oak but a group of several oaks amassed in succession. Such is the progress of vegetation; such, in plants, is the destiny of seeds.

“If animals were designed to remain immobile, like plants, the growth and multiplication of both would be executed in precisely the same manner—but animals need to move and act. Several other animals cannot be implanted on an animal, as several other branches can be implanted on a branch; that would not be compatible with the movement that each one requires.

“By virtue of a just consequence of the general rule, however, animals have seeds, as vegetables do. These seeds are principally observable, either in particular reservoirs, which do in animals what flowers do in plants, or beneath the skin, which is similarly the animal equivalent of the bark of trees. The former develop when they are fecundated by the approach of two kinds; they form themselves into other animals—whereas those usually residing in bodies, far from developing there, take up so little volume that the human eye, aided by the best microscope, can scarcely perceive them. They remain there for some time, then fall or are distributed in the atmosphere.

“What we say about animals in general must apply in particular to the human species. There are germs or seeds in the human body, the rudiments of humans. There are some in the reservoirs designed for them in the two sexes; there are others that escape through the pores in the skin.

“But do these germs, these seeds, these rudiments escaped from human beings similarly escape their destiny? Do they become absolutely useless, as soon as they are carried outside the body? Nature is too economical to suffer a loss of that consequence.

“We are a troop of genies, whose employment is to save the greater part of these seeds. Those of men and women are my particular responsibility, and I have a number of subordinate genies who, under my orders, are occupied in gathering them.

“We are, in regard to you, what you are in regard to plants. You humans sow, cultivate and gather fruit; we genies sow, cultivate and gather human seeds. And, just as a gardener only reserves the seeds of the best and most beautiful plants in his garden, so we collected the human seeds furnished by men and women of the most distinguished merit.

“As yet you know nothing about the nature of these seeds or the use we make of them, but I shall tell you in due course. Let us go out of this study, though; I need to sharpen your eyesight so that you can see the harvest of human seed in progress.”

With these words, Amilec went out, and I followed him. We had scarcely gone two paces when I saw, a short distance away, five or six genies occupied in collecting human seed. Imagine a physicist, possessed of all possible attention and sagacity, occupied in investigating the down that he perceives on a fly’s wing; such was approximately the attitude of each of these harvester genies. I could not help bursting into laughter, but I was distracted from it by Amilec.

“To your left,” he told me, “you see a genie who is collecting the seed of an officer who, after mature consideration, finally decided that it was not unworthy of a military man to think, and who consequently employed the leisure time that others devoted to dissipation or debauchery in study.

“Further on, the precious seed is being collected of a man who only partakes of the joy of his friends when invited, but hastens of his own accord to share their sadness, and gives them the help they need without being asked.

“To your right, the seed of the tutor of a great lord is being collected. He is to be congratulated for his concern and the fortunate disposition of his pupil; he spent ten years teaching him to keep quiet.

“Do you see those three genies busy about that young woman? Can you guess why they are collecting her seed so carefully?”

“It seems simple to me,” I replied. “That’s one of the most beautiful women one could ever see; it would be a pity to lose a single one of her seeds.”

“If beauty is a treasure,” Amilec replied, “it’s one that only virtue can complete. Don’t image that it’s just for the sake of two lovely eyes that I set three genies busy around that woman. She got married five years ago; she has intelligence, beauty and youth; she hails from Paris; and she has always been faithful to a husband she does not love.”

As I looked from one side to the other, I saw one harvester genie employed in collecting the seed of a fop.

“What’s the point of that, Seigneur Amilec?” I said, astonished. “What provision are you making there? Where are you going to transplant that breed?”

“Nowhere,” Amilec replied. “It’s not with that aim that I’m having the fop’s seed collected—but even though I won’t reserve any, they’ll still be useful for something. I’ve found the secret of purifying female seed. I throw eight or ten seeds from a fop into a box full of feminine seeds; they excite a violent intestinal movement. When it settles down, and everything is calm, one finds in the container as many large clusters as fop-seeds were thrown in. Each cluster is formed by a multitude of female seeds that have thrown themselves at one fop-seed and have all stuck to it. I throw away the clusters and reserve the small amount of seed that remains in the box.”

Amilec continued: “Human seeds, according to their species, all have singular properties, by which you will soon have occasion to be surprised. For example, the seeds of magistrates are provided with an extraordinary corrosive quality. If I were not careful to throw a few litigant seeds into the box where they are enclosed, to excite that famished virtue, I couldn’t conserve a single one; they would rather eat one another away than remain inactive.

“Among others, the seeds of advocates have the further property that, once set in movement, instead of moving in a straight line like other natural bodies, they incessantly follow curved and parabolic trajectories.

“A long time ago, I observed that the seed of surgeons, introduced to that of physicians, acquire a violent seething movement. That impact also results, following the rules of the art, in an amphibious seed<sup>2</sup>—which, as you know, combines that of the surgeon with that of the physician, but is worse than either.

“If I entered into detail regarding the properties of human seeds, I’d never get to the end. Let’s go on—I want to show you my warehouse. On the way, I’ll explain my mission, my work and the use I make of human seed.”

As he finished speaking, Amilec launched himself lightly into the air; not without astonishment, I felt myself transported alongside him. We did not walk but flew to the warehouse.

“Would you believe,” Amilec resumed, “that the whole of this innumerable multitude of Suns and habitable Earths that comprise this vast universe was once—no, you’ll never believe it—was once all contained in a seed scarcely as large as a pea. Its development has been gradual, but is not yet concluded. There are many worlds that one could compare to young plants that have, so to speak, barely begun to germinate. Those masses of Stars, and those white patches which you other inhabitants of Earth perceive in the vault of Heaven and call Milky Ways, are nothing but packets of little worlds that only emerged from their shells sixty or eighty centuries ago. They therefore seem to you to be in close proximity to one another—and are, in fact, because they have not yet grown very much, and take up little space in consequence.

“Furthermore, our World in particular, our Vortex, although fully developed, has not yet attained its final perfection. As everyone knows, the Planets are as many habitable worlds, but they require a certain degree of maturity in order to be populated, and they haven’t all reached that degree yet. Those different Earths are like as many large apples, which, although attached to the same tree, don’t all ripen at the same time.

---

<sup>2</sup> Tiphaigne inserts a footnote here, which translates as “Lettered surgeons” [i.e. surgeons with diplomas]. He was writing in an era when surgery and professional medicine were still somewhat separate, the former having previously been the province of barbers, but in which the medical profession was beginning to take surgeons aboard. Although Tiphaigne was a physician himself, he does seem to have had a keen awareness of the limitations of his art, but that obviously did not make him any better disposed toward upset surgeons. He is using *amphibie* [amphibious] in a more general sense than is now usual, to imply something akin to “hybrid.”

“Mercury, being nearest to the Sun, ripened first, then Venus, than the Earth. As soon as Mercury was ripe, I was sent there with the primordial seeds of humankind. Having reached that Planet, I sowed, cultivated and collected further human seeds. Then, when I learned by way of a few Couriers that I had been ordered there to reconnoiter the territory, I went on to Venus, whose maturity was perfect. I sowed again; I populated that Planet, and obtained a new provision of seeds.

“Eventually, I left Venus some seven or eight thousand years ago, and I arrived on Earth, where I’ve continued to sow and harvest. Now I’m on the point of leaving for Mars, whose maturity is well advanced. From there I’ll go on to take up residence on Jupiter. Finally, I’ll end my career on Saturn, which will only be in a habitable state twelve thousand years from now...yes, I’m assuming that it will take at least that long to mature, for, as you know, it’s a very long way from the Sun.

“As for the little Earths that evolve round one another, which you call Moons or Satellites, I won’t take the trouble to transport myself there in order to populate them; I’ll send my Lieutenants. Five hundred years ago, I sent the genie Zamar to your Moon with a good provision of human seed. I have no doubt that today, the multiplication of the species is on a sound footing there; I’m surprised not to have received any news of it—I’m expecting some any day now.”

While Amilec was speaking, we were flying through the air with extreme rapidity. Our carriage, whatever its nature, was very gentle; there were no jolts, no tremors—but the volubility of such an apparatus always goes to one’s head slightly. Finally, we arrived at the warehouse.

Imagine a vast apartment, the walls covered with shelves and labeled boxes and the middle occupied by a huge table, laden with little bags, packets and twists of paper, with workers busy on every side, urgently winnowing, sifting, sorting and packing, and that is the interior of Amilec’s warehouse.

“You humans,” he said to me, “imagine that genies think only about enjoying themselves, and that their life is a tissue of delights. Judge others by my officers and myself, and do more justice to the Celestial Powers. You’ve just seen see how much discernment, attention and patience is required to collect human seed; you can see by the activity of the genies laboring in this warehouse how much care has to be lavished on preparing the good seed, which never lacks poor seed to obscure it, in spite of all the attention and sagacity of the harvester genies.

“If it requires a great deal of trouble to collect and purify the seeds, however, it requires no less to conserve them. Excessive humidity corrupts them, excessive dryness weakens them; excessive heat dissipates the spirit that ought one day to vivify them, excessive cold freezes them and destroys their organization; too much air damages them, a lack of air suffocates them. It is therefore necessary to keep them in a certain environment and that environment is difficult to procure. They’re also subject to a further inconvenience—mites attack them.

“The other day, quite by chance, I opened this box bearing the label *Conquerors’ Seed*; imagine my surprise when, instead of finding seeds in good condition, I found little more than dust, the mites having attacked the source of grandeur of soul. More than two thirds of my Heroes had been reduced to powder, or had served as food for those little insects; it was a desolation. That which was to have become the terror of Kings one day, had been unable to resist the injurious bite of a mite.

“How many laurels harvested before their time, triumphs missed, revolutions stifled—what a tragedy for the universal history of Mars! The links between the greatest events that should have succeeded one another on that Planet, of which the seeds of a Conqueror should have been the knots, have been disconnected, and by the same token, the entire apparatus has fallen apart; everything has disappeared.

“Would you rather laugh or cry at the enormous pettiness to which the greatest things are reduced, when one gets closer to their origin? At any rate, in the affair of the mites and the Conquerors, almost all my Alexanders, my Caesars, my Charles XII<sup>3</sup> and many others have been destroyed—and I don’t know whether I’ve lost or gained in consequence, whether I ought to mourn or applaud.

“What would I be mourning, in fact? That what remains to me might not be enough to destroy ten cities a year? That perhaps, on Mars, there will only be unheroic men who live in peace with their

---

<sup>3</sup> The comparison of Charles XII of Sweden (1682-1718) to Alexander and the Caesars is somewhat tongue-in-cheek, and probably has more to do with the fact that Voltaire wrote an *Histoire de Charles XII* (1731) than the monarch’s actual military adventures in Europe.

neighbors? That there might not be a single one capable of assembling some to murder others? In truth, I think that if one has not been afflicted by such things, one ought not to be inconsolable.”

“I agree,” I said, “but it’s still annoying that the Celestial Powers should take so much trouble to amass delicate nourishment for miserable mites, and that animals so vile and tiny should take pleasure in destroying twenty Alexanders and twenty Caesars in less than a week, without even getting fat on them. Moreover, Seigneur Amilec, it seems to me that you could have spared yourself a good deal of work. Merely take two or three human seeds from the earth, choose the most prolific and healthiest of them, and in time you’d have enough to populate the whole of Mars.”

“Very kind of you!” retorted Amilec, hotly. “Go tell the Laborer busy sowing: ‘Why are you going to so much trouble? Take back that multitude of seeds that you’re lavishing on the earth. One alone will be sufficient; in time you’d cover all your lands.’ How many centuries would it take me...”

Amilec was interrupted by a harvester genie who suddenly came in, saying: “Let those who want to do so involve themselves; for myself, I’m giving up. I’d much rather seek the truth among the Philosophers. Because you know that I have a little talent, you exhaust me with all the most difficult asks. Do you know how much trouble I’ve had providing you with the seeds of irreproachable judges?”

“Don’t I deserve a little rest, having fulfilled such a difficult mission? On the contrary—now I have to find you the seed of Ecclesiastics of good faith. Where do you expect me to find them? There are no more of them—or if there are, they’re confused with a multitude of bad seeds, from which they can’t be disentangled. You think you’re collecting good Ecclesiastical seed, and you find your hands full of Monks’ seed.

“You should have given me the commission ten or twelve centuries ago; I’d have given you an abundant supply—but back then you couldn’t imagine a scarcity, and amused yourself collecting supplies of the seeds of a few modest daughters, a few virtuous wives and a few chaste widows. You didn’t think you’d ever be able to find enough of them. The time for harvesting Ecclesiastical seeds has passed, though; you’ve thought about it now, but there was no more time.”

After this harangue, the Ecclesiastic harvester presented Amilec with an exceedingly tiny box, which was only half full; that was the entire yield of his harvest.

Amilec took it and said to him: “Go on—be diligent and don’t lose heart. If you search hard, you’ll still find men full of God, Savants who have always suspected their own reason, rich Prelates who receive only to give, and zealous Pastors whom laxity has not put to sleep in the midst of their flock. The seeds of the Apostles are not yet exhausted; you can still find a few.”

Having thus sent away the grumbling genie, Amilec threw the ecclesiastical seed he had just received into a sieve that retained the good and rejected the bad. He shook the sieve, and, as he did so, I saw more than half the seeds that were contained therein fall through. They were of several different colors: black, white, grey and variegated.

Amilec continued sifting, until there was something resembling a hail of centuries-old molecules, which were repelling one another, seemingly manifesting in mutual aversion and disdain that which ought to have animated them one day. Amilec cast all those the sieve had rejected to the wind, and put the rest away.