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The Atheist's Mass

great is the satisfaction of his religious wishes, the day when this Mass is said at the beginning of each season, I say with the good faith of a doubter, "Oh God, if there is a sphere where, after their death, you place all those who have been perfect, think of good Bourgeat. And if there is anything for him to suffer, give me his sufferings so that he may enter more quickly into what is called Paradise." That, my dear fellow, is the most that a man with my opinions can allow himself. God must be a decent chap; he couldn't hold it against me. I swear to you, I would give my fortune to be a believer like Bourgeat.'

Blanchon, who looked after Desplein in his last illness, dares not affirm nowadays that the distinguished surgeon died an atheist. Believers will like to think that the humble Anversnat will have opened the gate of heaven for him as, earlier, he had opened for him the gate of that earthy temple on whose doorway is written Aux grands hommes la patrie reconnaissante.

7. These words (meaning 'To our great men from their grateful country') are inscribed above the doorway of the Panthéon in Paris where many of the great men of France are buried.

Facino Cane

I was living at that time in a little street you probably don't know, the Rue de Lesdiguières: it starts at the Rue Saint-Antoine, opposite a fountain near the Place de la Bastille, and runs into the Rue de la Côte-Saint-Antoine.

For the love of knowledge I had gone to live in a garret, working by night and spending the day in a near-by library, the Bibliothèque de Monsieur. I lived frugally and I had accepted all the conditions of the monastic life which is essential for serious students. When the weather was fine, at best I took a walk on the Boulevard Bourdon. Only one passion could drag me away from my studious habits, but even that was a kind of study. I used to go and observe the people of the suburb, their characters and behaviour. Since I was as badly dressed as the working-men and did not bother about appearances, I did not arouse their hostility. I could mingle with them as they stood in groups, and watch them bargaining and arguing as they left their work.

I had already acquired a power of intuitive observation which penetrated to the soul without ignoring the body, or rather it grasped external details so well that it immediately went beyond them. This power of observation enabled me to live the life of the individual I was watching, allowing me to substitute myself for him, just like the dervish in the Arabian Nights who took on the body and soul of people over whom he pronounced certain words.

Sometimes, between eleven o'clock and midnight, as I passed a workman and his wife returning home together from the Ambigu-Comique, I would amuse myself by following them from the Boulevard du Pont-aux-Choux as far as the Boulevard Beaumarchais. These good folk would first of all talk about the play they had just seen; then gradually they would come to discuss their own affairs. The mother would
drag her child along by the hand, without paying any attention to his complaints or demands. The husband and wife would calculate the amount of money which was due to them the following day and would think of twenty different ways of spending it. Then came housekeeping details, complaints about the terrible price of potatoes, or the length of the winter, or the increased cost of fuel, and heard protests about what they owed the baker. In the end the discussions would grow acrimonious, and they would each reveal their characters by the use of colourful language. As I listened to these people, I was able to live their lives; I felt their rags on my back, and walked with their worn-out shoes on my feet. Their wants, their needs, all passed into my soul, or perhaps it was my soul which passed into theirs. It was like the dream of a man who is wide awake. I shared their indignation against tyrannical foremen, or against bad customers who made them come back several times without paying them. To discard my own habits, to become someone other than myself by an exaltation of my moral faculties, and to play this game at will, such was my amusement. To what do I owe this gift? Is it a kind of second sight? Is it one of those qualities which, if abused, could lead to madness? I have never tried to explain this power; I possess it and make use of it, that is all. All you need to know is that, already, at that time, I had broken up into its elements the heterogeneous mass called 'the people', and had analysed it in such a way that I could appraise both its good and its bad qualities. I already knew what use could be made of this district, this breeding-ground of revolutions which contains heroes, inventors, technicians, rogues, scoundrels, virtues and vices, all oppressed by poverty, stifled by want, soaked in alcohol, worn out by strong drink. You cannot imagine how many unrecorded adventures, how many forgotten dramas there are in this town of suffering, how many horrible and beautiful things. It would be impossible to imagine the truth which is concealed in it and which no one can take steps to reveal. You would have to dig too deep to discover these wonderful scenes of tragedy and comedy, these masterpieces produced by chance. I don't know how I have been able to keep untold for so long the story I am about to tell you; it is one of those strange tales stored in the bag of memory and drawn out at random like numbers in a lottery. I know many more, as odd as this one and buried as deeply. But their turn will come, you may be sure.

One day my daily help, a workman's wife, came and asked me to honour her sister's wedding with my presence. So that you can appreciate what this wedding would be like, I must tell you that I paid forty francs a month to this poor creature who used to come every morning to make my bed, clean my shoes, brush my clothes, sweep the room and prepare my lunch. For the rest of the day she turned the handle of a machine, and at this nasty job she earned ten sous a day. Her husband, a cabinet-maker, earned four francs. But as the couple had three children, they could barely earn enough to live on. I have never met a more unshakeable honesty than this man's and this woman's. For five years after I had left the district Mère Vaillant would come to congratulate me on my saint's day, bringing me flowers and oranges, even though she never had ten sous saved up. Poverty had brought us together. I could never give her more than ten francs, often borrowed for the occasion. This may explain my promise to go to the wedding. I hoped to forget my own worries in these poor folk's enjoyment.

The party, the dance, all took place on the first floor of a wine-merchant's in the Rue de Charenton. The large room was lit by lamps with tin reflectors and papered with filthy wallpaper up to the height of the tables; along the walls there were wooden benches. Eighty people, in their Sunday best, decked with flowers and ribbons, their faces flushed, all in carnival mood, were dancing as if the world were coming to an end. The bride and groom were kissing to everyone's satisfaction and there were facetious hee-hees and haw-haws which were really less vulgar than the timid ogling of so-called well-brought-up girls. The whole company expressed an animal happiness which was somehow infectious.

But neither the faces of the people at this gathering, nor the wedding, nor anyone of the company have anything to do
Facino Cane

with my story. The only thing to bear in mind is the unusual setting. Imagine the wretched, red-painted shop, smell the wine, listen to the shouts of joy, stay a while in this suburb, amongst these workers, these old men, these poor women who, for one night, have given themselves up to pleasure.

The orchestra was composed of three blind men from the Quinze-Vingts; the first played the violin, the second the clarinet and the third the flageolet. They were paid a lump sum of seven francs for the night, between the three of them. Of course, for that price they didn’t perform Rossini or Beethoven; they played what they wanted to or what they could. With charming tact no one complained! Their music assaulted my cardrooms so violently that, after casting a glance at the company, I looked at the blind trio and was inclined to indulgence as soon as I recognized their uniform. The musicians were sitting in a window bay, so that one had to be quite near them to see their faces clearly. I did not go up to them immediately, but when I did, in an unaccountable way, nothing else mattered. The wedding-party and its music ceased to exist; my curiosity was excited to the highest degree, for my soul passed into the body of the clarinet player. Both the violinist and the flageolet-player had quite ordinary faces, the usual faces of the blind, intense, attentive and serious, but the clarinetist’s was one of those phenomena which arrest the attention of an artist or a philosopher.

Imagine Dante’s death-mask lit up by the red glow of the lamp and crowned with a forest of silver-white hair. The bitter, sorrowful expression of this magnificent face was enhanced by blindness, for the power of thought gave a new life to the dead eyes. It was as if a burning gleam emanated from them, the effect of a single relentless desire which was vigorously marked on a high brow, furrowed with wrinkles like stone-courses in an old wall. The old man puffed away at random, without paying any attention to the time or the tune; his fingers went up and down touching the old keys mechanically. He did not worry about playing wrong notes, but neither

dancers nor my Italian’s two acolytes noticed them; for I was sure that he was an Italian and in fact I was right. There was something great and masterful about this blind man who kept within himself an Odyssey doomed to oblivion. It was a greatness so real that it triumphed even over his abject condition, a masterfulness so strong that it dominated his poverty. Not one of the violent passions which can lead a man to good as well as to evil, make him a criminal or a hero, was absent from that nobly formed, sallow Italian face. It was a face with overhanging, grey eyebrows that cast their shade over the deep sockets below; I trembled lest I should see the light of thought reappear in them, just as I would be afraid to see robbers armed with torches and daggers come to the mouth of a cave. There was a lion in that cage of flesh and blood, a lion whose fury had been spent in vain against its iron bars. The conflagration of despair had expired in its ashes, the lava had grown cold. But the furrows, the devastation, a little smoke bore witness to the violence of the eruption, to the ravages of the fire. These thoughts aroused by the man’s appearance were as burning in my soul as they were frozen on his face.

Between each dance, the violinist and the flageolet-player, busy in good earnest with their bottle and glass, hung their instruments on a button of their reddish-coloured coats; then they stretched out their hands to a little table placed in the window bay where their refreshments stood, and always handed the Italian a full glass which he could not take himself because the table was behind his chair. Each time, the clarinetist thanked them with a friendly nod. Their movements were carried out with that precision which is always so surprising in the blind from the Quinze-Vingts and which makes you think they can see. I approached the three blind men to listen to their conversation, but when I was close to them, they sized me up carefully, and, presumably not recognizing a workman’s temperament, kept quiet.

"Where do you come from, you the clarinetist?"

"From Venice," replied the blind man with a slight Italian accent.
Facino Cane

"Were you born blind, or were you blinded by..."

"As the result of an accident," he replied sharply, "a cursed atrophy of the optic nerve."

"Venice is a beautiful city; I have always had a longing to go there."

The old man's face lit up, his wrinkles changed, he was deeply moved.

"If I went there with you, you would not be wasting your time," he said.

"Don't talk to him about Venice," said the violinist, "or you'll set our Doge off; especially as he has already got two bottles inside him, that prince of ours!"

"Come on, get going, old Canard," said the flageolet-player.

They all three began to play, but while they were playing the four dances, the Venetian was aware of me. He could feel the enormous interest which I took in him. His face lost its cold, sad expression. Some hope I don't know what - enlivened all his features, slid into his wrinkles like a blue flame. He smiled and wiped his forehead, that bold, terrible forehead. Finally he brightened up like a man about to start on his hobby-horse.

"How old are you?" I asked.

"Eighty-two!"

"How long have you been blind?"

"For nearly fifty years now," he replied in a tone which showed that his regrets arose not only from the loss of his sight, but also from the loss of some great power of which he had been despised.

"Why do they call you "the Doge"?" I asked.

"Oh, they're just teasing," he said, "I am a patron of Venice and I would have been Doge like the others."

"Then, what's your name?"

"Here," he said, "they call me old Canet. They never could write my name in any other way on the registers. But, in Italian, it is Marco Facino Cane, principe de Vareso."

"What, you are descended from the famous condottiere, Facino Cane, whose conquests passed to the Dukes of Milan?"

"E vero," he said. "At that time, Cane's son took refuge in Venice to escape being killed by the Visconti and had himself inscribed in the Golden Book. But now neither Cane nor the book exists any more." And he made a terrible gesture which expressed his expired patriotism and his disgust for human affairs.

"But if you were a senator of Venice, you must have been rich: how did you come to lose your fortune?"

At this question he turned his head towards me, with a truly tragic movement as if to examine me and replied, "In misfortunes."

He no longer thought of drinking and, with a gesture, refused the glass of wine which the old flageolet-player was just at that moment handing to him; then he bowed his head. These details were not of a kind to dampen my curiosity. While these three machine-like musicians were playing the dance, I examined the old Venetian noblemen with the avid feelings of a twenty-year-old. I could see Venice and the Adriatic; I could see it in ruins on that ruined face. I walked in that town so beloved of its inhabitants. I went from the Rialto to the Grand Canal, from the Quai des Esclavons to the Lido; I went back to the cathedral, so distinctively sublime I looked at the windows of the Casa d'Oro, each of which is differently ornamented; I gazed at the old palaces with their wealth of marble, and, in short, at all those wonders which the scholar appreciates all the more in that he can colour them as he pleases and does not deprive his dreams of their poetry by the sight of reality. I reconstructed the life-history of this offspring of the greatest of the condottieri, trying to discover in it the traces of his misfortunes and the causes of that deep-seated physical and moral deterioration which made even more beautiful the newly revived sparks of greatness and nobility. His thoughts were no doubt the same as mine, for I think that blindness speeds up intellectual communication, by preventing the attention's being frittered away on external objects. I did not have long to wait for a proof of our fellow-feeling. Facino Cane stopped playing, rose from his chair, came up to me and said, "Let's go." The effect of his words on me was like an electric shock. I gave him my arm and we went out.
Facino Cane

When we were in the street, he said, 'Will you take me to Venice, be my guide there? Will you have faith in me? You will be richer than the ten richest companies of Amsterdam or London, richer than the Rothschilds, in short, rich as the heroes of the Arabian Nights.'

I thought the man was mad, but there was a power in his voice which I obeyed. I let him lead me and he took me towards the most of the Bastille as if he had had eyes. He sat down on a stone in a very lonely place where the bridge which connects the Saint-Martin canal to the Seine has since been built. I placed myself on another stone in front of the old man whose white hair gleamed like silver thread in the moonlight. The silence, barely disturbed by the bustling noise which reached us from the boulevards, the purity of the night, everything combined to make this a truly fantastic scene.

'You speak of millions to a young man, and you think that he would hesitate to endure a thousand ills in order to obtain them! Are you not making fun of me?'

'May I die without confession,' he said passionately, 'if what I tell you is not true. I was twenty years old, as you are at this moment. I was rich, handsome and noble. I began with the greatest of all follies, love, I loved as men no longer love, even to the extent of hiding in a chest and risking being stabbed there without having received anything but the promise of a kiss. To die for her seemed the most important thing in life. In 1760 I fell in love with a Vendramini, a woman of eighteen who was married to a Sagredo, one of the richest senators, a man of thirty who was crazy about his wife. My mistress and I were as innocent as two cherubim when il sposa surprised us talking of love. I was unarmed; his blow missed me; I leapt on him and strangled him with my two hands, wringing his neck like a chicken's. I wanted to go away with Bianca but she was unwilling to follow me. That's what women are like! I went away alone; I was found guilty and my possessions were confiscated in favour of my heirs. But I had taken away with me my diamonds, five rolled-up pictures by Titian, and all my gold. I went to Milan where I was left undisturbed. My case was of no interest to the State.'

'Just one little comment before I go on,' he said after a pause. 'Whether or not a woman's fancies influence her child while she is carrying him or when she conceives him, it is certain that, during her pregnancy, my mother had a passion for gold. I have a mania for gold which I feel such a need to satisfy that, whatever situation I have been in, I have never been without gold in my possession. I handle gold all the time. When I was young I always wore jewellery and I always had two or three hundred ducats on me.'

As he said these words, he pulled two ducats out of his pocket and showed them to me.

'I can sense gold. Although I am blind, I stop in front of jewellers' shops. This passion has ruined me. I became a gambler in order to play for gold. I was not a cheat and I was cheated and ruined. When my fortune was all gone, I was seized by a furious desire to see Bianca. I returned secretly to Venice, I found her again; for six months I was happy, hidden and kept by her. I thought with delight of ending my life in this way. She was courted by the Proveditori who guessed he had a rival. In Italy they can sense these things. He spied on us and surprised us in bed, the coward! You can imagine how fiercely we fought. I didn't kill him but I wounded him severely. This adventure destroyed my happiness. Since that day, I have never found another Bianca. I have enjoyed great pleasures; I have lived at the court of Louis XV among the most celebrated women; nowhere have I found the virtues, the charms, the love of my adored Venetian. The Provedittoo had his servants with him. He called them, they surrounded the palace and entered it. I defended myself so that I could die within sight of Bianca, who helped me to kill the Provedittoo. She had earlier refused to escape with me, but after six months of happiness she wanted to die with me and was hit several times. I was wrapped in a large cloak that they flung round me, lifted into a gondola and taken away to an underground dungeon. I was twenty-two and I clung so tightly to the stomp of my sword that to get it, they would have had to cut off my hand. By a strange chance, or rather

2. The Provedittoo was an official of the Venetian Republic.
inspired by some instinct of self-preservation, I hid this iron object in a corner, as if it might be of some use to me. My wounds were dressed; none of them was mortal. At twenty-two one recovers from anything. I was to be beheaded; I pretended to be ill in order to gain time. I thought I was in a cell next to the canal; my plan was to escape by digging a hole under the wall and swimming across the canal, at the risk of being drowned. These were the calculations on which my hope was based. Every time the gaoler brought me food I read the sigils written on the walls, such as “To the palace”, “To the canal”, “To the underground passage”, and I finally discerned a plan, which did not worry me much, but which could be explained by the then unfinished state of the ducal palace. With the genius which the desire to recover one’s liberty inspires, I managed, by feeling the surface of a stone with my finger tips, to decipher an Arabic inscription in which the man who had done the work informed his successors that he had dislodged two stones from the last row of masonry and dug eleven feet underground. To continue his work, one had to scatter the fragments of stone and mortar resulting from the excavation over the actual ground of the cell. Even if the gaolers and the inquisitors had not been reassured by the form of the building, which only needed to be guarded on the outside, the arrangement of the dungeons, to which you went down several steps, allowed the ground-level to be gradually raised, without the gaolers’ noticing anything. This enormous labour had been wasted, at least for the unknown man who had undertaken it, for his failure to finish it proclaimed his death. If his efforts were not to be for ever wasted, a prisoner had to know Arabic, and I had studied oriental languages at the Armenian convent. A sentence written at the back of the stone told the fate of this unhappy man who had died a victim of his own immense wealth which Venice had coveted and seized. It took me a month’s work to achieve anything. While I was working, and in the moments when I was overwhelmed by fatigue, I could hear the sound of gold, I could see gold in front of me, I was dazzled by diamonds. Now, I am coming to the point. One night, my blunted sword struck wood. I sharpened the stump and made a hole in this wood. In order to work, I crawled along on my belly like a snake, I stripped myself naked so that I could burrow like a mole with my hands in front, supporting myself on the rock itself. Two days before I was to appear before my judges, I determined to make one last effort during the night. I made a hole through the wood and my sword touched nothing on the other side. You can imagine how surprised I was when I put my eye to the hole. I was in the wooden panelling of a cellar where, by a dim light, I could see a pile of gold. The Doge and one of the ten were in this cellar; I could hear their voices. From their conversation I learned that here lay the secret treasure of the Republic, the gifts of the doges and the reserves of booty called “the pence of Venice”, resulting from a tax on the spoils of expeditions. I was saved! When the gaoler came, I suggested to him that he should help me to escape and go away with me, taking with us as much as we could carry. It was a chance in a million; he accepted. A ship was about to set sail for the Levant, all precautions were taken and Bianca helped to organize the plan which I dictated to my accomplice. In order not to give the alarm, Bianca was to join us at Smyrna. In one night we enlarged the hole and we went down into the secret treasury of Venice. What a night it was! I saw four large casks full of gold. In the adjoining room silver was piled up in two equal piles; a path was left between them so that one could cross the room in which coins were banked up against the walls to a height of five feet. I thought the gaoler would go mad; he was singing, jumping, laughing, dancing about in the gold. I threatened to strangle him if he wasted time or made a noise. In his delight, he didn’t at first see a table covered with diamonds. I pounced on it so skillfully that I filled my sailor’s jacket and my trouser-pockets. My God! I didn’t take a third of them. Under the table were gold ingots. I persuaded my companion to fill with gold as many sacks as we could carry, pointing out to him that it was the only way to avoid being discovered in a foreign country. “The pearls, the jewels, the diamonds would betray us,” I told him. Despite our enormous greed, we could only take two
Facino Cane

thousand gold pounds, which required six journeys across the prison to the gondola. The sentinel at the water-gate had been bribed with a bag of ten gold pounds. As for the gondoliers, they thought they were serving the Republic. At daybreak, we set off. When we were well out at sea and I recalled the night that had just passed, when I remembered the feelings I had experienced, and saw in my mind's eye that enormous treasure of which, according to my calculations, I was leaving behind thirty millions in silver and twenty millions in gold, several millions in diamonds, pearls and rubies. I became almost mad. I had gold-fever. We landed at Smyrna and reembarked immediately for France. As we were boarding the French ship, God did me the favour of ridding me of my accomplice. At the time, I didn't think of all the consequences of this mishap; I rejoiced at it. We were so excited that we remained stunned, without saying a word to each other, waiting until we were in a place of safety to enjoy our riches at our ease. It is not surprising that the fellow went berserk. You will see how God has punished me. I didn't feel at ease until I had sold two thirds of my diamonds in London and Amsterdam, and turned my gold dust into commercial assets. For five years, I remained in hiding in Madrid. Then in 1770 I came to Paris, using a Spanish name, and lived in the most brilliant style. Bianca was dead. In the midst of my pleasures, when I was enjoying a fortune of six millions, I was struck with blindness. I have no doubt that this affliction was the result of my stay in prison and of my labours in the stone, unless my power of seeing gold constituted an abuse of the power of vision that predestined me to lose my sight. At the time, I was in love with a woman to whom I hoped to link my destiny. I had told her the secret of my name, she belonged to a powerful family and I had great hopes of the favour showed to me by Louis XV. I had put my trust in this woman who was a friend of Madame du Barry. She advised me to consult a famous London oculist. But after a stay of some months in London, she deserted me in Hyde Park, having robbed me of all my fortune and leaving me without resources.

3. Madame du Barry was the favourite of Louis XV.

Facino Cane

Since I was obliged to conceal my name which it would have exposed me to the vengeance of Venice, I could ask no one's help. I was afraid of Venice. Spies which this woman had attached to my person exploited my infirmity. I spare you the recital of adventures worthy of Gil Blas. Your Revolution came. I was forced to go into the Quinze-Vingts where this creature got me admitted after having had me detained for two years at Bicêtre as a madman. I have never been able to kill her; I couldn't see to do it and I was too poor to pay another to do it for me. If, before losing Benedetto Carpi, my gaoler, I had consulted him about the situation of my cell, I would have been able to find the treasure again and go back to Venice when the Republic was destroyed by Napoleon. However, in spite of my blindness, let us go to Venice! I shall find the door of the prison again. I shall see the gold through the walls, I shall sense it under the waters where it lies buried, for the events which overthrew the power of Venice were such that the secret of this treasure must have died with Vendramino, Bianca's brother. He was a doge who, I hoped, would have made my peace with the ten. I wrote to the First Consul, I proposed an agreement with the Emperor of Austria, they all dismissed me as a madman. Come, let us set off for Venice. We shall start out beggars, we shall come back millionaires. We shall buy back my property and you will be my heir, you will be Prince of Vareso.'

I was staggered by this confidence, which in my imagination assumed the proportions of a poem, and looking at that white head in front of the black water of the moat of the Bastille, water as still as the canals of Venice, I made no reply. Facino Cane presumably thought that, like all the others, I judged him with a contemptuous pity. He expressed in a gesture the whole philosophy of despair. Perhaps this tale had taken him back to his happy days in Venice. He gripped his clarinet and played a melancholy Venetian song, a barcarolle, with all the talent he used to have when he was a nobleman in love. It was rather like the 'Supra flamma Babylonis', My eyes filled with

4. Psalm 137, 'By the waters of Babylon (we sat down and wept)', the lament of the Jews in exile in Babylon.
Facino Cane

tears. If a few belated strollers happened to wander along the Boulevard Bourdon, they probably stopped to listen to this exile’s last prayer, the last regret for a lost name, mingled with the memory of Bianca. But gold soon got the upper hand again, and the fatal passion quenched that glimmer of youth.

‘That treasure,’ he said, ‘I can see it all the time, when I’m awake and in my dreams. I walk about amongst it; the diamonds gleam, I am not as blind as you think. The gold and the diamonds light up my darkness, the darkness of the last Facino Cane, for my tide goes to the Memmi. Good God, the murderer’s punishment has begun without delay! Ave Maria.’

He recited some prayers which I could not hear.

‘We shall go to Venice,’ I exclaimed as he got up.

‘Then I have found a man, at last,’ he cried, his face flushed with excitement.

I gave him my arm and led him back. He shook my hand at the door of the Quinze-Vingts, just as some of the people from the wedding were going home, shouting at the tops of their voices.

‘Shall we set off tomorrow?’ asked the old man.

‘As soon as we have some money.’

‘But we can go on foot. I shall ask for alms... I am sturdy and when a man sees gold before him, he is young.’

Facino Cane died during the winter, having lingered for two months. The poor man had caught a chill.

1836

Pierre Grassou

Every time that you have gone, with serious intent, to the annual exhibition of painting and sculpture as it has been held since the 1830 Revolution, have you not been overcome by feelings of distress, boredom and sadness at the sight of the long, crowded galleries? There has been no real Salon since 1830. For a second time the Louvre has been taken by storm; this time by the crowd of artists who have maintained their position there. Formerly, by showing the very best works of art, the Salon carried off the greatest honours for the works which were shown there. Among the two hundred chosen pictures, the public would make a further choice; unknown hands would award a prize to a masterpiece. Passionate discussions would arise about a canvas. The insultslavished on Delacroix and Ingres served their fame no less well than the praise and the fanaticism of their partisans. Today neither the crowd nor professional art critics get excited about the products on show at this bazaar. They have to make the choice which formerly the examining jury used to make and their attention flags at the task. And by the time they have finished choosing, the Exhibition is about to close. Before 1817, the pictures accepted never occupied more space than the first two rows of the long gallery where the old masters are, but that year they filled the whole of that space, to the public’s great astonishment. Historical painting, genre painting, easel painting, landscapes, flowers, animals, and water colours – these seven categories could not offer more than twenty pictures worthy of being looked at by the public who cannot take in a large number of works. As the number of artists got bigger and bigger the selection committee ought to have become more and more difficult to please. Once the Salon overflowed into the main gallery, everything was lost. The Salon ought to have remained a fixed, limited place, of