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notes

David S. Cole is a sophomore from Lowell House who appears for the first time in the ADVOCATE. His play *En Croisade* was the winning entry in the first annual ADVOCATE—HDC playwrighting contest, and will be performed by an HDC workshop during the spring . . . David Berman, a first-year law student, has been in the past a mathematician, a classicist, and an advertising executive. He publishes here for the first time . . . Deborah Eibel's poem is her first piece in the ADVOCATE also. She is a first-year graduate student . . . Jeremy Johnston, Lampoon editor and expatriate gremlin, once again disdains parochial loyalty to a single publication by submitting to the ADVOCATE . . . Anne Miner plans a career in medicine . . . Our apologies to Alan Berger, whose short story *Doggy* appeared in the December issue. The passage beginning "Mickey was as strong as Fritzzy . . .," and ending "Now Fitzzy was happy" should come after "You don't turn into a candle" rather than" . . . when he hit the sidewalk".

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A Comedy In Certain Quarters

CHARACTERS

The Bishop
The Merchant
The Baron
The Angel

EN CROISADE

The summer of 1202, the deck of a Venetian galley en route to Constantinople during the Fourth Crusade. A stocky, dark wood railing, about four feet high, runs along the upstage (larboard) edge of the yellowed deck, disappearing off-right and off-left. Two brief stairways are set up against the railing, respectively right and left of up-center.

Right-center, and extending back almost to the railing, is an unpretentious ship's cabin, to the down-stage wall of which, left of a narrow door, is fastened the BARON's colorful heraldry. Left-center and extending back almost to the railing, is a higher and wider cabin, raised above the deck on a couple of concentric square risers, the front edges of which serve as stairs to a door in the down-stage wall of the cabin. From a pole on the roof of the cabin, a banner hangs out toward us. The banner's design, a long red cross on a white field, marks this cabin as the BISHOP's

The BISHOP, in elegant but faded clerical attire, sits on the second stair to his cabin; elbows on knees, chin on folded hands. The BARON stands left of the righthand stairway against the railing; his hands, slightly out from his sides, rest alertly on the rail. He is facing up-stage, intently scanning the sea for Constantinople, which he expects momentarily to appear on the horizon. Next to his right hand, on the railing, is a spyglass. In the down-right area, the MERCHANT is sprawled out asleep along a down-right up-center line. He uses a moneybag for a pillow.

It is just after dawn. The action of the play continues until about noon, and the stage grows correspondingly brighter.

BISHOP

When I was a child . . . no, I was never a child. Well, a young bishop, then. When I was a young bishop, one looked upon the Crusade with a certain reverence. Since that time, intentions have done premature highway service; motives remain aloof from the war effort; embattled piety begins to appear not quite the thing. Nevertheless, Europe persists in

her reverence. Why, exactly? That is a question to which my personal contact with the movement has supplied no answer. As on most other military expeditions of the High Middle Ages—I speak from long experience as a political bishop—one encounters Provençal hotheads, French *realpoliticians* and Italian financiers. It would be wrong to infer that these parties hold the Crusade to be “just another campaign”. On the contrary, the barons look forward to unparalleled adventures, the Frenchmen to unprecedented *tours d'état*, and the money-lenders to undreamt-of rates of interest. Differences of degree, however, do not imply differences of intent; yet somehow this gang of strategists, speculators and roaring boys has got itself declared a Holy Army. Somehow.

I would not have you think it my way to dawdle in antechambers. I *do* attach some importance to exemplars (which the Baron must get by without); for one is often as not received in the vestibule. No, *they* do as they please, I begin at the Problem, *in medias res*. Do I appear to have chosen? But choice, as the Merchant so delightfully puts it, is an “illusion”. No blaze of speculation but anguish sparks the tinder. And serves for tinder. It's all done with anguish. Of course, there's some variation in respect of method . . .

BARON

(still facing up-stage)

City of golden shadows, unreasoned object of the Western Dream, cast the glare of morning from your congested towers; welcome the European knights.

(turning out)

Why have we come to Constantinople? I can say by whose orders; I can say for whose profit. It is my training to be competent in answering such questions. But with what object I cannot say. Oh, there's that business with the Greek pretender: If we crown Alexis, he will help us meet the terms of the Venetian loan. But I have long since left off trusting in the ostensible. Ten thousand men cross the world and you will tell me why in a dozen words? Come! We feudal barons are simple creatures, but the affairs in which we are compelled to participate are not simple. And complexity once recognized becomes calculable in its own right. Whereas you begin by making allowance for the incomprehensible, you soon come to realize that there is nothing else to make allowance for. Each situation bears the quick-flowering seeds of insolubility. Each man has his reasons, each leader of men his reasons, each ob-

server a taste for inference. And we're to disentangle something in the way of a Reason? I would suggest a few preliminary inquiries. We overplay that difficulty; still, man's hard going.

(begins to resume his watch, then suddenly turns out again)

I wish it to be understood that the preceding remarks reflect no lack of confidence in the leaders of this expedition nor in the objectives of Holy Church.

(He resumes his watch.)

MERCHANT

(starting up)

Oh, what a morning-dream! Terrible! But then, morning-dreams always are. So intense! Bishop, let me tell you: I was aboard a crusading galley, sleeping a dreamless sleep, when suddenly I awoke, leapt up and cried, "Oh, what a morning-dream! Terrible! But then, morning dreams always are. So . . ."

(Realizing what he is saying, he breaks off, buries his face in his hands. After a moment, he raises his head. Plaintively)

I keep losing my path in time—isn't that silly?

(more calmly)

It is very humiliating for a man whose occupation presupposes a certain hard-headedness, that he has never learned to distinguish reality from dream. There's no comfort in the idea that a particular unpleasantness may be only illusion, since it works the same way with pleasure. I sleep through actuality and waken into dream. I could swear I'm not. Because there are tricks. Someone puts himself out awfully; however, I won't be fooled into being. Or then, the incapacity may not be mine. I don't discount that possibility. Like as not, I hold still while the world now looms into being, now shies back into the void. One or the other. My misgivings are so Olympian as to render their very verbalization painful. Sophomorphism is a luxury which the scion of a great mercantile house dare not permit himself.

(He yawns)

My metaphysical gloom has already resulted in the cancellation of three large accounts.

(He begins to lie back, then sits up again.)

He goes back to sleep. Suspended by a visible, indeed, an obvious flying halter, the ANGEL descends from the up-left wings, flapping his arms and smiling foolishly. His wings are of tinfoil and his halo is held in place by a conspicuous length of wire. Coming to rest on the railing above the left-hand stairway to the deck, he shakes himself, pulls straight his robe (to which the halter serves as a belt). Raising his arm as if to begin a benediction, he takes a step forward, but is restrained by the halter. When he unfastens it, his robe flows loose, considerably dignifying his appearance. As if the change in appearance had worked a change in his character, he suddenly becomes serious and reverent. He falls on his knees, clasps his hands, and worships the halter, which slowly ascends skywards. As soon as it is out

of sight, he jumps to his feet, resumes his supercilious air.)

ANGEL

(as if arriving in a circle of familiar friends)

It's me!

(Since the Baron is intent on his watch, the MERCHANT asleep, and the BISHOP lost in thought, there is no reply. The ANGEL continues with greater dignity.)

The wail of disbelief reaches to the throne of God. To hunger and pain, to thirst and sexual dissatisfaction, the King of Kings has assigned a purgative value: and therefore these sufferings are let run their course. But no soul is the better for its misgivings. Though a man come out from uncertainty, the pit is ever beside his feet. Thus saith the Lord (consequently): *I will make understanding to flourish in the midst of you; I will ennoble your prose style.* Come unto me

(to MERCHANT)

you who have overdone it with semblance;

(to BARON)

you who have fallen out of touch;

(to BISHOP)

you in whom the capacity to believe has atrophied. Come unto me and I shall give you something—ever so nice! For I am one of God's angels.

(Only the BISHOP has heard. Unruffled, he turns to the ANGEL.)

BISHOP

And I one of His men. So glad to meet you.

ANGEL

(taken aback)

Glad . . . ?

BISHOP

Yes. Glad.

(pause)

I suppose that *was* the intention?

ANGEL

Oh, yes . . . However, your way of putting it . . . that particular expression . . .

(BISHOP laughs violently)

I beg your pardon?

BISHOP

Are you really an angel?

ANGEL

I suppose so. I've never given it much thought.

(BISHOP again laughs violently.)

Are you really a man?

BISHOP

Oh, unmistakably.

(holding up his hand)

You can tell by the fingers where the claws should be. And other characteristics of a somewhat less equivocal nature. Yes, a man, as they say . . .

(struck by a possibility)

And since we're on the subject, might I ask you . . .

ANGEL
(earnestly)

What is it, Bishop? I want you to know that I am interested in answering all questions.

BISHOP

(gives another laugh, but quickly stifles it)

You would do better to specialize. I've tried catholicity and I promise you . . . but the cases don't compare. Still, I'm not sure we care for your miscellaneous opinions. In fact, this is one of the very few issues . . .

(ANGEL makes a movement)

You were going to object?

ANGEL
(shocked)

Oh, no, never to object! Perhaps to weep and pray, with the object of intercession . . .

BISHOP

Well, then: just before you . . . got here, I was asking myself, in regard to the Crusade . . .

(The ANGEL looks perplexed; the BISHOP is embarrassed)

I suppose that doesn't strike you as very fundamental, but I assure you, there are implications . . .

(to himself)

Oh, he wouldn't understand that!

(to the ANGEL)

Well, to put it simply . . .

ANGEL

I beg your pardon . . .

BISHOP

A curious inversion.

ANGEL
(vaguely)

Did you say, "crusade"?

BISHOP

Yes. Now—

(stopping cold)

You *have* heard of the Crusade?

ANGEL

Ought I have? I mean, is it something so very important?

BISHOP

Important!

(reflecting)

I would think so, considering your . . . vocation.

ANGEL

Oh, of course, that religious excess you people have . . . "Holy War", as you offensively put it.

BISHOP

(for once open-mouthed)

Then, in your circle . . .

ANGEL

We're not so impressed as you might think.

BISHOP

Well! I've always imagined that the Savior's fingernails were among the wonders of the three worlds, but . . .

ANGEL

He sees it as an impertinence. He's annoyed that these fighters and bankers suppose that His church need be compassed round with their bucklers and

their coin. And if I may say so, he is disappointed with the clergy for allowing such error to persist.

BISHOP

Dissatisfaction noted, but we're not in much of a position to reprove. The struggle is ours, too; and we go at it in the deadliest way. What can sword or galley or blockade accomplish against the fury of the aroused dialectician?

(pause; to himself)

I guess just about anything.

ANGEL

He can do without all that sort of thing, you know.

BISHOP

I am sure. But to return to my question . . .

ANGEL

Oh, yes! Now, what was it again? Questions are such fun!

BISHOP

(deliberately)

Why, despite failure and corruption on all levels, is the Crusade still revered?

ANGEL

But as I just left off telling you . . .

BISHOP

(annoyed)

No, no; among men, among *men!*

ANGEL

(quite unprepared to consider an aspect of the problem which neither interests nor concerns him)

Oh!

(improvising)

Well . . . , I suppose the people who go in for crusading are well-intentioned enough.

(on firmer ground)

Which is admirable, and, I'm told, not in the usual way of things here.

BISHOP

Come, that explains nothing. These same knights who now fancy themselves "Protectors of the Lord's Church" were yesterday out tearing up good farmland and raping country women. But are they detested, these "well-meaning" gentry? On the contrary, they are invoked, acclaimed, wished godspeed. How do you account for the inconsistency? Can it have anything to do with a bit of red cloth sewn onto a breastplate?

ANGEL

That bit of cloth is a symbol of the papal service. The spirit is to be revered even in its poorest vessels.

BISHOP

Do you really think that the association of such men with the Church can raise them in anyone's esteem? I should think the more probable result would be a Druidic renaissance.

ANGEL

Perhaps so . . . But I'll never really understand the religious temperament. Don't you think you could answer the question better yourself. I mean, you seem to have all the pertinent information . . .

BISHOP

(recollecting something)

Yes, certainly. How odd that . . . I . . .

(*very perfunctorily*)
Thank you: that will do.

ANGEL

I say, the dignity of the eternal doesn't seem to have much effect on you. I hardly expected to be taken in stride like this. Aren't you in the least surprised . . . disturbed . . .

(*hopefully*)
awed?

BISHOP

Ought I be?

ANGEL

No, of course not. There's no inevitable reason . . . I SAY, *there's no inevitable reason* why you ought to be surprised, or disturbed, or . . .

(*swallowing his pride*)
awed.

(*more quickly*)

It's only that I expected a chance for a scene with miracles and what-not. I'm told that's usually necessary when one has to do with men.

(*hastening to add*)

Of course, *officially*, I'm delighted that you've "hearkened to the call"—is that the expression?

BISHOP

Just a moment. If you're going to "have to do" with men, I suggest that you hasten to develop a sense of irony. And get to know indifference when you see it.

ANGEL

(*open-mouthed*)

Indifference to grace! To *grace*, mind you!

(*musings to himself*)

How would that work . . . ?

BISHOP

I bring it off by an effort of will. Or, more precisely, by a recollection. Now consider: I happen upon an angel. I'm—tempted, as anyone would be. However, in my case there are extenuating circumstances. It's not a consistent sort of reaction. So, I have simply got to take hold. I do so: Good. I can now examine your credentials in the cold glare of ignorance.

(*pause*)

I advise against impatience.

(*pause*)

Well, I'll say this much: It's kind of you to put my convictions to the test. They can always use it.

ANGEL

Am I to understand . . . Unless I misconstrue . . . I say, who are you to disbelieve in me anyway?

BISHOP

I don't exactly disbelieve in you. I'm not in the habit of conversing with people I disbelieve in.

(*to himself*)

At least, not so far as I've been able to ascertain . . .

ANGEL

That's no answer!

BISHOP

True enough.

ANGEL

I'm very hurt. When I particularly take the trouble . . . Oh, but what good's a hint not taken, eh? I

mean . . . oh, it's beastly of you . . . I can't say.

(*He sobs violently; the MERCHANT is awakened. The MERCHANT sits up, rubs his eyes, sees the BISHOP talking with an angel and—rubs his eyes again. Suddenly, the MERCHANT appears to have made a momentous discovery. He begins sneaking over toward the BISHOP and the ANGEL.*)

BISHOP

Well, taste it, taste it. Your sort has altogether too little experience along these lines. And it would do you good. In fact, it's all you need: to join in the common impotence. "Are you incommoded?" remarked the fish to the drowning sailor; "And yet it is my element."

ANGEL

And the man a bishop! To such hands and hearts has the Lord's Church come down!

BISHOP

We're only human, as they say. In fact, conspicuously human, remarkably human.

ANGEL

Reflect, unworthy priest, that your iniquities have consequences. A flock precious in the Lord's sight goes thirsting for that you will not drink. My lament is for the lost folk; and my curse is on those misleading them.

BISHOP

When you come down to it, we don't run your church so badly. As to inaccessibility, we could hardly have improved upon the present arrangement. But on the contrary, so accessible has the Church become, that in order to share in her colorful and gratifying heritage, a man need not even believe. He need not even feign belief. He has only to be born in Western Europe.

ANGEL

Blindest of the blind, what profits the life without the belief? The Church is not a masked ball; it is the everyday life of faith.

BISHOP

But belief is out of the question—as, of course, is disbelief. We understand, if you do not, that commitment is unthinkable; consequently, we do not require it. We understand, if you dare not, that faith presupposes cognitions which man cannot with certainty be said to possess; consequently, we do not require faith.

ANGEL

This is a Christian life with the soul gone out!

BISHOP

"Christian", did you say? I am happy to affirm that the Church, organized about a charming set of symbols, and administered with efficiency and imagination, has thus far kept free of Christian influence.

ANGEL

As I suspected! Vice and perplexity were ever the offspring of anticlericalism.

BISHOP

A detestable inclination! I consider, on the con-

trary, that in the distinction so carefully maintained between Catholic religion and Christian belief, consists the clergy's chiefest glory.

ANGEL

What do I care for your opinions? After a certain point, I don't listen for the words anymore. You are a cleric, a bishop to boot, and that I call disgustingly impious. How could it be otherwise? Your priesthood is a sneer and a belly-laugh at the expense of Christ's servants.

BISHOP

I allow a certain irony. But a laugh and a sneer—well, I'm just not that amused.

ANGEL

If you can't be of any use to God, nor he to you, why don't you leave Him alone?

BISHOP

(very excited)

I'll tell you why not. Let's just say that in spite of everything, I'm fool enough to play along. Let's suppose that I've decided, for reasons which are not quite relevant here, to transgress the gravest of the Ten Suggestions, and fashion the idol. Well, then, shall I be content with an occasional obeisance? No, by heaven, if I once elect for the sham, I will do it up royal. That I join the Church goes without saying, but why stop there? I proceed to master her ritual and doctrine, to reprove her laxities, and ultimately to govern her adherents. Because, don't you think that resolve is the next best thing to knowing something? Oh, I confess, it's a pitiful sort of affirmation, but just now, under the circumstances . . . I can't see my way to anything better. And irony has one real advantage: it rules out any but a pragmatic capitulation. That, to be perfectly frank, is a necessary precaution.

MERCHANT

(grotesquely ecstatic)

But you can never be too sure of your precautions, can you Bishop? Can you?

(indicating the ANGEL)

You, the holy one on the left. Slacken your guard just a trifle, omit one necessary precaution—and you are caught!

(The BISHOP and the ANGEL stare at him in astonishment; unheeding, he continues to the universe in general.)

I've caught them at it, caught them, CAUGHT THEM!

(with difficulty keeping calm enough to explain.)

Of course, I always realized that if my suspicions were correct, there must be plans and more plans.

(hysterically)

Plans, plans, plans!

(calming down a little)

Now, for example, to do—this ship, say, that's an intricate piece of chicanery. Has to be carefully thought out; committee meetings, assignment of contracts, plans. You don't suppose, I hope, that the Force of Deception has only to will and presto change the vast illusion blossoms into shapes and colors be-

fore me? By God, that would be a helluva way to run a railroad!

(assuming an unnatural whisper)

But they conceal, oh, they're very careful to conceal! You suspect nothing; open your eyes for the merest fraction of a second, and everything's there, down to the last bit of dust, the last star. It's like being Tantalus, waist-high in illusion with the fruit of reality always alert to recede from your grasp. But this time, God knows how, I have the fruit in my fist; I've got backstage, and here

(indicating the BISHOP and the ANGEL)

are the director and special effects man working out a new piece of business. Your pardon, gentlemen: I did not mean, did not hope, to interrupt. And what is it you prepare? Ah! A mock angel, complete with wire halo and tin wings. A lovely trick, just lovely. Do you see, you worldly-wise who blushed for my youthful imprecision when I suggested that life is a dream: Do you see? I have unveiled the sham; I have ripped the nothing from the nothing; I have . . .

(Evidently becoming aware of something dreadful, he stops cold)

But how stupid of me! You also were not real! Illusions denying illusions! Shadows that you were, how could you keep a straight face? How, for example, could you, Bishop . . . ? Wait! Before you answer, down on your knees;

(He forces the BISHOP to his knees)

Show the respect due a sentient creature from a coagulation of void. Now . . . !

(lights down, spot on the BISHOP.)

ANGEL and MERCHANT hold.)

BISHOP

(to the audience)

And by way of a reply? "Merchant, you're a young fool with your high talk about reality and this and that!" There you have the instinct. Which must, of course, be repressed as rigorously as the other. Perhaps more so: it's a more attractive instinct. Where on earth would I have acquired any rights over the absurd? It's more my way to concede "there's something in that" or "it may be he has a point there." No matter how crackbrained the whimsy, you may count upon my restive modicum of assent. True enough, on those terms life decays into a flaccid torture . . .

(lights up)

ANGEL

(sober and deliberate)

Who but a human being would ever have thought such thoughts? The devils know better. The beasts and plants know better. The rocks and clouds know better in knowing nothing.

BISHOP

You begin to understand.

ANGEL

(taking him up sharply)

I do not, I cannot understand.

(to the MERCHANT)

Is it, do you suppose, any more remarkable that the Lord of the Universe should hold my halo in place by His will simply than by His will congealed into a bit of wire? And as for my "tin" wings—try them and see.

(The MERCHANT crosses up behind the ANGEL, takes a wing in each hand and pulls; the wings come off easily. Clutching them triumphantly, the MERCHANT crosses away from the ANGEL, leaning over his shoulder at the ANGEL).

ANGEL

(very embarrassed)

Well, if you're going to pull *that* hard . . .

MERCHANT

Yes, we're going to pull that hard, pull and tear and flay our illusions. How else dare one deal with illusions?

ANGEL

(petulantly appealing to the BISHOP)

Oh . . . ! If I pull your ears hard enough, they'll come off. Does that prove you're not a man?

BISHOP

(shaking his head in amused disapproval)

Specious, specious.

ANGEL

"Specious!!" A personal revelation is vouchsafed you, the eternal truth dances before your eyes, the blinding light becomes for your sake an illumination, and then, having depleted every resource of human duplicity in the refutation of what ought to be self-evident truth, you declare the arguments of the divine minister to be specious!

BISHOP

(blandly)

You have it right so far.

MERCHANT

Divine minister! Rather an unimpressive ministry, yours.

ANGEL

Young man, be slow to judgment and take no delight in conviction,

(the BISHOP starts)

unless that conviction be of God, His laws and His Christ.

(the BISHOP relaxes)

The Bishop, here, whom you

(with a glance at the BISHOP)

very ironically consider my accomplice in deception, thinks I haven't much sense of this "life" business. But of so much I am sure: When the human and the divine go for each other, your kind of anguish just gets in the way. Over-scrupulous attention to detail

argues the tragedian, not the tragic hero.

MERCHANT

I tell you, I take a man's hand and wonder if I'm fingering void! But awareness is of all things most subject to decay, and life is a powerful corrosive. The reds and blues and bitters and sweets and noises and silences soak into one.

BISHOP

Intellect has a way of keeping her feet dry.

MERCHANT

Intellect cannot prevent the bloating of the sponge. She is engaged full time wringing it out.

BISHOP

No, I mean the will . . .

MERCHANT

Eat, move your bowels, sleep, dream, suffer, and then, if you've a moment free, have a thought to the will.

BISHOP

(to himself)

Mark up another triumph for impotence. One of several.

ANGEL

Yet I do beseech you . . .

MERCHANT

Never mind. The thing goes bad of its own accord. Consciousness of void turns tail and swallows itself, and, in fulfillment of the ancient adage, you get nothing for nothing.

ANGEL

(relieved and a little silly)

Oh! You see that? Wonderful!

MERCHANT

Well, it's thus and so: If all's sham, why not a sham divulcation of the sham? Always that step ahead . . .

ANGEL

I had hoped . . . but you answer absurdity with absurdity. Forsake ratiocination; come down off the rim of the turning wheel. Your misgivings give the lie to reason; will you call reason in their defense? And reason at its most exigent—doubt; doubt even of Him by Whose grace you are permitted to doubt.

MERCHANT

(as if reciting a creed)

Angel, creature of my fancy or the Other's, in the fire of Hell I would question the sear of the flame.

BISHOP

The sear of the flame and the snake's tooth. For in the flesh we have seen nothing in particular.

(The BARON suddenly picks up the

spyglass, puts it to his eye, and intently scans the waves. The others turn and watch him. He evidently sees nothing; with a sigh, he puts down the glass and resumes his former position. The others turn away. Pause.)

BISHOP

(languidly cheerful)

Come, Child of the Morning, give me your hand, that for once the two worlds not pass like ships in the fog, but sight and hail like merchantmen from a common port.

(to himself)

Or sea-dogs making ready a death struggle. Well, risk it; the real horror is the ghost ship.

ANGEL

(a little annoyed)

Now look here, is it quite sensible one moment to deny my mission and the next refer to me as "Child of the Morning"? Don't you see the contradiction?

BISHOP

See the contradiction? No, my connection is a little more intimate.

ANGEL

(petulantly)

Well, that's your trouble.

MERCHANT

You don't say?

ANGEL

(beginning to consider seriously his preceding speech, originally only an expression of irritation.)

Yes, come to think of it, there's the root of all your misery!

(enraptured)

Look what grace can accomplish! Unwilling that his creatures should suffer, God acquaints them with the etiology of their complaint. What beneficence! Fall on your knees, fortunate men; fall and praise.
(The ANGEL falls on his knees and praises.)

BISHOP

(to himself)

To change courts.

(to the Angel)

Rise. Rise and discuss.

(The ANGEL rises.)

I take it you are proud of your discovery?

(The ANGEL begins to protest.)

No subtleties, please; I withdraw the expression. But you *are* convinced that we have been done a turn?

(The ANGEL nods rapturously, would fall back on his knees, but the BISHOP restrains him.)

And yet, do you suppose that by uncovering the ambivalence in our thoughts and deeds, you point out anything which the thinking and doing of them does

not inculcate a thousand times over? I assure you, there wants no angelic messenger to educate us to our insufficiencies. Just what do you think we have in mind when we call life intolerable—what if not this very contradiction? But then, I suppose it's characteristic of the divine nature to mistake diagnosis for remedy. "Remedy", did I say? That's not quite the word! For you see, you've overlooked the one point which, not being so apparent, might be of some importance: One doesn't speak of a remedy . . .

ANGEL

You reckon without grace!

BISHOP

I so reckon.

ANGEL

Yet grace can accomplish all things.

BISHOP

I'm afraid we define her potency. Ours is the affair in which no decisive action can be taken. After all, the contradiction is not subject to disavowal, and it's muddleheaded to speak of escape from oneself. But you, spare us your insolent panaceas. We live the contradiction for want of an alternative.

MERCHANT

That is not so, Bishop. Let's try and leave in a little dignity. Death is an alternative.

BISHOP

Death is an imperative.

ANGEL

On the contrary . . .

BISHOP

(to ANGEL)

Immortal, do not presume to instruct men in death.

(to MERCHANT; surprised)

Whatever difference could death make?

MERCHANT

Why, this awareness of ours . . .

BISHOP

Faith, man, is my life my awareness? Are there not multitudes who get by just splendidly, unaware? Who raise crops and children and taxes to perpetuate that for which we can see no present excuse or need? Who, in a word, hang with unknowing zeal upon that most indefensible of creeds—purpose? Try out your enormous qualms on a grass farmer; talk moral philosophy with the starboard watch, and then do a little substituting in your equation. Men are not less alive for their less awareness.

ANGEL

No, indeed; *more* alive, for it is the simple of whom Christ says . . .

BISHOP

Leave off apologetics for a moment, can't you? The dissolution of dance into a show of grimaces—such, admittedly, is life. But the order which chance enjoins upon the dreariest throes—that is life also. Each and neither—the thorough commingling of the thoroughly immiscible. “Useless to rise” is the theme of discussions which continue till morning; while the sculptor graves “Eternal Beauty” onto his mound of dust. Neither and each. We are playthings of the extremities. Quick, now, while the reverence is upon me: Angel, your hand.

(The BISHOP puts out his hand in the manner of a suppliant; the ANGEL extends his hand elegantly. The tableau resembles Michelangelo's picture of God and Adam.)

The BISHOP'S face contorts with terror; he seems to see something in his mind's eye, and the terror gives way to ecstasy. With a sudden misgiving, he jerks his hand from the ANGEL'S, staggers away from the ANGEL.)

ANGEL

(in a tone of compassion which he has not used before)

What is the matter?

BISHOP

(half to himself, half to the ANGEL)

Shall I act horse-sensitive, pass palm over brow and whisper, “Nothing; a cramp, a chill”? Or, variety being the spice of life, shall I at this point do the votary, crying, “Creature of Light, by this sign I do know thee!”? Which alternative, Angel, skilled in alternatives?

ANGEL

I don't think you'd be much interested in my answer.

BISHOP

Well, then, neither. I shall play the fool and keep my peace.

ANGEL

(gently)

The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.

BISHOP

(angrily)

The fool hath nor heart nor words to speak in his heart, and his only wisdom is the terror of folly.

MERCHANT

(conciliatingly)

That is a great wisdom.

BISHOP

(more quietly)

Perhaps for some purposes. I have not remarked its particular applicability to living.

ANGEL

In that case . . .

BISHOP

Never mind. Let it be. I am not ashamed of the fool's role. It is a familiar one. At the parturition of the Kingdom I was in the next room discussing fees with the obstetrician.

BARON

(mistaking the last few words of the BISHOP, and angrily crossing down to expostulate with him.)

No, by heaven, there'll be no partition of the kingdom! This Byzantine frolic is bad enough, but do you suppose that when we take Jerusalem there'll be a man pig enough to ask a share in the spoils. “Spoils!” My God, what a way to talk about the Holy Land!

(As the BARON finishes his tirade, he catches sight of the ANGEL, cannot decide whether to fall on his knees or run.)

ANGEL

(Joyously throwing up his hands)

The faith lives!

(The ANGEL is transfigured. A white spot will do.)

BARON

(falling on his knees and worshipping)

Creature of Light, by this sign I do know thee!

ANGEL

(to the BARON)

My dear son, if your sentiments are representative of those of the feudal nobility, that institution has been much maligned!

(The ANGEL makes the sign of the cross over the BARON; the BISHOP shuffles uneasily.)

MERCHANT

For excessive devotion, there's no equalling a Provençal feudatory.

BARON

Oh, no, Child of God! My spirit is unworthy, my flesh the expectation of the worm. When the shadow holds converse with the light, where shall he find words, how shall he not offend? Yet hear me in mercy and look thou graciously upon my supplication.

MERCHANT

(embarrassed for all men)

Oh, how he overdoes it!

ANGEL

You see that? Then there is hope for you.

MERCHANT

As there is rest for the winds and tides, light for the devil's pit.

ANGEL

(sighs; turns to BARON)

Remember, good Baron, that it is possible to magnify the Lord without minimizing oneself.

(to himself)

I spoke that well.

BARON

(emphatically)

I am as naught . . .

ANGEL

Not really. In a sense, yes; but when you consider that we've even a dossier on the condition of your scalp . . .

BARON

Worm that I be, if I might presume to a single question!

ANGEL

Come, you too are a child of God, and, as I, ever in His presence. How may I help you?

BARON

Well, then, saving your reverence, I'd like to know . . . some things about man, and . . .

(blurting it out)

just why you're here.

(The ANGEL is puzzled)

MERCHANT

That is the point. In a way. It's what I call a fine, well thought-out question.

(The BARON acknowledges the compliment; to BISHOP)

I wonder we didn't think to ask him that.

BISHOP

We couldn't be sure he'd answer straightly. Besides, wouldn't you say that anyone in a position to raise such questions must subscribe to certain assumptions which, however it may be with the Baron, are quite unthinkable in your case or in mine?

MERCHANT

That's so.

(to BARON)

A stupid question, a senseless question, a hopeless question.

(The BARON acknowledges the insult.)

ANGEL

(coming out of his reverie)

Why am I here . . . ? Well, I heard the three of you talking . . . no. No, there was something, now as you mention it. But I can't think at the moment . . . just . . . what.

(brightly)

Instead, suppose I tell you a story!

BISHOP

I was under the impression that the angelic nature is pure contemplative.

MERCHANT

Not in the least. Anecdote is the usual recourse.

BARON

But my question . . .

ANGEL

Fear God and keep his commandments: that is the answer to all questions. Now then, a certain nun, having passed her whole life in works of devotion, was, upon entering heaven, permitted any one wish of her heart's desire. She asked to behold a vision of the Mother of God. As Mary glided past in a cloud of bluish light, the old nun cried, "Queen of Heaven, what were your thoughts as the Messiah Jesus was passing out of your womb?" "Well, to tell you the truth," replied the Virgin, "we wanted a girl . . ."

(awkward pause)

BISHOP

That's an old one.

MERCHANT

I think it's a scream!

BARON

In rather questionable taste . . .

ANGEL

(hastening to reassure him)

By way of a parable, you understand.

MERCHANT

Hear now the true interpretation of the parable: The nun is the human mind, the Virgin those transcendental forces with which we come into contact. The Virgin's flippant answer represents divine cruelty, while the contrasting good faith of human investigation finds expression in the nun's earnestness.

BISHOP

Hear now the true interpretation of the parable: the nun is a symbol of life's apparent meaning; the Virgin of man's awareness. Awareness responds to apparent meaning by reducing it to absurdity, just as the Virgin's answer made a joke of the nun's question.

BARON

Hear now the true interpretation of the parable: The nun represents intellect; Mary, the mysteries of faith. Just as the nun's query elicited an absurd reply, so they will find absurdities who strive by reason to comprehend the effects of grace.

MERCHANT

Farfetched.

BISHOP

But wholesome.

ANGEL

Hear now the true interpretation of the parable: God is great, men are fools.

(awkward pause)

MERCHANT

I don't see how you get that.

ANGEL

(*apologetically*)

It's pretty much the gist of any parable.

BARON

(*unable to restrain himself any longer*)

Is this the best you can do? Has God's courier nothing better for man than these weak-hearted paradoxes? Angel, don't you see the tragedy of it: I have kept some faith out of harm's way—just a drab, to be sure, but till now enough for all practical, and a number of impractical purposes. This faith I have borne gently and safely through deserts of passion and sloughs of misgiving. But, Angel, I falter! What were the agonies of mind and flesh to the desolate implications of your unconcern?

ANGEL

(*incredulous*)

Unconcern!

(*to himself*)

I can see how it might give that impression.

BARON

If by faith I am undone, where shall I put my faith? I wasn't ready for that one; it is easier to imagine Pyrrho damned than Augustine disappointed. Castigation is one thing, but I never expected to be laughed down. For He has only to crack a smile, you know, and the whole creation gets to dancing in the street. In that event, sanity ceases to appear desirable . . . But I am losing myself in horror. Is this what you call a foretaste of the Kingdom in whose name I've suffered every manner of anguish; of the Spirit by whose grace all was to be well with me?

ANGEL

You confuse my coming with the Messiah's

BARON

If the tidings have run mad, what is it to me who bears them?

ANGEL

Do not expect overmuch of this life.

BARON

This life, next life . . . we go on about time . . . ! I expect something of each intrusion. And I don't care for speculative triumphs. What about the Word made flesh and the Spirit working all changes? I confront you with neglected promises and derided promises. I confront you with the desiccation of the Christian dream. How speak of dreams?—the Christian *knowledge*, as faith stands surety for faith. Or will you do the gospel over into the subjunctive? Will you give us a Christ whose dying thoughts turn to certain observations of the procurator? When crying out from the depths I am advised to defer my complaint, where has the sense of the world got to? It begins to appear that I have somewhere mislaid a

lifetime. My good God, I am not up to much terror, and, my good God, consider that I have trusted in Thee!

ANGEL

(*very impressively*)

Miracles are for those who do not require them; conversion is a gift to the faithful; the Kingdom of God is within you. The true faith requires no object, but is a faith in faith itself. The true believer unravels the meaning in whatever vision is vouchsafed him, reflecting that this world, from which the Creator is apparently absent, is the strangest and saddest vision of all. The glory is not conformable to your conception, nor is the deprivation without purpose. Thank Heaven you are not of those on whom the resource of persuasion need be expended.

BARON

(*quite overwhelmed*)

Mea culpa . . .

ANGEL

That's not necessary. It's an understandable reaction. The lapse is pardoned, and the vision has its disadvantages. Know man in God—wasn't that your other question?—for he is unknowable in himself. The hammer has purpose in the smith's hand, but what is the meaning of the tongs left by the roadside?

BISHOP

(*bitterly*)

What a wrong-headed way of putting it!

ANGEL

(*carelessly*)

Vivid, though.

(*sentimentally*)

Ah, but then, to what may man's life be compared?

BISHOP

I beg your pardon, I think I am the more competent to answer that question.

ANGEL

We shan't expect much in the way of brilliant imagery . . .

BISHOP

Leave off that style of speech. This is as close as I come to prayer.

ANGEL

One is, I know, rather limited . . .

BISHOP

Oh, you beast of an immortal! Couldn't care less! But man has acquired some facility on man. A race of fools, perhaps, but like all fools conversant on their own account. However, you won't approach the sources; that way of going at it doesn't appeal to you . . .

ANGEL

Some picaresque symbol or other . . .

BISHOP

You see? It was precisely to avoid . . .

ANGEL

(waxing facetious)

Will it be—an ocean across which we take our way with never a star or an edge of land to plot by?

BISHOP

No . . . of course not . . .

ANGEL

Or, conversely, there's the desert simile: trek, trek, and all green sheltering places prove mirage, till one dare not lift his eyes from the sand.

BISHOP

But I tell you, this vastness has got it all wrong! The human condition is a small room in light pastel—green, say. A room in which there is light enough to see your hand before your face, air enough to keep off closeness, floors and walls enough to pace and stretch.

ANGEL

I believe you said something about anguish?

BISHOP

Sounds comfortable, does it? Oh, but gods are simple-minded things! Brimstone or beatitude. Now look: whence is that light? There are no windows, no candles. Whence that air? Not a door or even a crevice interrupts the smooth walls. And whence those very walls, for I say nothing of an outside or an elsewhere.

MERCHANT

Oh, Bishop, that's it! That's so right! Now get on to the noises.

BISHOP

The noises, as we say. Well . . . bumps and scratches; wails beginning deep down in the imagination and ascending through the register of pain; a chorus like a promise . . .

MERCHANT

(disappointed)

So vague . . .

BISHOP

Vague? Yes, to be sure, vague. Insinuations, whispers, glimmers. But, you see, they do their work. Clearly not within the room and so the primordial hint at an elsewhere. Which must end in deprecation of the here. The occupant of the room starts off with "How?" and "Wherefore?" When these questions continue un-answered, he begins to notice a stuffiness, which is the fatigue of the unknown; a shortage of space, which is the inhibition of the unknown. Would it be premature to suggest that the occupant is lost?

BARON

Unless he break through the wall.

BISHOP

To what, and how? The stuff of the walls is boundless elsewhere.

(to ANGEL)

I imagine it requires some effort of the divine imagination . . .

ANGEL

Not at all. You've an original turn of mind. I like that. Because when a man starts in on his misery, one can never be too careful; but fresh images imply a freshly lacerated wound. That's very good, has possibilities. However, allowing for the ill effects of doubt . . .

BISHOP

Doubt! Did you think . . . ?

(to himself)

One had as well take a god of stone!

(to ANGEL)

But look here, if you are able to doubt, you are, in all essentials, convinced.

ANGEL

Of what, pray?

BISHOP

The without, the other. To doubt is to doubt something, and if you've got that far, there remain only a few details to be seen to. Cracked plaster lies at your feet, and through the shattered walls you behold—whatever it is you have a particular interest in beholding. Do you see now why faith comes so much easier than doubt? Faith is unto itself; doubt picks out a shadow and broods over it.

BARON

I cannot accept this conclusion. Faith is unto God. It is faith's great enemy, reason, that invariably gets lost in itself.

BISHOP

There's a distinction for a simpleton. Euclid's postulates are articles of faith, and the Sermon on the Mount has syllogistic overtones. Through the on-driving of this much contemned reason you arrived at your belief, but the religious will be turning on the hand that feeds them. One decides for faith only because life is unthinkable without it.

BARON

Say rather, unbearable.

BISHOP

What exactly can you not bear? Anguish? But we all *do* bear anguish. In fact, we're remarkably proficient at it. What cannot be borne is that anguish should go to waste. Anguish gone to waste offends reason, runs against one's sense of order, presents itself, in a word, as unthinkable. And so, rationality having been ever the most insistent of passions, one elects for faith.

(pause)

ANGEL

(sententiously)

You'd be better off without your speculative penchant.

BISHOP

You know whom to see about that. Get me back the buck and I'll pass it. I take no pleasure in the society of abstractions.

MERCHANT

There's this to be said for the room: insufferable, perhaps, but green.

ANGEL

(in this and the following three of his speeches, preoccupied, debating with himself)

Now—say a man proves me twice four seven. Unassailably proves it. Still . . .

BISHOP

You would uncover flaws?

ANGEL

I might not be clever enough.

BISHOP

Really? Now in what I was saying, as usual, just off hand . . .

ANGEL

But arguments aside, when you come to the fact of the matter . . .

BISHOP

Between the conclusion and the conviction falls the Shadow?

MERCHANT

With a thud.

BISHOP

That works both ways . . .

ANGEL

(decisively)

I cannot let go my sense of the distinctly otherwise!

BISHOP

Then we are at the heart of the impasse. It is possible that truth is one; it is even very likely. Perceptions, however, diverge. The Angel may be slightly aware of darkness, but his element is light. Man is at home amidst the shadows, but has some ideas about illumination. And what earthly use is truth but as one perceives it?

ANGEL

No *earthly* use . . .

BISHOP

Oh, don't be stupid and go catching up every word like that! There comes a moment, and it is not long in coming, when salty prose and lucky word-play cease to satisfy. Nicety of phrase is by way of an apology: It's the next best thing to relevance. The human mind and the divine mind whirl about each other, never swerving, never clashing. The best one can hope for—witness the present encounter—is an occasional eclipse. And at such a moment, the obvious misgivings, the subtle disparagements, the jiffy conversions, are all preferatory to the impasse.

ANGEL

So be it. From the heart of the impasse I ascend into the heart of the light. Would that man chose to follow after.

BISHOP

To all error impervious, how can gods yet suppose that their ways are the ways accessible to men? What is the sense of exhortation? Do not counsel us to be other than we are; make us other than we are.

ANGEL

Creature, God did not make you thus or thus. You may read for what role you choose in the tragedy of will.

BISHOP

It is not the freedom to *do* which is at issue here, but the freedom to *be*.

ANGEL

You are as God made you; you are to do as he bids you. Would He ask the impossible?

BISHOP

Evidently so . . .

ANGEL

Pride!

BISHOP

Oh, nonsense! I am the temple of a trinity of imperfections—weak, ignorant, useless. And I don't arrange things discreetly. My inflection is outburst; there's a censorious cancer upon my speech. But you call down powers beyond imagining to endorse your least aphorism.

ANGEL

You stand apart. You *glory* in standing apart.

MERCHANT

And you would have us stand aside?

BISHOP

(to ANGEL)

Apart I stand. But as to glory . . . why do you insist on that style of thought? At the moment, things are as they are. What is pride but the Lord's maladroit evasion of penance?

(to himself)

At least, one might look at it that way . . .

BARON

Bishop, in the name of all saints and martyrs . . .

ANGEL

Be silent. It is not of the faithful to reprimand. The evil in every soul is a reproach upon God, and will you venture to reproach?

BARON

In this and all else, your will be done.

(self-consciously)

"His", I meant to say.

MERCHANT

Oh, splendid! Mesmerize the poor man; bind him up in your rhetoric. The Bishop's right as can be. You've acted the silly all morning. In fact, you've made a perfect fool of yourself with smutty jokes and sleight of hand. Considering your dubious ontological position, I call it presumption.

BISHOP

Be silent. It is not of the ignorant to reprimand. Have *we* conducted ourselves so wisely? Or have we rather gone down a rapids of speculation, till our very images perished from exhaustion? Shall we dismiss them as fools—we who want the sense to keep our mouths off “truth” and “God” and “man”? Impossible as things are, one might have the courtesy to keep still. Talk is a waste of that much life.

ANGEL

Exactly. In your case, the Word having been judged of no avail, they sent me to sway with miracles and signs.

BISHOP

Miracles are for those who do not require them; conversion is a gift to the faithful; the Kingdom of God is within you.

ANGEL

Be slow to mock. We are so easy to mock—and so invulnerable. And do not pretend that, when I laid hands upon you, the spirit entered not into you. I read in your eyes the mark of the miracle of grace.

BISHOP

How can we be expected to have faith in your miracles? Man is the greatest of miracles, and we have no faith in him.

ANGEL

(struck by BISHOP's answer; appealing)

You must understand: I was not provided with instructions, that is to say, *adequate* instructions.

(to himself)

Which is odd, considering as how they've had so much experience along these lines.

(to the BISHOP, with exaggerated resolution)

But having failed, it now becomes imperative to examine the question of guilt.

BISHOP

Is this necessary?

ANGEL

A habit of thought—the way you run on about anguish. Blame is one of my consuming interests. Or rather, the fixing of it. On whom? The Baron? I must, for personal reasons, insist that he be excluded from the discussion. As for the rest of us, you, Bishop, and you, Merchant, have had the agreeable sensation of catagorizing what is beyond categories. And I, I have attempted to combine exhortation and good-fellowship in the justifiable proportions.

BISHOP

(impatient)

As you will.

ANGEL

(to himself)

Of course, with respect to intention, I should go scot free. Or be damned for thinking so . . .

BISHOP

On and on. In to the center and suddenly back out.

ANGEL

(to himself)

That very anxiety could be taken two ways: humility or irresolution. I prefer to suppose . . .

BISHOP

Skittish preoccupation!

ANGEL

(turning angrily on the BISHOP)

Are you the only ones can't change? We gods have a way of being, too. And if it's your way to repulse the mission, ours is no less to proffer and affirm it.

BISHOP

Then what's all this about blame? Will you step in between fire and water and demand to know the causes of their falling out? Failure inheres in certain associations.

ANGEL

(very excited)

I see that—your way, yours, not mine! Gods and men shoved up against each other like millstones—all abrasion and just this trickle of despair to show for it.

MERCHANT

A proselyte!

BISHOP

(to MERCHANT, sternly)

I recall to you the decency of silence!

ANGEL

(silly)

Although it *has* been a let-down. My first time, you understand.

(dignified again)

These are my last words to you: *What we will, we can; that we do not, look to it.*

(He makes ready to fly away, flaps his arms, but nothing happens. He remembers something, snaps his fingers, but still nothing happens. He puts his fingers in his mouth, whistles loudly. The flying halter descends; he worships it perfunctorily, steps on to the railing of the ship and slips the halter on. He smiles foolishly, gets into position for takeoff. The MERCHANT can no longer restrain his laughter.)

ANGEL

(angrily, to MERCHANT)

What we will, we can; that we do not . . .

(But he has not fastened the halter tightly enough. He slips, loses his balance, and falls overboard. A splash.)

MERCHANT

(waving his fist)

Sic semper Angelis!

BARON

I believe. Won't somebody *please* do something about my unbelief?

BISHOP

There is that in this occurrence which imparts more conviction than any number of winked upon aberrations from the mechanistic norm. In the occasional ironic gesture, there transpires a languid intention; chance has no sense of humor. The words and the wonders and the works are only an irritation. They will never prevail upon me, but the deafness of a Beethoven may.

MERCHANT

Or could not one just as easily conclude that it is all "part of the act"? Man is subtle, and they like playing around with his subtlety. Of course, there is the assurance that in order to be duped, one must be; but it is not very pleasant to pay for existence in the coin of self-respect. One had rather do without. One is, of course, not consulted; but does that in itself provide an excuse for Promethianism? I don't see how. Take what fantastic form they will, the Energies of Deception have always my provisional approval. And when you consider that approval is surrender . . . Oh, why, why all this bother on my account? What sort of benefits can accrue, and to whom? In my repertoire of idle speculations, there at last is the idlest. I drive my pain higher among the peaks; words begin to fall away; the trustiest formulations are shattered against out-hanging cornices. And death, meanwhile, has gone back on his word . . . If only we might make do with the dream! No use: with awareness for a midwife, joy is necessarily still-born. In the course of a long life (which I'd just as soon forgo, but you can always be sure of the superfluous), I shall lose many more large accounts, and, with a little luck, my sanity.

BARON

I like the Angel's answer: "Know man in God". I should in any case begin my investigation with a look inward. There, in the heart of hearts, I uncover the Lord, and somewhere in the vicinity of the Lord, man is knocking about. Sound doctrine and sound method—a rare combination.

Need we pause to consider the Merchant? I think

not. But the Bishop is nobody's fool. He goes in for distinctions, dichotomies. One is nevertheless reluctant to classify him as . . . a Manichee, say. I don't think that's what he has in mind. Well, the Bishop's opinions are certainly peculiar, but if it be God's will that he hold them, then I say, *Deus Vult*. I've been saying that a good deal lately.

Now I confess, the Angel had me for a moment. But directly I understood my faith was being proved, I set my jaw and held firm. At least, that's my recollection. It may have been otherwise, but faith exceeds possibility and gives fact a run for the money. So I feel . . .

(Suddenly the silhouette skyline of Constantinople rises enormous and sinister on the horizon, till most of the stage is in shadow. At the same time, and continuing through till the end of the play, a rather mournful chorus of welcome is heard across the water from the city. The BARON runs to the railing, peers intently at the city, seems to cringe for a moment, but then cries out:)

Thanks be to God!

(He falls to his knees, facing the city, and prays fervently)

BISHOP

In adoring the Crusaders, the Byzantines adore their ruin. They can hardly be called atypical. All problems are chips off the Problem; and the Problem does not exhaust our capacities. Irresolution is not permitted to dream the night away, and tedium finds refuge in habit. An odd procedure, admittedly, but after the first few concessions . . . My thought grows too rich for the matter.

(loudly)

Bring on the Moslem foe!

(to himself)

Death may have something to add.

SLOW CURTAIN

COMING!

Romeo and Juliet

April 20

Memorial Hall