

the house, we would see a figure standing upon the doorstep, and Mamma would say to me: "Good heavens! There's Françoise looking out for us; your aunt must be anxious; that means we're late."

And without wasting time by stopping to take off our things we would dash upstairs to my aunt Léonie's room to reassure her, to prove to her by our bodily presence that all her gloomy imaginings were false, that nothing had happened to us, but that we had gone the "Guermantes way," and when one took that walk, why, my aunt knew well enough that one could never be sure what time one would be home.

"There, Françoise," my aunt would say, "didn't I tell you that they must have gone the Guermantes way? Good gracious, they must be hungry! And your nice leg of mutton will be quite dried up now after all the hours it's been waiting. What a time to come in! Well, and so you went the Guermantes way?"

"But, Léonie, I supposed you knew," Mamma would answer. "I thought Françoise had seen us go out by the little gate through the kitchen-garden."

For there were, in the environs of Combray, two "ways" which we used to take for our walks, and they were so diametrically opposed that we would actually leave the house by a different door according to the way we had chosen: the way towards Méségliste-la-Vineuse, which we called also "Swann's way" because to get there one had to pass along the boundary of M. Swann's estate, and the "Guermantes way." Of Méségliste-la-Vineuse, to tell the truth, I never knew anything more than the "way," and some strangers who used to come over on Sundays to take the air in Combray, people whom, this time, neither my aunt herself nor any of us "knew from Adam," and whom we therefore assumed to be "people who must have come over from Méségliste." As for Guermantes, I was to know it well enough one day, but that day had still to come; and, during the whole of my boyhood, if Méségliste was to me something as inaccessible as the horizon, which remained hidden from sight, however far one went, by the folds of a landscape which no longer bore the least resemblance to the country round Combray, Guermantes, on the other hand, meant no more than the ultimate goal, ideal rather than real, of the "Guermantes way," a sort of abstract geographical term like the North Pole or the Equator or the Orient. And so to "take the Guermantes way" in order to get to Méségliste, or vice versa,

would have seemed to me as nonsensical a proceeding as to turn to the east in order to reach the west. Since my father used always to speak of the "Méségliste way" as comprising the finest view of a plain that he knew anywhere, and of the "Guermantes way" as typical of river scenery, I had invested each of them, by conceiving them in this way as two distinct entities, with that cohesion, that unity which belong only to the figments of the mind; the smallest detail of either of them seemed to me a precious thing exemplifying the special excellence of the whole, while beside them, before one had reached the sacred soil of one or the other, the purely material paths amid which they were set down as the ideal view over a plain and the ideal river landscape, were no more worth the trouble of looking at than, to a keen playgoer and lover of dramatic art, are the little streets that run past the walls of a theatre. But above all I set between them, far more than the mere distance in miles that separated one from the other, the distance that there was between the two parts of my brain in which I used to think of them, one of those distances of the mind which not only keep things apart, but cut them off from one another and put them on different planes. And this distinction was rendered still more absolute because the habit we had of never going both ways on the same day, or in the course of the same walk, but the "Méségliste way" one time and the "Guermantes way" another, shut them off, so to speak, far apart from one another and unaware of each other's existence, in the airtight compartments of separate afternoons.

When we had decided to go the Méségliste way we would start (without undue haste, and even if the sky were clouded over, since the walk was not very long and did not take us too far from home), as though we were not going anywhere in particular, from the front-door of my aunt's house, which opened on to the Rue du Saint-Esprit. We would be greeted by the gunsmith, we would drop our letters into the box, we would tell Théodore, from Françoise, as we passed that she had run out of oil or coffee, and we would leave the town by the road which ran along the white fence of M. Swann's park. Before reaching it we would be met on our way by the scent of his lilac-trees, come out to welcome strangers. From amid the fresh little green hearts of their foliage they raised inquisitively over the fence of the park their plumes of white or mauve blossom, which glowed, even in the shade, with the sunlight in which they had bathed. Some of them, half-concealed by the little tiled house known as the Archers' Lodge in

secluded, seeing nothing of the world but the river which bathed its feet. A young woman whose pensive face and elegant veils did not suggest a local origin, and who had doubtless come, in the popular phrase, "to bury herself" there, to taste the bitter sweetness of knowing that her name, and still more the name of him whose heart she had once held but had been unable to keep, were unknown there, stood framed in a window from which she had no outlook beyond the boat that was moored beside her door. She raised her eyes listlessly on hearing, through the trees that lined the bank, the voices of passers-by of whom, before they came in sight, she might be certain that never had they known, nor ever would know, the faithless lover, that nothing in their past lives bore his imprint, and nothing in their future would have occasion to receive it. One felt that in her renunciation of life she had deliberately abandoned those places in which she might at least have been able to see the man she loved, for others where he had never trod. And I watched her, returning from some walk along a path where she knew that he would not appear, drawing from her resigned hands long and uselessly elegant gloves.

Never, in the course of our walks along the Guermantes way, were we able to penetrate as far as the source of the Vivonne, of which I had often thought and which had in my mind so abstract, so ideal an existence that I had been as surprised when someone told me that it was actually to be found in the same department, at a given number of miles from Combray, as I had been when I learned that there was another fixed point somewhere on the earth's surface, where, according to the ancients, opened the jaws of Hell. Nor could we ever get as far as that other goal which I so longed to reach, Guermantes itself. I knew that it was the residence of the Duc and Duchesse de Guermantes, I knew that they were real personages who did actually exist, but whenever I thought about them I pictured them either in tapestry, like the Comtesse de Guermantes in the "Coronation of Esther" which hung in our church, or else in iridescent colours, like Gilbert the Bad in the stained-glass window where he changed from cabbage green, when I was dipping my fingers in the holy water stoup, to plum blue when I had reached our row of chairs, or again altogether impalpable, like the image of Geneviève de Brabant, ancestress of the Guermantes family, which the magic lantern sent wandering over the curtains of my room or flung aloft upon the ceiling—in short, invariably wrapped in the mystery of the

Merovingian age and bathed, as in a sunset, in the amber light which glowed from the resounding syllable "antes." And if in spite of that they were for me, in their capacity as a duke and duchess, real people, though of an unfamiliar kind, this ducal personality of theirs was on the other hand enormously distended, immaterialised, so as to encircle and contain that Guermantes of which they were duke and duchess, all that sunlit "Guermantes way" of our walks, the course of the Vivonne, its water-lilies and its overshadowing trees, and an endless series of summer afternoons. And I knew that they bore not only the title of Duc and Duchesse de Guermantes, but that since the fourteenth century, when, after vain attempts to conquer its earlier lords in battle, they had allied themselves to them by marriage and so become Counts of Combray, the first citizens, consequently, of the place, and yet the only ones who did not reside in it—Comtes de Combray, possessing Combray, threading it on their string of names and titles, absorbing it in their personalities, and imbued, no doubt, with that strange and pious melancholy which was peculiar to Combray; proprietors of the town, though not of any particular house there; dwelling, presumably, outside, in the street, between heaven and earth, like that Gilbert de Guermantes of whom I could see, in the stained glass of the apse of Saint-Hilaire, only the reverse side in dull black lacquer, if I raised my eyes to look for him on my way to Camus's for a packet of salt.

And then it happened that, along the Guermantes way, I sometimes passed beside well-watered little enclosures, over whose hedges rose clusters of dark blossom. I would stop, hoping to gain some precious addition to my experience, for I seemed to have before my eyes a fragment of that fluvial country which I had longed so much to see and know since coming upon a description of it by one of my favourite authors. And it was with that story-book land, with its imagined soil intersected by a hundred bubbling watercourses, that Guermantes, changing its aspect in my mind, became identified, after I heard Dr Percepied speak of the flowers and the charming rivulets and fountains that were to be seen there in the ducal park. I used to dream that Mme de Guermantes, taking a sudden capricious fancy to me, invited me there, that all day long she stood fishing for trout by my side. And when evening came, holding my hand in hers, as we passed by the little gardens of her vassals she would point out to me the flowers that leaned their red and purple spikes along the tops of the low

walls, and would teach me all their names. She would make me tell her, too, all about the poems that I intended to compose. And these dreams reminded me that, since I wished some day to become a writer, it was high time to decide what sort of books I was going to write. But as soon as I asked myself the question, and tried to discover some subject to which I could impart a philosophical significance of infinite value, my mind would stop like a clock, my consciousness would be faced with a blank, I would feel either that I was wholly devoid of talent or that perhaps some malady of the brain was hindering its development. Sometimes I would rely on my father to settle it all for me. He was so powerful, in such high favour with people in office, that he made it possible for us to transgress laws which Françoise had taught me to regard as more ineluctable than the laws of life and death, as when we were allowed to postpone for a year the compulsory repointing of the walls of our house, alone among all the houses in that part of Paris, or when he obtained permission from the Minister for Mme Sazerat's son, who had been ordered to some watering-place, to take his baccalaureate two months in advance, among the candidates whose surnames began with "A," instead of having to wait his turn as an "S." If I had fallen seriously ill, if I had been captured by brigands, convinced that my father's understanding with the supreme powers was too complete, that his letters of introduction to the Almighty were too irresistible for my illness or captivity to turn out to be anything but vain illusions, in which no danger actually threatened me, I should have awaited with perfect composure the inevitable hour of my return to comfortable realities, of my deliverance from bondage or restoration to health; and perhaps this lack of genius, this black cavity which gaped in my mind when I ransacked it for the theme of my future writings, was itself no more than an insubstantial illusion, and would vanish with the intervention of my father, who must have agreed with the Government and with Providence that I should be the foremost writer of the day. But at other times, while my parents were growing impatient at seeing me loiter behind instead of following them, my present life, instead of seeming an artificial creation of my father's which he could modify as he chose, appeared, on the contrary, to be comprised in a larger reality which had not been created for my benefit, from whose judgments there was no appeal, within which I had no friend or ally, and beyond which no further possibilities lay concealed. It seemed to me then that I

existed in the same manner as all other men, that I must grow old, that I must die like them, and that among them I was to be distinguished merely as one of those who have no aptitude for writing. And so, utterly despondent, I renounced literature for ever, despite the encouragement Bloch had given me. This intimate, spontaneous feeling, this sense of the nullity of my intellect, prevailed against all the flattering words that might be lavished upon me, as a wicked man whose good deeds are praised by all is gnawed by secret remorse.

One day my mother said to me: "You're always talking about Mme de Guermantes. Well, Dr Percepied took great care of her when she was ill four years ago, and so she's coming to Combray for his daughter's wedding. You'll be able to see her in church." It was from Dr Percepied, as it happened, that I had heard most about Mme de Guermantes, and he had even shown us the number of an illustrated paper in which she was depicted in the costume she had worn at a fancy dress ball given by the Princesse de Léon.

Suddenly, during the nuptial mass, the verger, by moving to one side, enabled me to see in one of the chapels a fair-haired lady with a large nose, piercing blue eyes, a billowy scarf of mauve silk, glossy and new and bright, and a little pimple at the corner of her nose. And because on the surface of her face, which was red, as though she had been very hot, I could discern, diluted and barely perceptible, fragments of resemblance with the portrait that had been shown to me; because, more especially, the particular features which I remarked in this lady, if I attempted to catalogue them, formulated themselves in precisely the same terms—*a large nose, blue eyes*—as Dr Percepied had used when describing in my presence the Duchesse de Guermantes, I said to myself: "This lady is like the Duchesse de Guermantes." Now the chapel from which she was following the service was that of Gilbert the Bad, beneath the flat tombstones of which, yellowed and bulging like cells of honey in a comb, rested the bones of the old Counts of Brabant; and I remembered having heard it said that this chapel was reserved for the Guermantes family, whenever any of its members came to attend a ceremony at Combray; hence there was only one woman resembling the portrait of Mme de Guermantes who on that day, the very day on which she was expected to come there, could conceivably be sitting in that chapel: it was she! My disappointment was immense. It arose from my not having borne in

mind, when I thought of Mme de Guermantes, that I was picturing her to myself in the colours of a tapestry or a stained-glass window, as living in another century, as being of another substance than the rest of the human race. Never had it occurred to me that she might have a red face, a mauve scarflike Mme Sazerat; and the oval curve of her cheeks reminded me so strongly of people whom I had seen at home that the suspicion crossed my mind (though it was immediately banished) that in her causal principle, in the molecules of her physical composition, this lady was perhaps not substantially the Duchesse de Guermantes, but that her body, in ignorance of the name that people had given it, belonged to a certain female type which included also the wives of doctors and tradesmen. "So that's Mme de Guermantes—that's all she is!" were the words underlying the attentive and astonished expression with which I gazed upon this image which, naturally enough, bore no resemblance to those that had so often, under the same title of "Mme de Guermantes," appeared in my dreams, since it had not, like the others, been formed arbitrarily by myself but had leapt to my eyes for the first time only a moment ago, here in church; an image which was not of the same nature, was not colourable at will like those others that allowed themselves to be impregnated with the amber hue of a sonorous syllable, but was so real that everything, down to the fiery little spot at the corner of her nose, attested to her subjection to the laws of life, as, in a transformation scene on the stage, a crease in the fairy's dress, a quivering of her tiny finger, betray the physical presence of a living actress, whereas we were uncertain, till then, whether we were not looking merely at a projection from a lantern.

But at the same time, I was endeavouring to apply to this image, which the prominent nose, the piercing eyes pinned down and fixed in my field of vision (perhaps because it was they that had first struck it, that had made the first impression on its surface, before I had had time to wonder whether the woman who thus appeared before me might possibly be Mme de Guermantes), to this fresh and unchanging image, the idea: "It's Mme de Guermantes"; but I succeeded only in making the idea pass between me and the image, as though they were two discs moving in separate planes with a space between. But this Mme de Guermantes of whom I had so often dreamed, now that I could see that she had a real existence independent of myself, acquired an even greater power over my imagination, which, paralysed for a moment by contact

with a reality so different from what it had expected, began to react and to say to me: "Great and glorious before the days of Charlemagne, the Guermantes had the right of life and death over their vassals; the Duchesse de Guermantes descends from Geneviève de Brabant. She does not know, nor would she consent to know, any of the people who are here today."

And then—oh, marvellous independence of the human gaze, tied to the human face by a cord so loose, so long, so elastic that it can stray alone as far as it may choose—while Mme de Guermantes sat in the chapel above the tombs of her dead ancestors, her gaze wandered here and there, rose to the capitals of the pillars, and even rested momentarily upon myself, like a ray of sunlight straying down the nave, but a ray of sunlight which, at the moment when I received its caress, appeared conscious of where it fell. As for Mme de Guermantes herself, since she remained motionless, sitting like a mother who affects not to notice the mischievous impudence and the indiscreet advances of her children when, in the course of their play, they accost people whom she does not know, it was impossible for me to determine whether, in the careless detachment of her soul, she approved or condemned the vagrancy of her eyes.

I felt it to be important that she should not leave the church before I had been able to look at her for long enough, reminding myself that for years past I had regarded the sight of her as a thing eminently to be desired, and I kept my eyes fixed on her, as though by gazing at her I should be able to carry away and store up inside myself the memory of that prominent nose, those red cheeks, of all those details which struck me as so many precious, authentic and singular items of information with regard to her face. And now that all the thoughts I brought to bear upon it (especially, perhaps—a form of the instinct of self-preservation with which we guard everything that is best in ourselves—the familiar desire not to have been disappointed) made me think it beautiful, and I set her once again (since they were one and the same person, this lady who sat before me and that Duchesse de Guermantes whom I had hitherto conjured up in my imagination) apart from that common run of humanity with which the actual sight of her in the flesh had made me for a moment confound her, I grew indignant when I heard people saying in the congregation round me: "She's better looking than Mme Sazerat" or "than Mlle Vinteuil," as though she was in any way comparable with them. And my eyes resting upon

her fair hair, her blue eyes, the lines of her neck, and overlooking the features which might have reminded me of the faces of other women, I cried out within myself as I admired this deliberately unfinished sketch: "How lovely she is! What true nobility! It is indeed a proud Guermantes, the descendant of Geneviève de Brabant, that I have before me!" And the attention which I focused on her face succeeded in isolating it so completely that today, when I call that marriage ceremony to mind, I find it impossible to visualise any single person who was present except her, and the verger who answered me in the affirmative when I inquired whether the lady was indeed Mme de Guermantes. But I can see her still quite clearly, especially at the moment when the procession filed into the sacristy, which was lit up by the intermittent warm sunshine of a windy and rainy day and in which Mme de Guermantes found herself in the midst of all those Combray people whose names she did not even know, but whose inferiority proclaimed her own supremacy too loudly for her not to feel sincerely benevolent towards them, and whom she might count on impressing even more forcibly by virtue of her simplicity and graciousness. And so, since she could not bring into play the deliberate glances, charged with a definite meaning, which one directs towards people one knows, but must allow her absent-minded thoughts to flow continuously from her eyes in a stream of blue light which she was powerless to contain, she was anxious not to embarrass or to appear to be disdainful of those humbler mortals whom it encountered on its way, on whom it was constantly falling. I can still see, above her mauve scarf, puffed and silky, the gentle astonishment in her eyes, to which she had added, without daring to address it to anyone in particular, but so that everyone might enjoy his share of it, a rather shy smile as of a sovereign lady who seems to be making an apology for her presence among the vassals whom she loves. This smile fell upon me, who had never taken my eyes off her. And remembering the glance which she had let fall upon me during mass, blue as a ray of sunlight that had penetrated the window of Gilbert the Bad, I said to myself: "She must have taken notice of me." I fancied that I had found favour in her eyes, that she would continue to think of me after she had left the church, and would perhaps feel sad that evening, at Guermantes, because of me. And at once I fell in love with her, for if it is sometimes enough to make us love a woman that she should look on us with contempt, as I supposed Mlle

Swann to have done, and that we should think that she can never be ours, sometimes, too, it is enough that she should look on us kindly, as Mme de Guermantes was doing, and that we should think of her as almost ours already. Her eyes waxed blue as a periwinkle flower, impossible to pluck, yet dedicated by her to me; and the sun, bursting out again from behind a threatening cloud and darting the full force of its rays on to the Square and into the sacristy, shed a geranium glow over the red carpet laid down for the wedding, across which Mme de Guermantes was smilingly advancing, and covered its woollen texture with a nap of rosy velvet, a bloom of luminosity, that sort of tenderness, of solemn sweetness in the pomp of a joyful celebration, which characterise certain pages of *Lohengrin*, certain paintings by Carpaccio, and make us understand how Baudelaire was able to apply to the sound of the trumpet the epithet "delicious."

How often, after that day, in the course of my walks along the Guermantes way, and with what an intensified melancholy, did I reflect on my lack of qualification for a literary career, and abandon all hope of ever becoming a famous author. The regrets that I felt for this, as I lingered behind to muse awhile on my own, made me suffer so acutely that, in order to banish them, my mind of its own accord, by a sort of inhibition in the face of pain, ceased entirely to think of verse-making, of fiction, of the poetic future on which my lack of talent precluded me from counting. Then, quite independently of all these literary preoccupations and in no way connected with them, suddenly a roof, a gleam of sunlight on a stone, the smell of a path would make me stop still, to enjoy the special pleasure that each of them gave me, and also because they appeared to be concealing, beyond what my eyes could see, something which they invited me to come and take but which despite all my efforts I never managed to discover. Since I felt that this something was to be found in them, I would stand there motionless, looking, breathing, endeavouring to penetrate with my mind beyond the thing seen or smelt. And if I then had to hasten after my grandfather, to continue my walk, I would try to recapture them by closing my eyes; I would concentrate on recalling exactly the line of the roof, the colour of the stone, which, without my being able to understand why, had seemed to me to be bursting, ready to open, to yield up to me the secret treasure of which they were themselves no more than the lids. It was certainly not impressions of this kind that could restore the hope I had lost of

succeeding one day in becoming an author and poet, for each of them was associated with some material object devoid of intellectual value and suggesting no abstract truth. But at least they gave me an unreasoning pleasure, the illusion of a sort of fecundity, and thereby distracted me from the tedium, from the sense of my own impotence which I had felt whenever I had sought a philosophic theme for some great literary work. But so arduous was the task imposed on my conscience by these impressions of form or scent or colour—to try to perceive what lay hidden beneath them—that I was not long in seeking an excuse which would allow me to relax so strenuous an effort and to spare myself the fatigue that it involved. As good luck would have it, my parents would call me; I felt that I did not, for the moment, enjoy the tranquillity necessary for the successful pursuit of my researches, and that it would be better to think no more of the matter until I reached home, and not to exhaust myself in the meantime to no purpose. And so I would concern myself no longer with the mystery that lay hidden in a shape or a perfume, quite at ease in my mind since I was taking it home with me, protected by its visible covering which I had imprinted on my mind and beneath which I should find it still alive, like the fish which, on days when I had been allowed to go out fishing, I used to carry back in my basket, covered by a layer of grass which kept them cool and fresh. Having reached home I would begin to think of something else, and so my mind would become littered (as my room was with the flowers that I had gathered on my walks, or the odds and ends that people had given me) with a mass of disparate images—the play of sunlight on a stone, a roof, the sound of a bell, the smell of fallen leaves—beneath which the reality I once sensed, but never had the will-power to discover and bring to light, has long since perished. Once, however, when we had prolonged our walk far beyond its ordinary limits, and so had been very glad to be overtaken half-way home, as afternoon darkened into evening, by Dr Percepied who, driving by at full speed in his carriage, had seen and recognised us, stopped, and made us jump in beside him, I received an impression of this sort which I did not abandon without getting to the bottom of it to some extent. I had been set on the box beside the coachman, and we were going like the wind because the doctor had still, before returning to Combray, to call at Martinville-le-Sec to see a patient at whose door it was agreed that we should wait for him. At a bend in the road I experienced,

suddenly, that special pleasure which was unlike any other, on catching sight of the twin steeples of Martinville, bathed in the setting sun and constantly changing their position with the movement of the carriage and the windings of the road, and then of a third steeple, that of Vieuxvicq, which, although separated from them by a hill and a valley, and rising from rather higher ground in the distance, appeared none the less to be standing by their side.

In noticing and registering the shape of their spires, their shifting lines, the sunny warmth of their surfaces, I felt that I was not penetrating to the core of my impression, that something more lay behind that mobility, that luminosity, something which they seemed at once to contain and to conceal.

The steeples appeared so distant, and we seemed to be getting so little nearer them, that I was astonished when, a few minutes later, we drew up outside the church of Martinville. I did not know the reason for the pleasure I had felt on seeing them upon the horizon, and the business of trying to discover that reason seemed to me irksome; I wanted to store away in my mind those shifting, sunlit planes and, for the time being, to think of them no more. And it is probable that, had I done so, those two steeples would have gone to join the medley of trees and roofs and scents and sounds I had noticed and set apart because of the obscure pleasure they had given me which I had never fully explored. I got down from the box to talk to my parents while we waited for the doctor to reappear. Then it was time to set off again, and I resumed my seat, turning my head to look back once more at the steeples, of which, a little later, I caught a farewell glimpse at a turn in the road. The coachman, who seemed little inclined for conversation, having barely acknowledged my remarks, I was obliged, in default of other company, to fall back on my own, and to attempt to recapture the vision of my steeples. And presently their outlines and their sunlit surfaces, as though they had been a sort of rind, peeled away; something of what they had concealed from me became apparent; a thought came into my mind which had not existed for me a moment earlier, framing itself in words in my head; and the pleasure which the first sight of them had given me was so greatly enhanced that, overpowered by a sort of intoxication, I could no longer think of anything else. At that moment, as we were already some way from Martinville, turning my head I caught sight of them again, quite black this time, for the sun had meanwhile set. From time to time a turn in the road would sweep

them out of sight; then they came into view for the last time, and finally I could see them no more.

Without admitting to myself that what lay hidden behind the steeples of Martinville must be something analogous to a pretty phrase, since it was in the form of words which gave me pleasure that it had appeared to me, I borrowed a pencil and some paper from the doctor, and in spite of the jolting of the carriage, to appease my conscience and to satisfy my enthusiasm, composed the following little fragment, which I have since discovered and now reproduce with only a slight revision here and there.

Alone, rising from the level of the plain, and seemingly lost in that expanse of open country, the twin steeples of Martinville rose towards the sky. Presently we saw three: springing into position in front of them with a bold leap, a third, dilatory steeple, that of Vieuxvicq, had come to join them. The minutes passed, we were travelling fast, and yet the three steeples were always a long way ahead of us, like three birds perched upon the plain, motionless and conspicuous in the sunlight. Then the steeple of Vieuxvicq drew aside, took its proper distance, and the steeples of Martinville remained alone, gilded by the light of the setting sun which, even at that distance, I could see playing and smiling upon their sloping sides. We had been so long in approaching them that I was thinking of the time that must still elapse before we could reach them when, of a sudden, the carriage turned a corner and set us down at their feet; and they had flung themselves so abruptly in our path that we had barely time to stop before being dashed against the porch.

We resumed our journey. We had left Martinville some little time, and the village, after accompanying us for a few seconds, had already disappeared, when, lingering alone on the horizon to watch our flight, its steeples and that of Vieuxvicq waved once again their sun-bathed pinnacles in token of farewell. Sometimes one would withdraw, so that the other two might watch us for a moment still; then the road changed direction, they veered in the evening light like three golden pivots, and vanished from my sight. But a little later, when we were already close to Combray, the sun having set meanwhile, I caught sight of them for the last time, far away, and seeming no more now than three flowers painted upon the sky above the low line of the fields. They made me think, too, of three maidens in a legend, abandoned in a solitary place over which night had begun to fall; and as we drew away from them at a gallop, I could see them timidly seeking their way, and after some awkward, stumbling movements of their noble silhouettes, drawing close to one another, gliding one behind another, forming now against the still rosy sky no more than a single dusky shape, charming and resigned, and so vanishing in the night.

I never thought again of this page, but at the moment when, in the corner of the box-seat where the doctor's coachman was in the habit of stowing in a hamper the poultry he had bought at Martinville market, I had finished writing it, I was so filled with happiness, I felt that it had so entirely relieved my mind of its obsession with the steeples and the mystery which lay behind them, that, as though I myself were a hen and had just laid an egg, I began to sing at the top of my voice.

All day long, during these walks, I had been able to muse upon the pleasure of being the friend of the Duchesse de Guermantes, of fishing for trout, of drifting in a boat on the Vivonne; and, greedy for happiness, I asked nothing more from life in such moments than that it should consist always of a series of joyous afternoons. But when, on our way home, I had caught sight of a farm on the left of the road, at some distance from two other farms which were themselves close together, from which, to return to Combray, we need only turn down an avenue of oaks bordered on one side by a series of orchard-closes planted at regular intervals with apple-trees which cast upon the ground, when they were lit by the setting sun, the Japanese stencil of their shadows, suddenly my heart would begin to pound, for I knew that in half an hour we should be at home, and that, as was the rule on days when we had taken the Guermantes way and dinner was in consequence served later than usual, I should be sent to bed as soon as I had swallowed my soup, and my mother, kept at table just as though there had been company to dinner, would not come upstairs to say good night to me in bed. The zone of melancholy which I then entered was as distinct from the zone in which I had been bounding with joy a moment before as, in certain skies, a band of pink is separated, as though by a line invisibly ruled, from a band of green or black. You may see a bird flying across the pink; it draws near the border-line, touches it, enters and is lost upon the black. I was now so remote from the longings by which I had just been absorbed—to go to Guermantes, to travel, to live a life of happiness—that their fulfilment would have afforded me no pleasure. How readily would I have sacrificed them all, just to be able to cry all night long in Mamma's arms! Quivering with emotion, I could not take my anguished eyes from my mother's face, which would not appear that evening in the bedroom where I could see myself already lying, and I wished only that I were lying dead. And this state would persist until the morrow, when, the rays of morning

leaning their bars of light, like the rungs of the gardener's ladder, against the wall overgrown with nasturtiums, which clambered up it as far as my window-sill, I would leap out of bed to run down at once into the garden, with no thought of the fact that evening must return, and with it the hour when I must leave my mother. And so it was from the Guermantes way that I learned to distinguish between these states which reign alternately within me, during certain periods, going so far as to divide each day between them, the one returning to disposes the other with the regularity of a fever: contiguous, and yet so foreign to one another, so devoid of means of communication, that I can no longer understand, or even picture to myself, in one state what I have desired or dreaded or accomplished in the other.

So the Méségliste way and the Guermantes way remain for me linked with many of the little incidents of the life which, of all the various lives we lead concurrently, is the most episodic, the most full of vicissitudes; I mean the life of the mind. Doubtless it progresses within us imperceptibly, and we had for a long time been preparing for the discovery of the truths which have changed its meaning and its aspect, have opened new paths for us; but that preparation was unconscious; and for us those truths date only from the day, from the minute when they became apparent. The flowers which played then among the grass, the water which rippled past in the sunshine, the whole landscape which surrounded their apparition still lingers around the memory of them with its unconscious or unheeding countenance; and, certainly, when they were contemplated at length by that humble passer-by, by that dreaming child—as the face of a king is contemplated by a memorialist buried in the crowd—that piece of nature, that corner of a garden could never suppose that it would be thanks to him that they would be elected to survive in all their most ephemeral details; and yet the scent of hawthorn which flits along the hedge from which, in a little while, the dog-roses will have banished it, a sound of echoless footsteps on a gravel path, a bubble formed against the side of a water-plant by the current of the stream and instantaneously bursting—all these my exaltation of mind has borne along with it and kept alive through the succession of the years, while all around them the paths have vanished and those who trod them, and even the memory of those who trod them, are dead. Sometimes the fragment of landscape thus transported into the present will detach itself in such

isolation from all associations that it floats uncertainly in my mind like a flowering Delos, and I am unable to say from what place, from what time—perhaps, quite simply, from what dream—it comes. But it is pre-eminently as the deepest layer of my mental soil, as the firm ground on which I still stand, that I regard the Méségliste and Guermantes ways. It is because I believed in things and in people while I walked along those paths that the things and the people they made known to me are the only ones that I still take seriously and that still bring me joy. Whether it is because the faith which creates has ceased to exist in me, or because reality takes shape in the memory alone, the flowers that people show me nowadays for the first time never seem to me to be true flowers. The Méségliste way with its lilacs, its hawthorns, its cornflowers, its poppies, its apple-trees, the Guermantes way with its river full of tadpoles, its water-lilies and its buttercups, constituted for me for all time the image of the landscape in which I should like to live, in which my principal requirements are that I may go fishing, drift idly in a boat, see the ruins of Gothic fortifications, and find among the cornfields—like Saint-André-des-Champs—an old church, monumental, rustic, and golden as a haystack; and the corn-flowers, the hawthorns, the apple-trees which I may still happen, when I travel, to encounter in the fields, because they are situated at the same depth, on the level of my past life, at once establish contact with my heart. And yet, because there is an element of individuality in places, if I were seized with a desire to revisit the Guermantes way, it would not be satisfied were I to be led to the banks of a river in which there were water-lilies as beautiful as, or even more beautiful than, those in the Vivonne, any more than on my return home in the evening—at the hour when there awakened in me that anguish which later transfers itself to the passion of love, and may even become its inseparable companion—I should have wished for a mother more beautiful and more intelligent than my own to come and say good night to me. No: just as the one thing necessary to send me to sleep contented—in that untroubled peace which no mistress, in later years, has ever been able to give me, since one has doubts of them even at the moment when one believes in them, and never can possess their hearts as I used to receive, in a kiss, my mother's heart, whole and entire, without qualm or reservation, without the smallest residue of an intention that was not for me alone—was that it should be she who came to me, that it should be her face that leaned over me, her face on

which there was something below the eye that was apparently a blemish, and that I loved as much as all the rest—so what I want to see again is the Guermantes way as I knew it, with the farm that stood a little apart from the two neighbouring farms, huddled side by side, at the entrance to the oak avenue; those meadows in which, when they are burnished by the sun to the luminescence of a pond, the leaves of the apple-trees are reflected; that whole landscape whose individuality grips me sometimes at night, in my dreams, with a power that is almost uncanny, but of which I can discover no trace when I awake.

No doubt, by virtue of having permanently and indissolubly united so many different impressions in my mind, simply because they made me experience them at the same time, the Méséglise and Guermantes ways left me exposed, in later life, to much disillusionment and even to many mistakes. For often I have wished to see a person again without realising that it was simply because that person recalled to me a hedge of hawthorns in blossom, and I have been led to believe, and to make someone else believe, in a renewal of affection, by what was no more than an inclination to travel. But by the same token, and by their persistence in those of my present-day impressions to which they can still be linked, they give those impressions a foundation, a depth, a dimension lacking from the rest. They invest them, too, with a charm, a significance which is for me alone. When, on a summer evening, the melodious sky growls like a tawny lion, and everyone is complaining of the storm, it is the memory of the Méséglise way that makes me stand alone in ecstasy, inhaling, through the noise of the falling rain, the lingering scent of invisible lilacs.

Thus would I often lie until morning, dreaming of the old days at Combray, of my melancholy and wakeful evenings there, of other days besides, the memory of which had been more recently restored to me by the taste—by what would have been called at Combray the “perfume”—of a cup of tea, and, by an association of memories, of a story which, many years after I had left the little place, had been told me of a love affair in which Swann had been involved before I was born, with a precision of detail which it is often easier to obtain for the lives of people who have been dead for centuries than for those of our own most intimate friends, an accuracy which it seems as impossible to attain as it seemed impossible to speak from one town to another, before we knew

of the contrivance by which that impossibility has been overcome. All these memories, superimposed upon one another, now formed a single mass, but had not so far coalesced that I could not discern between them—between my oldest, my instinctive memories, and those others, inspired more recently by a taste or “perfume,” and finally those which were actually the memories of another person from whom I had acquired them at second hand—if not real fissures, real geological faults, at least that veining, that variegation of colouring, which in certain rocks, in certain blocks of marble, points to differences of origin, age, and formation.

It is true that, when morning drew near, I would long have settled the brief uncertainty of my waking dream; I would know in what room I was actually lying, would have reconstructed it around me in the darkness, and—fixing my bearings by memory alone, or with the assistance of a feeble glimmer of light at the foot of which I placed the curtains and the window—would have reconstructed it complete and furnished, as an architect and an upholsterer might do, keeping the original plan of the doors and windows; would have replaced the mirrors and set the chest of drawers on its accustomed site. But scarcely had daylight itself—and no longer the gleam from a last, dying ember on a brass curtain-rod which I had mistaken for daylight—traced across the darkness, as with a stroke of chalk across a blackboard, its first white, correcting ray, than the window, with its curtains, would leave the frame of the doorway in which I had erroneously placed it, while, to make room for it, the writing-table, which my memory had clumsily installed where the window ought to be, would hurry off at full speed, thrusting before it the fireplace and sweeping aside the wall of the passage; a little courtyard would occupy the place where, a moment earlier, my dressing-room had lain, and the dwelling-place which I had built up for myself in the darkness would have gone to join all those other dwellings glimpsed in the whirlpool of awakening, put to flight by that pale sign traced above my window-curtains by the uplifted forefinger of dawn.