

People passed, who entered a little church. Luc understood that they came there for another hunger. Then, he had hunger anew, a hunger more profound, a hunger desperate, and which almost made him shed tears. Not that he felt himself less happy. He suffered as from a lack—as if having seen that, he had found himself diminished. He entered.

LUC TO THE DEMONS

Ah! I see you, demons. This is no longer the earth, this is not heaven . . . is it hell? For purgatory, really, can I believe in it?

Would it be from gratuitous joy that your little looks gleam, demons? Or should I look for some malice there? Demons, dear demons, my friends the demons (but are you really demons?) tell me, what do these looks mean? I put myself in your school, demons, a charming school in truth, and since I have pretended to reduce God to formulas, show me at least the mistake, for you alone, can know it.

They laugh, they do not hear me. Ah! you are allowed to laugh. What is it if a man is tempted, who knows himself tempted—even if he sins? Demons, unfortunate demons. Can you do without God? (*he laughs*) No more than I. (*He laughs always*), and that is why you are assembled here this evening. You are reduced to a very little thing, demons a mistake in a problem!

You jostle each other with your elbows, I see well, and also you laugh. Am I mistaken? (*He takes his head in his hands. He seeks*) Would it be the contrary then? Would it be when a man is tempted and knows that he is lost. Temptation or sin, which damns? Would there be absolute temptation only in God? (*He makes a gesture of doubt and despair.*)

Your silence teaches me more about it than I should learn from it myself. I thought I was between two postulates of my soul, and here they give the choice between Satan and God. But does one not always choose between Satan and God? I am seated near my lamp, and my gestures are tranquil—I think; they are my gestures however which project behind me those tumultuous figures. In every man are there not consecrated regions and cursed regions. (*His voice chokes, his utterance is stifled and hurried*) One never chooses except within himself, one never chooses anything but himself, one never chooses

He throws himself on the ground and weeps.

So slyly the slope of our thoughts is hastened and enlarged. O God, O Satan, will you pardon my sacriligious tranquillity? Before me your image: I pretended however to do without you.