

"The new scheme is, we fear, more magnificent than practical. That the three-million-dollar house will give distinction to its neighborhood and satisfaction to its patrons, may be regarded as certain; that it may offer some notable representations is by no means improbable; but that it will immediately and directly raise the national standard of drama, or hasten the looked-for revival, only the most sanguine of enthusiasts will believe."

The dramatic papers are more friendly. The New York *Dramatic Mirror* thinks that such a theater as is proposed would "easily and quickly dominate the society notion that gave it birth," and "might well become the pride of the whole country." *The Theatre Magazine* (New York) says:

"The new National Theatre probably will not be more successful in finding good new plays than are the speculative managers, but at least it will do what the speculative manager does not do—it will give us adequate performances of the classic and standard plays, so that the growing generation, the men and women of to-morrow, may have an opportunity of seeing well acted the dramatic masterpieces of all lands. In this lies the real value of the proposed theatre—not in the fact that it will be the most expensive and probably the most beautiful playhouse in America, if not in the world, and that society—which really cares as much about educating the drama as it does about educating the naked Hottentot—will make it the resort of wealth and fashion. And so potent and far reaching will be this educational influence of the splendid new playhouse that indirectly it will affect all our other theatres. It will improve plays and acting everywhere."

THE APOSTLE—BAHR'S POLITICAL DRAMA

"The Apostle," by Hermann Bahr, an Austrian playwright and dramatic critic of extraordinary power and brilliancy, deals with a theme somewhat veiled by the title. The name "Apostle" scarcely suggests the atmosphere of modern party politics, yet this is the *milieu* in which the personages and the events of the play are set, and the conclusion deduced from it is the impossibility of accomplishing the regeneration of society by the machinery of the state. Bahr's drama is now being played in St. Petersburg, where it has produced a sensation owing to the bearing which it is interpreted to have upon the actual political happenings in Russia, and in New York its production is promised in the near future by Orleneff's Russian company, with Orleneff in the leading rôle.

The point on which the plot turns is very similar to that in Mrs. Edith Wharton's short story, "The Best Man," which was contributed to *Collier's* recent "Short-Story Contest," and which one of the judges, Senator Lodge, thought "by far the best story offered." In the drama and in the story the hero, an upright statesman, is compromised by the action of his wife, who, without his knowledge, has been trapped into receiving a loan from one who seeks this means of placing the statesman in his power. In each case the statesman, though nearly overwhelmed, triumphs nobly over his tricky enemies. In "The Apostle" the statesman is an Austrian prime minister who has earned his sobriquet by his sterling character, his lofty

ideals and his disinterested motives in serving his country. The government is undertaking the building of a canal for which two companies are bidding—the National Bank of Austria and the Southwest Company, an American corporation. The Prime Minister is in favor of the National Bank, while the party of the right favors the Southwest Company, and is greatly aided by the enormous sums of money that the American company is expending in bribes to obtain the contract. Great opposition to the Premier's course is manifested. The members of the ministerial party are discontented and urge upon the Minister the necessity of strengthening their position by awarding the government offices to their own men. At a meeting in the house of the minister, which takes place before the parliamentary session at which this question of the canal franchise is to be decided, Gohl, a deputy of the chamber, comes out most boldly for this change of policy. He is known to be himself an aspirant for the office of prefect, and in order to gain the assistance of the premier's wife, Irene, he has induced her to borrow money from the National Bank without the knowledge of her husband. In the course of the meeting, the Premier grows furious at Gohl, calls him a "scoundrel," and turns him out of the house.

The second act opens upon a scene in parliament in which Andri, the young leader of the right, in a brilliant speech, attacks the government and calls the Minister an unpractical dreamer and a poet, not fit to administer

the sober business of state. The Minister replies in a calm, impressive address, and sits down amid thundering applause. The victory of the ministerial party seems assured and the President is about to put the matter to a vote, when Gohl, smarting under the sense of his recent rough handling by the Premier and the open scorn with which he is treated by all the members of his own party, demands the floor and precipitates the following tumultuous scene:

Gohl (to the Premier, who, after giving Gohl a contemptuous look, turns to the door and is about to withdraw): I want you to remain here, Premier; I am going to bring charges against you.

Premier (motioning to his secretary to stay): I hear.

Gohl: I accuse you of having betrayed the country and sold it for money.

Andri (leader of the right; breaking out indignantly against Gohl): For shame!

Tawn, Lus and Leppa (prominent members of the left; jumping up and addressing Gohl): For shame! Scoundrel! Liar!

(The Premier stands motionless as if transfixed.)

Gohl (in a shrill, loud voice reaching out above the noise of the house): Sold it for the money of the National Bank, which bribed and paid him in hard cash!

(Andri turns away in contempt from Gohl and walks up ostentatiously to the Minister. There is a great uproar in the house. The president has risen from his seat and rings the bell violently.)

Gohl (shouting with all the vigor of his lungs): I am going to prove it!

President (shouting): Deputy Gohl, I will not suffer you to—

Gohl (not heeding the President's interruption): I am going to prove it!

President (ringing violently and shouting): You cannot speak if I—

Gohl (in a still shriller voice): I am going to prove it!

All the Deputies on the Left: For shame! Scoundrel! Down with him! Put him out!

Minister (coming up at one bound to the stenographers' table, and stretching himself to his full height like a lion, with a powerful gesture of his uplifted hand): Let him prove it! *(Then turning to Gohl amid the sudden stillness that ensues):* Prove it!

Gohl: I am going to prove that the Minister is not only a petty adventurer as Andri has called him with that delicate and careful circumlocution which, under the mask of justice, he parades for every species of corruption, for—

All the Deputies on the Right (some jumping on the benches, others running to the middle of the hall and waving their fists at Gohl): Scoundrel! Scamp! Call him to order!

Andri: He is mad, stark mad!

Minister (shoving back the deputies of the right): Let him furnish the proofs! *(Addressing Gohl in a loud, threatening voice):* Your proofs!

Gohl: Not only, as Deputy Andri said, a little adventurer, but a—a common thief!

(A terrific uproar. The whole audience in the gallery and in the boxes jump up from their seats and bend over the railing.)

The Ministers (addressing the President): Close up, close up! Close the session!

(The President rings the bell continuously with an air of helplessness.)

All Deputies of Right and Left (tumultuously): Proofs! proofs!

Prime Minister (steps up close to Gohl): Proofs!

Gohl (clamors at the top of his voice): I have them, yes, I have the proofs! *(Pulls a package of papers from his pocket and waves it triumphantly in the air):* Here, here, here they are, the proofs!

(A sudden stillness falls upon the entire house. All the groups seem to be dazed. Not a sound, not a movement is heard. All look with breathless suspense at the Minister.)

Gohl (in a light, calm, conversational tone as he displays one paper after the other): Acknowledgements to the director of the National Bank of receipts of loans *(with light irony)*, of course, loans, Sept. 10th, Nov. 4th, and so on, and so forth. *(Handing a paper to the Minister):* Tell me, please, is this your wife's writing? Or are you going to deny it?

Prime Minister (remains rooted to the spot as if struck by lightning; then slowly puts out his hand for the paper, looks at it, and suddenly begins to simper as if in a fit of convulsions; he opens his mouth twice, but is incapable of articulating a sound; finally he says in a rattling, gurgling voice): It is my wife's writing. *(Then breaks down and tumbles on a chair with his head thrown back. At this moment the fearful tension is relieved and gives place to a wild uproar and confusion.)*

People in the gallery and in the boxes (furiously gesticulating): For shame! for shame! Depose him! Down with the Minister! Down with him!

One of the audience (clamoring): The Minister is a thief! a thief! The Minister is a thief!

Several: The Minister is a thief! Down with the Minister! The Minister is a thief!

A street-arab (pushes up to the front bench of the gallery, and jumping upon it shouts in a thundering voice, pointing his finger at the Minister): Beware of pickpockets! Pickpocket! Pickpocket!

The entire gallery on the right, soon also followed by the left (chanting in a rhythmic fashion): Pickpocket! Pickpocket! Pickpocket!

Firmian (the most intimate friend of the Minister, goes up to him, touches him on the shoulder and whispers): Carl! Carl!

Ministers (gesticulating violently and talking all together so that only disconnected words and phrases are heard): Evidence! Dismissal! But the evidence? I wash my hands clean of the entire matter! Impossible! Dismiss! Break up! At once! Resignation! Resignation!

Deputies of the Right (violently gesticulating): An unconditional resignation! What! against such evidence? Resignation! Now or never! The people are with us! In the face of such evidence! Immediate resignation!

Prime Minister (with glassy eyes, his head thrown forward in the arms of Firmian): The wretch! The wretch! Think of it, Firmian! My wife! My wife! What have I done? (*Weeps like a child. He starts as if in a sudden fit of insanity, thrusts back Firmian and his secretary, and staggering down the steps shouts in an unnatural voice:*) I am a thief! Away! Don't come near me! I am a thief! (*Gazing up at the gallery and his whole body shaking convulsively:*) I am a thief!

Andri (rushing upon Gohl): Judas! Judas!

The disorder in the chamber increases until it becomes a veritable pandemonium. Someone rushes from the gallery and attacks the Premier. Cries of "Police!" and "Help!" are raised, and finally the chamber is cleared amid the wildest excitement, the fighting continuing in the street. The third act discovers the Premier in a dark room in his own house after he has succeeded in making his escape from the infuriated mob.

Premier's Secretary (putting down his hat and umbrella upon the table): We are saved! Oh!

Premier (without hat, his coat crumpled and begrudged, his collar loose, his hair disheveled): The beasts! the beasts! (*Feeling his face with a feverish hand, and bursting forth in a fit of indignation:*) Spat upon! trampled upon!—whipped! (*Lyng*)—whipped like a cur! (*Jumps up staggering, and utters inarticulate cries*) Oh-oh-oh! (*His body trembles with rage, he falls back.*)

Secretary (picks him up and puts him on a chair): Premier! Premier!

Premier: The beasts! The beasts! Oh-oh-oh! (*Shaking his fists at the window*) Beasts! Wolves! Devils! Infernal Devils! I—I—I— (*His voice breaks; he seizes his throat with his hands, tears open his shirt, and tumbles down heavily with the chair. With a rattle in his voice*)
hrr—hrr—

Secretary (trying to help him up): Premier!

Premier (pushes him away with his feet; shrieking): Leave me alone! Go! I want nobody, nobody!—Alone! I want nobody, nobody any more! —The beasts! The beasts!

Secretary walks up to the door, presses the electric button, and the room is lighted up.)

Premier (starts back, blinded by the light. Mechanically): My people! My people! My people! Everybody is gone from me, everybody! I am left all alone.

Secretary (pained): Premier!

Premier (indifferently, almost contemptuously): Oh, you! That's because you get paid for it! Beasts! Everybody! Everybody has left me, even Firmian (*shaking his head, while large tears roll down his face*). Firmian! No more Firmian! Why should he? I am only a thief. (*Jumping up with a desperate shriek*) I am only a thief, only a thief! I am a thief, a thief, a thief!

(A shrill whistle is heard from the street close under the balcony. This is answered by whistles from all sides. Then steps are heard approaching nearer and nearer; a confusion of voices, laughter.)

A groaning voice in the street: There is light in the house of the thief.

Secretary (trembling): They have seen the light. (*He quickly puts out the light, and the room is again in darkness.*)

Many voices in the street: Pickpocket! pickpocket! pickpocket! Down with him! Down with the thief! Down with him! (*Laughter and yells.*)

(A large stone crashes through the glass door of the balcony and falls on the table upon which the Premier has tumbled in his fright, narrowly missing him; he crawls under the table in mad panic.)

Repeated cries of "Pickpocket!" The Secretary rolls down the shutters and the noise in the street grows faint. At this point Firmian rushes wildly into the room.)

Premier (from under the table): Don't let anybody come in! Help! help!

Firmian (walking up to the Premier): Carl! Carl!

Premier (crawling out from under the table toward the door on the left; shrieks with terror): Mercy! mercy! I am innocent!

Firmian: Carl, it is I, Firmian. Calm yourself!

Premier (gropes with his hands after him, composes himself and tries to rise; still hesitating as if surprised): You? Firmian?

Firmian: The gate is guarded by military; you are safe. (*Lifts the Premier and puts him on a chair.*)

Premier: Firmian, you will remain with me, will you not? Thank you, thank you! (*Puts his head on Firmian's breast.*)

Firmian: Calm yourself, for Heaven's sake!

Premier (sinks on the chair): My good Firmian! (*The street is quiet again, not a sound is heard.*)

Firmian: I do not know how I came to lose you so suddenly. My hat was knocked from my head; I bent down to pick it up and fell forward. A young man helped me up, but when I got on my feet again you were already gone. I was carried along with the crowd, but finally succeeded in slipping out into a side street. I ran and ran until I found a cab at the bridge. But it was impossible to pass on account of the throngs of people. Then I happened to come across a military guard. The lieutenant knew me and escorted me to your house. But now all is over.

Premier (laughing with a melancholy air): Do you think so? Yes, all is over.—Fame, power (*lowering his voice*), honor. All is over. I have nothing, nothing left. My whole life, everything is gone. My whole life's work is shattered, gone in an hour. Not a trace remains. I am a thief, a thief.

Firmian: But whoever believes that you—? Why, no one imagines it even. You are out of your mind! (*Walks up and down the room.*) The few criers and comedians! It will blow over, and they will be ashamed of it themselves. There is no one who believes this about you. It is stupid to think it. We are not yet so far gone. Every honest man knows what to think of you, and you can well afford to be indifferent about the opinion of the others. No decent man can imagine anything of the sort about you. They know you. Your whole life lies open to them.

Premier: But it is true, it is true.

Firmian: What is true?

Premier: I saw the notes.

Firmian: Well?

Premier: It is her writing. It is true.

Firmian: But no decent man who knows you will think on that account that you—

Premier: Can you comprehend it? You know her well. Can you (*struggling with his tears*), can you comprehend that she—?

Firmian: Good Lord, women!

Premier: She, she! I could have sooner believed anything, anything else in the world than that she—

Firmian: That will all be explained, I am sure. Wait until we hear what the director of the bank has to say. I am positive she had no idea—

Premier: No idea?

Firmian: I have no doubt of it; I am positive.

Premier: No idea that one must not steal?

Firmian: Women have their own opinions. Did you ever explain to her that our peculiar position sometimes does not permit us to do certain things which in themselves are not at all inadmissible?

Premier (*staggered*): I do not know what you mean.

Firmian: This is not the time to enter into explanations. What you want now above all else is rest. You must gather up all your strength, all your energy for to-morrow, in order to—

Premier: What am I to do to-morrow?

Firmian: You must show them to-morrow who you are.

Premier: I?

Firmian: You owe this to yourself and to your country. Nothing has happened so far. We will get through with Gohl in very short order. And the people (*with ironic emphasis*), the people who spat upon you to-day will hail you to-morrow. *Mobilis turba Quiritum!* You must only not give yourself up. You must show how it has come about, you must prove that you are innocent. There is no calumny that cannot be put down if you only go at it with might and main. But for this you must above all be fresh and healthy, and with strong nerves. Don't agitate yourself any further. The best thing for you now is to go to bed.

Premier: To her? Yes, I must go through that yet, I must go through that. (*To the Secretary*) Call my wife in. (*As if frightened, bursting into a laugh*) My wife!

Firmian: Not to-day, not now, you are too much worn out.

Premier: I must go through that. (*To the Secretary*) Call her in.

Firmian: Then I will leave you.

Premier: Stay here, I entreat you. I promise you I will be very calm, I will be quite composed. I only want to know (*with a sudden outburst*) because I still cannot conceive that she, that she— (*Crying out aloud*) *Firmian*, can you conceive that she whom I, she who—

Firmian: Did you not promise me—?

Premier: Yes, yes, I shall be calm, very calm, but you must remain here with me.

Irene, his wife, enters, looking very pale. Gohl had told her previously that he was going

to bring a public accusation against her husband, and the situation is therefore clear to her.

Firmian (*with an air of compassion*): Lady, lady!

Premier: Silence! I am going to speak. (*In a whisper, without looking at her*) I am not excited, I am quite composed, quite composed. Now then. I want to know.

Irene (*softly*): Carl!

Premier: Yes?

Irene: Now do listen to me!

Premier (*thunderingly*): Yes?

Irene: I did not know that—

Premier: Yes or no? Yes? Yes?

Irene (*bursting into tears*): Forgive me! Forgive me!

Premier: Oh! oh! oh! Thief! thief! (*Rushes at Irene.*)

(*Firmian interposes between him and Irene.*)

Premier (*to Firmian*): Get away! Get away, or I— (*Springs at his throat.*)

Firmian (*pushing him away*): Carl!

(*Premier staggers back as if in terror of himself, and drops on a chair, covering his face with his hands in shame.*)

Firmian (*takes Irene by the hands and leads her to a corner on the left*): I can very well imagine how it came about. You were in an embarrassed position, and—

Irene (*softly*): We needed more than—

Firmian: Why did you not tell me about it?

(*Premier raises his head and listens to the conversation.*)

Irene: I was afraid of Carl.

Firmian: Gohl is just the man you should not have—

Irene: He proposed it himself; he must have learned that I was in financial difficulties.

Firmian (*in a mild tone*): And you never thought, Irene, that—

Irene: What do I know about such matters?

Firmian: But you could have understood that for Carl to be implicated in that way with the National Bank—

Irene: I did not even know that the money came from the National Bank.

Firmian: What then? Where did you think the money came from?

Irene (*shrugging her shoulders*): I took the money and asked no questions.

Firmian: And did not think of the consequences at all?

Irene: The money was not given to me, I just borrowed it, and meant to save up and pay. How could I have known that?

Firmian: If you had only said a word to me.

Irene: I did not have the courage.

Firmian: But you confided in Gohl.

Irene: Because he took pains with me. He noticed that I was troubled. He asked me, you did not. (*Smiling painfully.*) I do not mean this as a reproach. How could you have thought of it? Only I want to explain how it happened. I had nobody to turn to. Gohl was the only person.

Premier (*with a mild tone*): And I?

Irene (*raising her head to the Premier, visibly affected*): You?

Premier: I, Irene. Was I not here?

Irene (slightly embarrassed): But you—you were occupied with more important matters.

Premier: More important matters?

Irene (very simply): I could not come to you and bother you with my troubles too.

Premier: I was occupied with more important matters!

Irene (to Firmian): Don't you understand it? I wanted him to have peace at least when he was home. I tried to do the best. It gave him such pleasure to see me contented. I had often made up my mind to speak to him when I saw no other way out, but then when he would come home tired and exhausted and so glad to have a half-hour to play with the children, I could not do it. You may say what you please, but I could not make up my mind to do it. You say that I have acted wrongly. It may be, I do not know. I only know that I could not do otherwise. You have never seen him tired and worn the whole day long with all these duties and cares that I do not understand, and then I was to come to him with my cares in addition, and torment him again? No, no; I could not act otherwise! Do with me what you please, I could not, I could not act otherwise! (*Tears stifle her voice.*)

Premier (after a long pause): Firmian, after all the whole thing was a lie.

Firmian (with surprise): What?

Premier: Our whole work.—Well, it is just a thought that came to me. (*Remains standing at the window absorbed in thought, then turns to Irene*): What you must have suffered, my poor child! Irene (*Bursts into sobs.*) Did he torment you very much?

Irene (weeping): Only of late.

Premier (putting his hand on Irene's head): Forgive me!

(*Irene grasps his hand and wants to kiss it.*)

Premier: No, no, you must go now.—To-morrow! (*Exit Irene.*)

Premier (closing the door after her): To-morrow! It is my fault. Now I understand all. Now only do I understand it.

Secretary: Deputy Andri is here. He wants to see you very urgently.

Premier (recovering his self-composure): Let him come in. But first open the windows and let in some air.

Andri (enters): I have come to apologize to you.

Premier (surprised): To apologize to me? You?

Andri (quickly): I regret, I am so ashamed that I have worked against you!

Premier (calmly): Why, you never—

Andri: I have always tried to run you down and to incite people against you. I have traveled through the country to set the people against you. I have fought against you with all the passion of my feverish soul because I—(*pausing an instant*) because I hated you, hated you.

Premier (with a warding-off gesture): Andri!

Andri: Hated you out of envy, out of sheer envy, as an insignificant and weak man hates the powerful and the good man. I hated you for many years. Now I have repented it, I have been punished with this terrible day, this terrible day. I shall never betray you again. I promise you that. I shall crawl away somewhere in a corner

and disappear. (*Premier puts his hands on Andri's shoulder.*)

Andri (withdrawing, with drooping head): No, leave me. I am ashamed of myself, I am ashamed of myself!

Firmian: Yes, dear Andri, life is different from what one imagines it to be.

Andri: Terrible! terrible!

Firmian: You have slandered and lied—(*Andri makes a negative gesture*)—or you have allowed others to slander and to lie; all in good faith, of course, so as to propagate your opinions and to put us out, for the sake of the party. That excuses everything! *Acherontia movebo!* You did move it! Now take care that it does not swallow you also.

Andri: It is not for this reason.

Premier: Let that alone now. That is not the question any more. (*Extending his hand to Andri*) Thank you.

Andri (grasping his hand): I apologize for everything, everything.

Premier (pressing his hand again): We have all erred.

Andri: Oh, I have paid for it, I have atoned for it.

Firmian: Why, what happened? What is it that makes you so queer?

Andri: I wanted to come here directly after the break-up of the session, but it was impossible to make my way through the crowd. I tried here, there, because I felt I had to see you, because I could not get any peace of mind until I told you that I did not believe all this about you, that I knew that the scoundrel lied, and that I trusted and honored you. But it was impossible to get through the crowd. Then I met a group of people who knew me. They shouted, clamored and acclaimed me. I was seized and carried along with them. Oh, how ashamed I was of myself, how I despised myself! In order to get away from them I said that I wanted to go home. They carried me to my house and up the steps. It seemed as if they could not tear themselves away from me from sheer admiration and enthusiasm. For, don't you see? I am the hero, the hero of the mob! (*With a gesture of disgust*) I still feel their touch and wish I could purge myself of the defilement. When we got on the balcony they surrounded me, knelt before me and kissed my hands.—Oh, those faces, distorted with anger, malice and hate! The infamy of it, the beasts! . . . Oh, that hour, that hour! I have made good, I have atoned for all the wrong I have done you. I will crawl away in some corner and disappear.—But one thing I still had to do—to apologize to you. My motives were good, I did not know the people. I regarded as conviction what was nothing but hatred and envy. I know it now. I recognized myself in Gohl. We wished to revenge ourselves on you because you are greater. That was it. We are like the crowd, like the mob that acclaimed us; they know why they acclaim us. This is the recognition I came to in that terrible hour, and I was anxious to let you know it, that is all. After that I am ready to go. I will disappear and try to become a decent man in some quiet place and earn my bread by honest toil.

Premier (in calm but powerful voice): You err.

(*Andri raises his eyes to the Apostle, while his face seems to radiate with a sort of religious ecstasy.*)

Premier: You err. You have no apologies to make to me; I have no apologies to make to you. We have both been wrong, we have both learned. Now we can both walk together and seek the right. We shall never part again. (*Pointing at the door*) There is a woman who has lived here many, many years, a woman who loves me, whom I love, a good woman, the best of mothers, faithful, pure—in short, good. Many years has she been with me, and was loved by me. This woman became a thief. Right here at my side, whose whole life was honesty. She stole without knowing it, not even from frivolity, but simply because she did not understand it. It is my fault, mine alone. For this woman who has lived for so many years at my side and loved me, the mother of my children, had no one to confide in. I was not present to advise her, to help her. I thought I had more important work to do. I was outside. I had to convert the people, I had to speak, to speak always and everywhere. In your speech against me to-day you reproached me with my big words and small accomplishments. You were quite right. Words are nothing. Men have listened to us in the name of liberty and justice, have applauded and hurraed us and grown enthusiastic, and then they went forth and remained slaves and unjust. Like my wife, who always listened to talk about virtue, they believed in it and then stole! Behold! the word has no power, the word cannot help. Everyone takes it, repeats it, and remains what and where he was. The inner man cannot be reached by words. We who bring the words, we have felt them here. (*pointing to his breast*), and therefore we believe them. Our feelings must accompany our words. But the people hear only a sound which deceives them, but has no genuine feeling. We imagine that because they repeat our words they also feel with us. No, they repeat your words, they repeat my words, but they do not feel them and that is why they do not act up to them. Now we must see that the word be expressed in life. All else is sham and emptiness. You have experienced it. You meant to speak the truth, but they heard in your words only their greed and their wrath. I have experienced it also. Give me your hand. Now we will seek the right path together.

Andri: No, I do not deserve it.

Premier: We have both erred.

Andri: In your presence I feel myself old.

Premier: No one is old who has a task to perform.

Andri: And I have lost my faith in man.

Premier: Believe only in yourself and you shall be strong.

Andri: I am ashamed of myself.

Premier: You have suffered; the gods love you. That is their sign.

Andri: It is too hard, too profound.

Premier: Suffering is grace, it purges and improves.

Andri (*wearily*): To begin again?

Premier: Yes, again! Always, always again! In order again to fail, again to suffer, again to err, again to learn, endlessly—until we reach the goal, not you and I, but the people in the distance

(*gazing into the distance*). Bright, radiant men who smile and soar. I believe in men.

Andri (*touched, kissing his hand*): You—you are great.

Premier (*smiles and puts his hands on Andri's head; then, while his whole being seems to pass into a sort of spiritual ecstasy, and he grows taller and taller*): Only good. We need be only good. That is far greater than to be great. Behold, have we not been foolish? What have we done? Once in a blessed moment we perceived a purer condition. And how did we show our gratitude? We pressed it into the mold of a poor word—Liberty, Justice! And we grow impatient if the people fail to understand it immediately. It is so foolish. To us, indeed, is sufficient the memory of that blessed moment! But the people, how should they know of it? What can the poor word do for them? It flickers, and the people see it glimmer and run to catch it: Liberty, Justice! But in their hands it turns gray. It has only sparkled in the reflection of our own felicity. No, it is so foolish; so foolish! You can make people understand only that they themselves have already experienced. That is it. Let them enter into our own felicity, our own blessedness, that they may see with us and reverence with us! The word is of no avail; they must feel it. (*To Firmian*) Now you laugh, you wise man, for it is not given to you to hope because you think you know evil. But I say that the evil is only apparent, it is not real. We are all good, only no one believes it of another, and because each one thinks the other bad he disguises himself until he becomes bad himself. Wait until we are but together in some blessed moment so that we can see one another as we really are, and all men will sink into one another's arms like brothers. Come with us, wise man! Humanity has been too clever. You see how little reason has accomplished. Come with us and be an enthusiast.

Firmian (*moved, extending his hand to the Premier*): You glorious man!

Premier (*stationing himself between Andri and Firmian, and holding each one by the hand*): Only good, Firmian. We need only be good. Good is the only, the highest thing. (*To Andri, smiling*) In a quiet place, did you say? Yes, we will go to a quiet place and sit down by the side of the people, and take each one singly by the hand and envelope him with such love that he will grow weak and be no longer able to withstand us. (*Laughing good-naturedly*) No party, my Andri! No words! We shall sit very still by the side of the people, and nestle up closely and warmly against them; and we shall be good to them and so tender and loving that they will incline toward us and become even as we, first one, then two, then several, then all—gentle, subdued, all—in the future, in the far distance.—Let this be our covenant.

Andri (*with admiration*): Thus did you appear to me when I was a boy, when they told me about you: the Apostle!

Premier: Go now! The day is breaking. We must each of us hasten to his task! (*Stretching forth both his hands*) I am thankful for the lot that has fallen to me!

(*The light of dawn breaks through the windows; the curtain falls.*)