Here are deep matters, not easily to be dismissed by crying blasphemy.
To

Maman Célie

for reasons which appear hereafter
## Contents

**FOREWORD**  
3

**Part One**  
THE VOODOO RITES  

I. **SECRET FIRES**  
7  
II. **THE WAY IS OPENED AND CLOSED**  
16  
III. **THE PETRO SACRIFICE**  
28  
IV. **THE "OUANGA" CHARM**  
45  
V. **GOAT-CRY GIRL-CRY**  
54  
VI. **THE GOD INCARNATE**  
70

**Part Two**  
BLACK SORCERY  

I. **THE ALTAR OF SKULLS**  
81  
II. **"... DEAD MEN WORKING IN THE CANE FIELDS***  
92  
III. **TOUSSÉL'S PALE BRIDE**  
104  
IV. **CÉLESTINE WITH A SILVER DISH**  
115

**Part Three**  
THE TRAGIC COMEDY  

I. **A BLIND MAN WALKING ON EGGS**  
127  
II. **A NYMPH IN BRONZE**  
134
CONTENTS

III. "THE TRUTH IS A BEAUTIFUL THING" 142
IV. "LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, THE PRESIDENT!" 150
V. BUT THE TRUTH BECOMES SOMEWHAT TANGLEO 162

Part Four
TRAILS WINDING
I. THE WHITE KING OF LA GONAVE 171
II. THE BLACK QUEEN'S COURT 185
III. A TORN SCRAP OF PAPER 194
IV. PORTRAIT OF A "GROS NÈGRE" 203
V. "POLYNICE AND HIS WHITE" 207
VI. THE "DANSE CONGO" 219
VII. "NO WHITE MAN COULD BE AS DUMB AS THAT" 227
VIII. PORTRAIT OF A SCIENTIST 239
IX. MORNE LA SELLE ADVENTURE 247
X. THE SOUL OF HAITI 270
FROM THE AUTHOR'S NOTEBOOK 283

List of Drawings by Alexander King

HERE ARE DEEP MATTERS, NOT EASILY TO BE DISMISSED BY CRYING BLASPHEMY

| Frontispiece | Louis' face glowed with a light that was not always heavenly | 8 |
|              | Dort Dessiles, who was a "Papaloi"               | 20 |
|              | Maman Celie, high priestess of the mysteries     | 27 |
|              | The "Mamaloi" in a scarlet robe                  | 35 |
|              | Blood-maddened, sex-maddened, god-maddened     | 42 |
|              | Danced their dark Saturnalia                     | 50 |
|              | But marked for death by the Voodoo curse, they died | 67 |
|              | At the left of the altar were the "Rada" drums    | 67 |
|              | And as she sang, she was a daughter doomed to die | 74 |
|              | They were staring fixedly as entranced mediums stare into crystal globes | 82 |
|              | Croyance, leading the nine dead men and women   | 93 |
|              | Strange tales are told of Voodoo in the boudoir and salon | 98 |
|              | No one dared to stop them, for they were corpses walking in the sunlight | 112 |
|              | Antoine Simone, president of the Republic, was active in black sorcery | 112 |
|              | Face mat gold like a Byzantine polychrome         | 154 |
|              | He had to whip her once or twice a year           | 191 |
Our West Indian mail boat lay at anchor in a tropical green gulf.

From the palm-fringed shore a great mass of mountains rose, fantastic and mysterious. Dark jungle covered their near slopes, but high beyond the jungle, blue-black, bare ranges piled up, towering.

At the water's edge, lit by the sunset, sprawled the town of Cap Haïtien. Our boat lay so close that in the bright, fading light it was easy to distinguish landmarks.

Here amid more modern structures were the wrecked mansions of the sixteenth-century French colonials who had imported slaves from Africa and made Haiti the richest colony in the western hemisphere.

Here was the paved pleasance on the waterfront, scene of white massacres when the blacks rose with fire and sword.

Here in ruins was the palace built for Pauline Bonaparte when Napoleon sent his brother-in-law with an imperial army to do battle with slaves who had won their freedom.

On a peak behind the Cape loomed the gigantic fortress which the self-crowned black king Christophe had built after every soldier of that white imperial army was dead or had sailed back to France.

And now above the present-day government headquarters in the town floated the red-blue flag made by ripping the white from the French tricolor. Thus it has floated for more than a hundred years as the symbolic emblem of black freedom.

All this was panoramic as we lay at anchor in the sunset, but as night fell it faded to vagueness and disappeared.
The voodoo rites

Part One:

Only the jungle mountains remained, dark, mysterious: and from their slopes came presently far out across the water the steady boom of Voodoo drums.

New York
September, 1928
Chapter I
SECRET FIRES

Louis, son of Catherine Ozias of Orblanche, paternity unknown—and thus without a surname was he inscribed in the Haitian civil register—reminded me always of that proverb out of hell in which Blake said, “He whose face gives no light shall never become a star.”

It was not because Louis' black face, frequently perspiring, shone like patent leather; it glowed also with a mystic light that was not always heavenly.

For Louis belonged to the chimeric company of saints, monsters, poets, and divine idiots. He used to get besotted drunk in a corner, and then would hold long converse with seraphim and demons, also from time to time with his dead grandmother who had been a sorceress.

In addition to these qualities, Louis was our devoted yard boy. He served us, in the intervals of his sobriety, with a passionate and all-consuming zeal.

We had not chosen Louis for our yard boy. He had chosen us. He had also chosen the house we lived in. These two things had happened while we were still at the Hotel Montagne. And they had seemed to us slightly miraculous, though the grapevine telegraph of servants in Port-au-Prince might adequately have explained both. Katie and I had been house-hunting. We had been shown unlivably ostentatious plaster palaces with magnificent gardens, and livable wooden villas with inadequate gardens or no gardens at all, until we had begun to despair. One afternoon as we left the hotel gate, strolling down the hill to Ash Pay Davis's, a black boy, barefooted and so ragged that we thought he was a beggar, stopped us and said in creole with
affectionate assurance, as if he had known us all our lives, "I have found the house for you." Not a house, mind you. Nor was there any emphasis on the the; there couldn't be in creole. He said literally, "M' té joied' caill' ou" (I have found your house). What we did may sound absurd. We returned to the hotel, got out our car, took Louis inside—he had wanted to ride the running-board—and submitted to his guidance. He directed us into the fashionable Rue Turgeau toward the American club and colony, but before reaching that exclusive quarter, we turned unfamiliarly left and then up a lane that ran into the jungle valley toward Petionville, and there where city and jungle joined was a dilapidated but beautiful garden of several acres and in its midst a low, rambling, faded pink one-story house with enormous verandas on a level with the ground.

Some of the doors were locked; the rest were nailed up. Behind the house were stone-built servants' quarters and a kitchen, also locked. There was a bassin (swimming-pool) choked with debris and leaves.

Who owned this little dilapidated paradise, whether it was for rent, how much the rent might be—these were matters outside the scope of Louis' genius. He had not inquired before coming to find us, and he made no offers or suggestions now.

We thanked Louis, dropped him at Sacré Cœur, told him to come see us at the hotel next morning, then drove to Ash Pay's and discovered after considerable telephoning that the place belonged to Maitre Morel and might be rented for thirty dollars a month. Toussaint, black interpreter for the brigade who dabbled helpfully in everything, would get us the keys on Wednesday afternoon when Maitre Morel returned from Saint Marc.

Louis did not come to the hotel next morning, nor the morning after, but when we went with Toussaint three days later, Louis' face glowed with a light that was not always heavenly.
later to open the house, we were received blandly by Louis, who was already at home in a corner of the brick-paved veranda to which he had in the interval transported all his earthly possessions, consisting of a pallet, an old blanket, an iron cooking-pot, a candle-stub, and a small wooden box containing doubtless his more intimate treasures. In the pot were the remains of some boiled plantain, apparently his sole sustenance.

Neither he nor we ever mentioned the matter of employing him. Several days were going to elapse before we could move in, but I gave him the keys to the house then and there. I also gave him ten gourdes, the equivalent of two dollars, which was a large sum of money, and told him to buy for himself what was needful, suggesting a new shirt and a supply of food. He was undernourished, and with that new wealth he could feast for a week; the price of a chicken in Haiti is twenty cents.

Returning some days later, I found him with a new pair of tennis shoes, a magnificently gaudy new scarf knotted round his neck, lying on his back in the grass beneath the shade of a mango tree, blissfully and inoffensively drunk, singing a little happy tune which he made as it went, inviting the birds to come and admire his new clothes. His shirt was as before. His whole shoulder protruded from a rent in it. I examined the cook-pot. It contained the remains of some boiled plantain, and it had apparently contained nothing else in the interval. I have told you, I think, that Louis was a saint. Even so, I fear it is going to be difficult to make you understand Louis, unless you have read sympathetically the lives of the less reputable saints and have also lived in a tropical country like Haiti.

Of course when we furnished the house and moved in, we had additional servants—the dull, competent butler, a middle-aged woman cook, and for blanchisseuse a plump little wench with flashing teeth and roving eyes who promptly fell in love with Louis, gave him money, and more
intimate favors when he permitted it. Having four servants was not ostentatious in Port-au-Prince, even for us who in New York habitually have none. It was the general custom. We paid the four of them a grand sum total of thirty-one dollars monthly, and they found their own food. The last three were reasonably efficient, as servants, doing generally what they were told, but Louis, who never did what he was told, was nevertheless in actual fact, putting quite aside his fantastic power of holding our affection, the most efficient servant of them all. The things he wanted to do, he did without being ordered, and they were many. For instance, there was the matter of our small sedan. He knew nothing about its mechanical insides and could never learn to change a tire, but he took a passionate pride in keeping it clean and polished. He groomed it as if it were alive. When it came home covered with caked mud he dropped no matter what and labored like a madman. He would never clean up the garden, burn brush, carry stones, but during the first week he anticipated our intentions by appearing with vines and flowers for transplanting, the earth still clinging to their roots, which he had got from God knows where. And these also he attended devotedly as if they were alive in a more than vegetable sense.

He delighted in doing personal things to please us. Sometimes when we thought we needed him he was as tranquilly drunk as an opium-smoking Chinaman or off chasing the moon, but at moments when we least expected anything he would appear with a great armful of roses for Katie or a basket for me of some queer fruit not seen in the markets. On rare occasions, sometimes when drinking, sometimes not, he was hysterically unhappy and could not be comforted. But usually he was the soul of joy. And in the household Louis gradually centered his allegiance and chief concern on me. I mention this because most people, whether servants, kinsfolk, intimate friends, or casual acquaintances, find Katie the more admirable human being of us two. But Louis put me first. He began gradually to give me confidences. He felt, as time passed, that I understood him. And what has all this to do with the dark mysteries of Voodoo? you may ask, but I suspect that you already know. It was humble Louis and none other who set my feet in the path which led finally through river, desert, and jungle, across hideous ravines and gorges, over the mountains and beyond the clouds, and at last to the Voodoo Holy of Holies. These are not metaphors. The topography of Haiti is a tropical-upheaved, tumbled-towering maundland of paradises and infernos. There are sweet plains of green-waving sugar cane, coral strands palm-fronded, impenetrable jungles of monstrous tangled growth, arid deserts where obscene cactus rises spiked and hairy to thrice the height of a tall man on horseback and where salamanders play; there are black canyons which drop sheer four thousand feet, and forbidding mornes which rise to beyond nine thousand. But the trail which led among them and ended one night when I knelt at last before the great Rada drums, my own forehead marked with blood—that trail began at my own back doorstep and led only across the garden to my yard boy Louis’ bare, humble quarters where a tiny light was burning.

In a coconut shell filled with oil the little wick floated, its clear-flamed tip smaller than a candle’s, and before it, raised on a pile of stones such as a child might have built in play, was a stuffed bag made of scarlet cloth, shaped like a little water-jug, tied round with ribbon, surmounted by black feathers. Louis had come on tiptoe shortly after midnight, seeing me reading late and Katie gone to a dance at the club, whose music floated faintly across from Turgeau in the stillness. He explained that a mystère, a loa, which is a god or spirit, had entered the body of a girl who lived in a hut up the ravine behind our house, and that everywhere throughout our neighborhood, in the many straw-thatched
huts of the ravine, likewise in the detached servant quarters of the plaster palaces of American majors and colonels, hundreds of similar little sacred flames were burning.

Thus, and as time passed, confidence engendering confidence, I learned from Louis that we white strangers in this twentieth-century city, with our electric lights and motor cars, bridge games and cocktail parties, were surrounded by another world invisible, a world of marvels, miracles, and wonders—a world in which the dead rose from their graves and walked, in which a man lay dying within shouting distance of my own house and from no mortal illness but because an old woman out in Leogane sat slowly unwinding the thread wrapped round a wooden doll made in his image; a world in which trees and beasts talked for those whose ears were attuned, in which gods spoke from burning bushes, as on Sinai, and sometimes still walked bodily incarnate as in Eden's garden.

I also learned from Louis, or at least began to glimpse through him, something which I think has never been fully understood: that Voodoo in Haiti is a profound and vitally alive religion—alive as Christianity was in its beginnings and in the early Middle Ages when miracles and mystical illuminations were common everyday occurrences—that Voodoo is primarily and basically a form of worship, and that its magic, its sorcery, its witchcraft (I am speaking technically now), is only a secondary, collateral, sometimes sinisterly twisted by-product of Voodoo as a faith, precisely as the same thing was true in Catholic mediaeval Europe.

In short, I learned from Louis that while the High Commissioner, his lady, and the colonel had called and taken tea in our parlor, the gods themselves had been entering by the back door and abiding in our servants' lodge.

Nor was this surprising. It has been a habit of all gods from immemorial days. They have shown themselves singularly indifferent to polite company, high-sounding titles, parlers, and fine houses.... indifferent indeed to all worldly pride and splendor. We have built domed temples and vast cathedrals, baited with glories of polychrome and marble to trap them, but when the gods come uninvited of their own volition, or send their messengers, or drop their flame-script cards of visit from the skies, it is not often these gilded temples or the proud of the earth they seek, but rather some road-weary humble family asleep in a wayside stable, some illiterate peasant-girl dreaming in an orchard, some speculate peasant-girl dreaming in an orchard; a world invisible, a world of marvels, miracles, and wonders— a world in which the dead rose from their graves and walked, in which a man lay dying within shouting distance of my own house and from no mortal illness but because an old woman out in Leogane sat slowly unwinding the thread wrapped round a wooden doll made in his image; a world in which trees and beasts talked for those whose ears were attuned, in which gods spoke from burning bushes, as on Sinai, and sometimes still walked bodily incarnate as in Eden's garden.

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And perhaps it was through some such habit of the gods as this that mortal I, who have stood with bowed head and good intentions in so many of this world's great gilded cathedrals, mosques, and temples, have never felt myself so close to the invisible presence of ultimate mystery as I did later, more than once, beneath straw-thatched roofs in the Haitian mountains. And this despite up-cropping naïvetés, savageries, grotesqueries, superstitious mumbo-jumbo, and at times deliberate witch-doctor charlatan trickeries that must be included too if I am to keep this record honest.

Louis and I began to go wandering in the hills together and sitting under trees, where he would tell me of the names and attributes of the many Voodoo gods—Papa Legba, guardian of the gates, who was the most benevolent; Damballa Oueddo, wisest and most powerful, whose symbol was the serpent; Loco, god of the forests; Agoué, god of the sea; Maitresse Ezilée, who was the mild Blessed Virgin Mary; Ogoun Badagris, the bloody dreadful One whose voice was thunder. There were dozens of them, it seemed. It was like
a nursery lesson in Greek mythology, except that to Louis these were not myths, they were more real than he or I. No need to catalogue all their names here; most of them will fall naturally into the record later. Perhaps before the book is ended I shall try to compile a table of theological Voodoo statistics, but it will not be as congenial a task as sitting with Louis under a palm tree.5

One afternoon, quite of his own volition, he began telling me of the ritual ceremonies in which these gods were worshiped, and soon I realized he was eye-witness recounting things quite unknown to the outside world and extraordinarily at variance not only with fiction and stage versions of Voodoo ritual, but with the few records extant of persons who have claimed a direct knowledge. He was telling me, in his own rich creole, of choral processions all robed in white, of men and women grouped, antiphonally chanting, of a sacred black bull covered with embroidered draperies, glittering with adornments, with lighted candles fastened to its horns, led to the sacrificial altar.... "Ah, monsieur," he cried, excited, "it was belle! belle! belle!" He was seeing it once more as he sat there. I could tell it in his eyes. He was trying to make me see it. But now, lost in his own memory vision, he could only repeat that it was beautiful, beautiful, beautiful.

Belle was a word Louis seldom used, probably because everything to him was beautiful, just as everything was holy to St. Francis, and a special phenomenon would have to be superlatively beautiful before he felt the fact worth mentioning. Only two phenomena in our immediate lives had hitherto, separately, called forth the adjective: Claire and the peacock. The peacock had been given us by Major Davis, but it was not aware that it belonged to us; it followed Louis about as if he were its mate. "Oh, la belle bête!" he exclaimed when it first spread its tail, and he called it by no other name thereafter. When Claire had appeared from New York to visit us, Louis had exclaimed with like ecstatic spontaneity, "Oh, la belle dame!" She will forgive me for suggesting that this was extraordinary. She had beauty, yes, but not of a flagrant kind. Leo Katz, sunken in mystic portrait painting, had limned her as a saint, and might as easily have made her a sibyl or a she-devil, but the social herd in Port-au-Prince, as at home, found her more often strange than surpassingly lovely. Louis was quick enough at remembering names, and hers was easy, but during her entire stay with us he found no other name for her. It was always "the beautiful beast," and always "the beautiful lady."

Claire's face glowed as Louis sometimes did with the inner light that never shone on land or sea; she also was of that strange company, a little sister of the saints and succubi; and I think it was for this that Louis wisely found her beautiful.

And now in memory he had evoked another vision of unearthly beauty.

I said to him presently, "Louis, it was for this, and for this only, I think, that I came to Haiti. I would give anything in the world to see it. I would risk my life, do you understand?—except that that isn't the way I want to see it."

"Ah, monsieur," said Louis sorrowfully, "if you were only black!"

Several days later Louis said, apropos apparently of nothing, "It's more than a month since I have seen my mother at Orblanche. It takes a day to go and a day to return."

I said, "All right, Louis, but since when have you taken to asking anybody's permission for your goings and returnings?"

"It was not for that," said Louis; "I thought you would come with me."
Chapter II

THE WAY IS OPENED AND CLOSED

Louis was flattered that I should have come with him; I was flattered that he should have asked me. So with our joint egos agreeably inflated we ambled along the narrow donkey path, I on a little saddled pony borrowed from Divesco, he topping me on a bareback mule obtained by his own mysterious devices, and as we rode single file we sang, not always in unison:

'Ti fi pas connais laver passer
Aller caille maman ou:
'Ti fi pas connais laver passer
Roter caille maman ou.

Chorus (repeated ad lib.):

Angélica! Angélica!
Roter caille maman ou.

It meant, "Little girl, since you don't know how to wash and iron, go on back home to your mamma and stay there." There was another verse in which the girl replies, "Little boy, since you haven't got any pennies in your pocket, you'd better beat it home to your own mamma."

From time to time inspired, Louis and I invented new verses, both indecent and mystical, until we emerged from the trail to the highroad, galloped into Pétionville, and dismounted at the market behind the church where old women sat with their baskets and donkeys. We squabbled and bargained until we had filled a large sack with gifts for Louis' mother. They were not expensive or lordly—such things as Louis might have bought returning to the maternal caille alone, dried fish, tobacco leaves, tablettes which are brown-sugar candy, gingerbread, a small sack of flour, a bottle of red rum, and (fools that we were) a lot of banana-figs that were crushed to a pulp as we jogged.

"No matter," said Louis; "the babies will lick them up."

So down the hills and over the plain of the Cul-de-Sac through fields of green cane, into another woods, to Orblanche, Louis' natal village, a straggling collection of some dozen straw-thatched, wattle-and-mud-walled huts and houses with naked babies and half-naked wenches who cried, "It's Cousin Louis with a white. Welcome, cousin. Welcome, white." It might have been in the friendly heart of Africa.

Louis' mamma, Catherine Ozias of Orblanche, small, black, and wrinkled, lay in her house on a palm-fiber pallet, in a moderately clean white wrapper, ill, but not too ill to arise and bestir herself. She whimpered and sobbed, hugging Louis, as old mothers do, but not excessively. It was only when she stood back to survey him and observed he was wearing shoes that the tears of joy flowed free. For only those who have risen in the world wear shoes in Haiti. And because Louis wore shoes and introduced me as his "friend and protector," she gave thanks to the bon Dieu and wanted to kiss my hand. The bon Dieu and Blessed Brother Jesus find themselves in strange company in Haiti, both celestial and mortal. The Catholic priests, all save a few of the oldest and wisest rural ones, deplore this, but I suspect that Jesus himself might understand and be well content.

Louis' mother exclaimed over the gifts as they were drawn one by one from the sack. Naked grandchildren crowded shyly in the doorway as she doled out candy and gingerbread. Under a palm-leaf canopy on poles in the yard, a chicken and millet in an iron bowl were set cooking. Louis drew his mother aside and began whispering earnestly with her, nodding in my direction. We went back presently.
into her house, into its main room, earth-floored, about nine feet by seven in size. We entered through the always-open doorway in which no door had ever hung. Her pallet lay on the earth; there was a little table on which were calabash utensils, also three or four china cups and plates, some tin knives, forks, and spoons; her few other belongings hung from pegs in the mud wall. Partitioned off from this were two other tiny rooms, one open with another pallet lying on the ground, the second closed by a rickety wooden door. To this door Louis and his mother led me, and we entered, shutting it behind us. Built against the wall was a low altar on which were two Voodoo ouanga bags surmounted by feathers, a crude wooden serpent symbol, a crucifix, a thunders tone, a French colored lithograph of the Virgin Mary, a calabash bowl with green plantains and other offerings of simple food, and in the altar's forefront a coconuts-shell lamp with its tiny, floating flame. I wish I could make it clear how real this was despite its, to our eyes, anachronistic naiveté. Forget the details and see only, if you can, that here a sacred flame was burning before sincerely worshiped household gods, just as such flames have burned not only for Louis' savage forbears in the Congo jungle, but before the Lares and Penates of ancient Rome, and still burn today before household shrines in every so-called heathen land and in a few archaic Christian ones where religion is an intimate vital element of daily life.

On the floor beside the altar was a small, cheap painted wooden chest which Louis brought out when we emerged. It contained the somewhat surprising family heirlooms and treasures. He fished out and displayed those which concerned him personally and would therefore be most likely to interest me. They did. There was an old-fashioned engraved certificate of first communion from the parish church at Croix de Bouquet, which Louis handed me as his own. It had come from an ecclesiastical engraver in the Quartier de Saint Sulpice at Paris. It depicted a Gothic interior with mitered mediaeval bishops communing little kneeling blonde girls in hoopskirts and early Victorian pantalettes, little white boys dressed like Frenchified Etonians. How different must the scene have been at Louis' own first communion. I examined the writing. I said, "But look here, Louis, this doesn't say your name, 'Louis, fils de Catherine Ozias'; it says, 'Auguste Jean Baptiste Ozias.'"

"Ah," said Louis, "it's true, but I had long forgotten it. Auguste is my cousin. You see, the priest was in a hurry, he handed them out rolled up and gave me the wrong one, but Auguste has one too, so it's all the same."

And now Louis pulled out of the box a flute. It was a proper black flute with German-silver keys. Writers of fiction generally must stick to probabilities, or at least possibilities, more or less, but in real life there are no such limitations. The impossible happens continually. Louis himself would have been incredible in any fiction, except perhaps that of Dostoevski or Melville. It seemed, as nearly as I could gather, that Louis in his childhood had for a time attended parish school, and that the amiable priests, despairing of teaching him to read and write, but hearing him often singing (and doubtless influenced unknowingly by his kinship with fauns and angels), had given him the old flute and taught him to play it. I am sure that if Louis had been born in an Italian hill village instead of the Haitian jungle, he would have preached to the animals and been canonized. Now he played a melody which I had often heard country people singing or whistling as they worked, and which I was to know later as the invocation to Legba. 2 I said, "Louis, why don't you bring your flute back to town?" He said, "I mean to; I was afraid before that it would be stolen." Where he had slept, how he had lived in the city before he attached himself to us, I wondered.

2 See Appendix, page 294.
He did bring back the flute and played it sometimes for us, but the best to hear was at a distance when he sat under a far tree in the garden for hours piping to the peacock, which would stand close near him as if enchanted.

Ye patient, pious, and mildly tolerant priests of Croix de Bouquet, would it have caused you pangs to know that the flute you once gave Louis from the goodness of your hearts, which your own consecrated hands taught him to play, was now piping pagan melodies to Legba, serpent gods, and peacocks; to know that his pretty first communion papers engraved in the shadow of Saint Sulpice and brought in Christian vessels across the seas, now lay with ancient thunderstones upon a Voodoo altar? If so, I believe, your pious pangs would have been in part assuaged could you have seen that selfsame altar as I chanced to return and see it long afterward, late in a Holy Week when all its sacred objects, Christian and pagan together, were stripped from it on the evening of Good Friday, laid as if dead in rows before it upon the ground and covered over with palm fronds, to remain thus buried as Lord Jesus was until the Easter resurrection morn. During Golgotha's tragedy, even the great Voodoo serpent-god Damballa must bow his hooded head. And with the half million Voodoo altars in Haiti, it was and has been, I am told, on each succeeding anniversary the same. Here are deep matters, not easily to be dismissed by crying blasphemy.

In the afternoon Louis and I went to walk by the river and to call upon his uncle, Dort Dessiles, who was a papaloi. Louis took him aside as he had his mother, and again whispered earnestly, and I knew they were talking of the conversation I had had with Louis on the hill. Dort Dessiles, naturally, was not wholly trustful. After all, my face was white. I often regretted it in Haiti. Old Dessiles, nevertheless, was friendly, took us to his house for a glass of rum. He wanted to do what Louis asked, but he was afraid.
Louis insisted. He kept saying that I was not like a white man, whatever that meant. Finally Dessiles and I had a long conversation. The immediate result was that we three went to another caille about a quarter of a mile distant, to lay the matter before a man named Dieron, who was a hoügan, a sort of Voodoo high priest in the district. His relation to Dessiles, I gathered, was somewhat like that of a bishop to a vicar. When we parted with him the upshot was still uncertain. They had a curious faith in Louis, due, I think, not only to their village and blood relationship, but also in part to Louis' otherworldliness. They accepted me on faith as Louis' friend. They talked with me frankly; they took me back a mile from the road and showed me the local boumfort (mystery house) and the peristyle under which blood-sacrifices from time to time took place; but for me, a white man, to be present at these ceremonials—ah, that was a hard matter, over which they shook their heads dubiously. I did not press it. "I am going to be in Haiti a long time," I said; "maybe sometime later if we get to know each other better..." And we let it stand at that.

I returned to Port-au-Prince the same night, by the moon, leaving Louis with his family, in his natal village. I guessed that he might accomplish more alone than with me present.

He came back after two days, saying he was sure it could be arranged in the end, and during the next several weeks I made three visits with him to Orblanche, sometimes spending the night there.

It was so well arranged finally—in anticipation—that my part in the preparations became as intimate as that of a city cousin engaged with country kinsfolk in trimming the family Christmas tree. I was to buy sweet cakes, candles, and ribbons. I was taken to admire the black bull chosen a week in advance and now penned up in Dieron's compound. It was to be for the next Saturday night.

Only one thing remained to be done, and it seemed a mere courteous formality. It was to inform Kebreau quietly
and unofficially so that he might keep his royal back turned and his royal eyes closed on that night. Kebreau was the brown-skinned Haitian Lieutenant-Chief of Gendarmerie for the Croix de Bouquet district, but unofficially he was political "king" of the Cul-de-Sac plain. Kebreau knew that Dort was a papaloi, Dieron a houyan. Kebreau knew the location of their houmfort and knew that from time to time ceremonials technically against the law occurred there. Kebreau knew everything. But Kebreau was not active in persecuting the religion of his own devoted peasants. I am not suggesting that Kebreau was false to his uniform or that he connived overtly in the breaking of the law; he was one of the most conscientious gendarme officers in Haiti, but he couldn't stamp out Voodoo if he had wished, and why should he try when many of the wisest and most efficient white captains and lieutenants of other rural districts closed their eyes to many things that went on continually around them—when at Leogane, for instance, and in a village just east of Gonaives there were unburned mystery houses, obvious and unmistakable, within clear sight of the great highroad over which the motor cars of white generals frequently passed.  

But it was a duty of courtesy to inform Kebreau unofficially, a matter of good faith, as Dort and Dieron explained; so on Thursday morning they were going to tell him.

Thursday night late, a man came in to Port-au-Prince from Orblanche, finding my house and asking for Louis, with the message that everything was spoiled—that Kebreau for some unaccountable reason had told them they must not do it.

I was unhappy, and so was Louis. During the night, lying awake, it occurred to me that Kebreau might have heard they planned to have a white man present, and for that reason had refused to let them go on. I decided, therefore, that there was a bare chance things might be straightened out if I went to see Kebreau myself. I happened to know him personally, and this is how I happened to know him:

Some months previous, Major R. H. Davis, Mr. Halliday, and I had gone on a wild-guinea hunt, motoring out through Kebreau's district, and turning fifteen miles beyond into the thorn-bush desert near Thomazeau, penetrating ten miles from the main highway, on a dirt road over which autos almost never passed. Toward twilight, just as we got back to the car, a torrential rain fell, which lasted most of the night. We had chains and tried to go through, with the result that soon we were bogged to our axles. An old man appeared out of the mud, rain, and darkness, and I said, "Ouv kapab' jove d'gros cor' de bel?" (Literally: You capable join [find] great rope two bulls?)  

"Non, blanc, pas capab'!" he replied in hopeless tones, but when we showed him six dollars—we chose six because it was the exact amount he could earn by working for a solid month in the canefields—he decided he was capab' and disappeared to try. Toward midnight he returned, wading through the mud, with a yoke of oxen and the entire male population of a village. Major Davis stayed at the wheel, trying to low-speed, while Halliday and I got out and pushed behind with the negroes, the old man cracking his whip and shouting at the oxen in front. The engine roared, the oxen tugged, Halliday fell down in the knee-deep goulash mud, got up, cursing, to push again, I fell down too, the negroes laughed, and the car never budged.

The old man gave it up in disgust, and blamed us, saying philosophically, "Auto bagai' de ville" (It's a toy that ought to stay in the city). But another old man, working with his wet black hands in the headlight glare, made a little cross with two sticks and a piece of string fished from his pocket, tied it prayerfully to our tail-light, and with mighty heaving the car came out of the hole. They dragged
us eventually to the highway, where the "city toy" went completely dead. Well paid, they departed, and left us to our now hopeless misery. It was a dreary night, and not yet dawn. We were wet through and covered with mud. People now began to pass, like ghosts, with their donkeys on the way to market. We began hailing them, saying, "Are you going to Croix de Bouquet?" When one said, "Yes," we gave him a half gourde (ten cents) and said, "Tell Lieutenant Kebreau at Gendarmerie headquarters to send out and rescue us." We sent a string of messages like that. And Kebreau, not content with sending a truck with a half dozen gendarme privates aboard, also a mechanic, also spades, tackle, and a thermos bottle full of coffee, came out himself in a touring-car to console us and lend a hand. It was the first time I had ever seen him. He was a magnificent fellow, six feet tall, past middle age, handsome as a bronze statue with his fine Kaiser Wilhelm mustaches and his skin almost the same color as his Sam Browne belt and polished boots. He was respectfully amused, but sympathetic. Furthermore, he took us to his own house at Croix de Bouquet, mud-covered scarecrows that we were, and spread before us a superb breakfast of state—was he not king of the Cul-de-Sac?—with cut-glass decanters of rum, delicious and golden. Our friend Major Davis had an ingrained prejudice against sitting down at table with Haitians, whom he referred to collectively as "darkies" when he was in a good humor and "niggers" when in a less amiable mood, but I observed now that the rain and a salutary fasting had purged him of it. He clinked glasses with Kebreau, told him what a splendid chap he was, and we sat there for two hours lighting each other's cigarettes, and growing more and more friendly.

Now looking back on this adventure, lying in bed, miserable and disappointed, recalling also pleasant subsequent meetings with Kebreau, I made up my mind definitely to go out and see him next morning, and did.

After five minutes' candid conversation with Kebreau, I realized I was encountering some sort of blind obstacle that had no direct connection either with the laws against Voodoo or his personal willingness to forget them, or with the fact that I was a white man. There was something else. He told me frankly that there was something, but concerning its precise nature he remained reticent.

When I returned and reported this to Louis, a light gradually dawned on him. "Ahh," said he, and "Ahh" again. "Mon dieu President jour ci il faché tout Kebreau, il vil couper tête il" (People say President these days is angry against Kebreau and wishes to chop off his head).

That afternoon I dropped in at headquarters to chat with General Turrill, chief of the Gendarmerie d'Haiti. Naturally I did not mention Voodoo, but in the course of our casual talk I said, "By the way, why has Borno got his ax out for Kebreau?"

What a world of irrelevant causes and absurdly disconnected eddying effects we blunder helplessly around in. Big events often upset smaller apple-carts, and it was an absurdly disconnected cause of this sort that had upset mine and Louis'...

United States Senator Shipstead is just a name to me, which I may not be even spelling correctly. The Haitians called him Sheepstead, so I am guessing it would be that. He had come to Haiti on a junket, and Kebreau, so General Turrill told me, had given a big rural barbecue in the senator's honor. Kebreau, as I have explained, was more than an ordinary lieutenant of gendarmerie; he was a powerful politician. At this barbecue, sponsored by Kebreau, Senator Shipstead had made an "agricultural speech" to several hundred peasants. Apparently it was an old war-horse, the same sort of speech he must have made a hundred
times at white barbecues in Iowa or wherever he hails from. It was about the importance of the small farmer, and con­tained reiterated phrases that were interpreted to mean, "Hold on to the land." It sounded innocuous and may have been so intended, but at that moment in Haiti it was taken to be highly charged with specific local significance. The signing of a huge irrigation contract, backed by American capital, was pending, and President Borno, who believed in such developments, was eager to get it signed. But it in­volved either the purchase or confiscation of thousands of small farms, and Senator Shipstead, whose speech was quoted and made the text of fiery editorials in all the Oppo­position papers howling that Borno was in league with Wall Street to dispossess and rob his own peasants—Senator Ship­stead, the General told me, grinning (he was an old Marine Corps former fighting colonel who didn't give a hoot in hell for politics), had thrown a monkey wrench in the works.

President Borno was highly indignant, the General con­tinued, and Kebreau, whom he held somewhat to blame, was going to have to watch his step very carefully for the next month or so. It was reported that the President had even sent his private spies into the Cul-de-Sac seeking to "hang something" on him which would justify an executive demand that he be kicked out of the service.

If I had ever read the newspapers, or taken any interest in politics, I might have already known most of this and guessed the rest. When I walked out of General Turrill's office, I knew that luck had broken against me.

One of my reasons for recounting this chronicle of dis­appointment in such detail is that it may throw an inter­esting sidelight on the legal status of Voodoo in Haiti today; another is that certain otherwise friendly and more than generous reviewers found what they called my "con­tinuous good luck" in the Arabian desert a bit monotonous
and too marvelous. But I suffered a hundred untold disappointments and obstacles that had to be deviously circumvented in Arabia. And I feel it best, therefore, to confess that I suffered many similar disappointments in Haiti before I finally reached my goal.

Louis' influence did not extend beyond his natal village in the plain, and my path eventually led up into the mountains. But it was Louis who had set my feet in it. Through him and his uncle Dort I began to understand more definitely what I sought, was able to avoid certain pitfalls, and Louis has my gratitude. Even so, with many a false start and wrong direction, my path was "roundabout" like Peer Gynt's, and more than once the Great Boyg barred it. The trail led me once through deep ravines in which the sun never shone, thence winding narrowly up the edge of a sheer cliff to the door of a little man with a wizened face, a famous little man, a sort of Voodoo hermit-saint, who could have wisely taught me all I wished to know, and more, but who sneered at my sincerity and said, "There is no such thing as Voodoo; it is a silly lie invented by you whites to injure us." Saints are not always amiable. It led once beyond the clouds on Morne Diable to a village whose inhabitants had seen no white face for eight years, and though on that occasion I rode with a doctor whose welcome remedies were freely given them, and though they entertained us hospitably for the night, when we arose next morning to go higher up the mountain, they laid hands on our bridles without violence, and said, "It is forbidden." And once I fled, after being offered hospitality, from the habitation of a leering, evil old woman, full of too eager promises, with greedy fingers already clutching at my pocketbook, who would have cut her own daughter's throat to oblige me, for a price. But also I made friends, occasionally saw strange sights, and there were habitations oft returned to where I became known and welcome.
THE WAY IS OPENED AND CLOSED

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"Maman Célie, high priestess of the mysteries."
On the afternoon of the Friday set for my blood baptism, more than fifty friends and relatives gathered at the habitation of Maman Célie. There was no reason to suppose that we might be disturbed, but as an extra precaution a gay danse Congo was immediately organized to cover the real purpose of our congregation. Maman Célie had told me that I would get no sleep that night; so despite the noise I napped until after sunset, when she awakened me and led me across the compound to the lwumfort.

Through its outer door, which Emanuel stood guarding like a sentinel and unlocked for us, we entered a dim, windowless, cell-like anteroom in which were tethered the sacrificial beasts, a he-goat, two red cocks and two black, an enormous white turkey, and a pair of doves. Huddled there in a corner also was the girl Catherine, Maman Célie’s youngest unmarried daughter; why she was there I did not know, and it is needless to say that I wondered.

From this dim, somewhat sinister antechamber we passed through an open doorway into the long, rectangular mystery room, the temple proper, which was lighted with candles and primitive oil lamps that flickered like torches. Its clay walls were elaborately painted with crude serpent symbols and anthropomorphic figures. Papa Legba, guardian of the gates, god of the crossroads, was represented as a venerable old black farmer with a pipe between his teeth; Ogoun Badagris, the bloody warrior, appeared as an old-time Haitian revolutionary general in uniform with a sword; 1 See Appendix, page 310.

Wangol, master of the land, drove a yoke of oxen; Agoué, master of the seas, puffed out his cheeks to blow a wind and held in the hollow of his hand a tiny boat; the serpent symbols stood for the great Damballa Oueddo, almighty Jove of the Voodoo pantheon, and his consort Ayida Oueddo.

At the near end of the room, close to the doorway through which we had entered, was the wide, low altar, spread over with a white lace tablecloth. In its center was a small wooden serpent, elevated horizontally on a little pole as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness; around this symbol, which was ancient before the Exodus, were grouped thunderstones, Christian crucifixes made in France or Germany, necklaces on which were strung snake vertebrae, others from which hung little medallions of the Virgin Mary. On the corner of the altar nearest me, my ouanga had been placed. Grouped also on the altar were earthen jugs containing wine, water, oil; platters of vegetables and fruits, plates containing common bread, and plates containing elab-
orate sweet fancy cakes, bought days before down in the plain. There were bottles of expensive French-labeled grenadine and orgeat, a bottle of rum, cola-champagne, etc. There were also three cigars, not of the rough sort the peasants smoke, but fat and smooth in their red-gilt bands. With a naive but justifiable rationality, these worshipers, whose gods were vitally, utterly real, saw no anachronism in offering to their deities the best of everything that could be procured. Maman Célie herself, accompanied by Papa Théodore, had gone by narrow trails across mountains and valleys, leading a donkey down to the modern city, shopping there for their celestial guests and returning with the donkey’s panniers heavy laden.

On the altar also was a cone-like mound of cornmeal surmounted by an egg, and before the altar candles were burning, and wicks floating in coconut shells of oil. At the left were the three Rada drums, at the right was a low wooden stool placed for me.

At the other end of the mystery room, so that a ten-foot open space was left before the altar, were seated on the ground the eighteen or twenty people, all close relatives or trusted friends, who were to witness the ceremony. When I entered, they were swaying and singing:

*Papa Legba, ouvri barriere pour moins!*
*Papa Legba, coté petits ou?*
*Papa Legba, ou oué yo!*
*Papa Legba, ouvri barrière pour li passer!*

(Father Legba, open wide the gate!
Father Legba, where are thy children?
Father Legba, we are here.
Father Legba, open wide the gate that he may pass!)

The *papaloi*, a powerful clean-shaven black man of middle age with red turban and a bright-colored embroidered stole over his shoulders, traced with cornmeal this cabalistic design on the bare earth before the altar:

![Diagram of altar with earth, sky, and sea circles and symbols](image)

It measured perhaps twelve feet from end to end. The circles, it was afterward explained to me, represented, from left to right, earth, sky, and sea. ( Adepts of the esoteric will read here earth, air, and water, or if of a certain school will read earth, air, fire, and water, accepting the central sky-circle as a symbol also of the sun.) All these matters indeed entered into it, but the simpler interpretation was dominant. The forked marks, all connecting, with lines interjoining them with the three circles, thence radiating toward the altar and reversely toward the worshipers, were symbols of the invisible paths through which the gods and mysteries would move.

Into the earth circle the *papaloi* poured oil, flour, and wine, while the people chanted, "Wangol mait la terre" (Wangol is master of the earth). Into the sky circle he poured rum and ashes, while they chanted, "Damballa Oueddo, ou mait la ciel" (Damballa Oueddo, thou art master of the sky). Into the sea circle he poured water, while they sang, "Papa Agoué, li mait la mer" (Father Agoué, he is master of the sea).

A number of solos interspersed this general chanting. It was impossible to retain them all in memory. I could not make pencil notes there; not even Maman Célie was able afterward to repeat them all for me, and the next day some of the singers were gone. There was one song to Papa
Agoué, however, which I partly remembered because it had seemed to me beautiful, and later I rode to find the singer and transcribe it. It was:

Agoué, moyô! moyô!
Mais' Agoué reter kans la mer;
Li titer canot.

Bassin bîé
Rever toi zilet;
Neg coqui' kans mer zorage;
Li titer canot là.

Agoué, moyô! moyô!
(Hail to Father Agoué
Who dwells in the sea!
He is the Lord of ships.

In a blue gulf,
There are three little islands,
The negro's boat is storm-tossed,
Father Agoué brings it safely in.
Hail to Father Agoué!)

When this singing and pouring of libations were ended, the papaloí sealed the open doorway by tracing thus across its earthen sill:
Evil or unwelcome forces which sought to enter would become entangled in the lines and go wandering from circle to circle like lost souls among the stars.

This done, he began the real service, for which all thus far had been but a preparation. He stood with arms raised before the altar and said solemnly, "Lors nom tout Loi et tout Mystère" (In the name of all the Gods and all the Mysteries).

Maman Célie advanced at a sign from the papaloi and was invested by him, with the scarlet robe and headdress of ostrich feathers black and red, as maman/priestess. This was accompanied by a shrill chant:

\begin{quote}
Ayida Oueddo, ou couleuvre moins!
Qui lé ou piler ou con z'éclai!
\end{quote}

(Ayida Oueddo, my serpent goddess,
When you come it is like the lightning flash!)

At the same time now I heard through the chanting a sharp long-drawn continuous hissing. It was Maman Célie, hissing like a snake, drawing and expelling the breath through her teeth.

I looked for Maman Célie's familiar sweet, gentle face, but beneath the black and scarlet plumes I saw now only what seemed a rigid mask. I felt that I was looking into the face of a strange, dreadful woman, or into the face of something which I had never seen before. As I watched, the cheeks of this black mask were deeply indrawn so that the face became skull-like, and then alternately puffed out as if the skull had been covered with flesh and come alive.

As the chanting died away, she whirled three times and flung herself prostrate before the altar with her lips pressed against the earth.

Emanuel, without donning sacerdotal garb, but now acting as a sort of altar servant, brought in the two red cocks.
Each was handled gently, almost reverently, by the papaloi, as he knelt holding it and with white flour traced on its back a cross. One of the small sweet cakes was crumbled, and each cock must peck at it from the mamaloi's hand. This was awaited patiently. At the moment when each bird consented to receive the consecrated food, the priestess seized it and rose wildly dancing, whirling with the cock held by its head and feet in her upstretched hands, its wings violently fluttering. Round and round she whirled while the drums throbbed in a quick, tangled, yet steady rhythm. With a sudden twist the cock's head was torn off and as she whirled the blood flew out as if from a sprinkling-pot. The other birds, the black cocks and the dove, were dealt with similarly. As she danced with the white living doves, it was beautiful, and it seemed to me natural also that they should presently die. Blood of the doves was saved in a china cup.

A thing which had a different, a horror-beauty like a mad Goya etching, occurred when the black priestess did her death dance with the huge white turkey. Though far from feeble, possessed of great vitality, she was a slender woman, slightly formed, whose nervous strength lay not in muscular weight. When the turkey's wings spread wide and began to flap frantically above her head as she whirled, the great bird seemed larger and more powerful than she; it seemed that she would be dragged from her feet, hurled to the ground, or flown away with fabulously into the sky. And as she sought finally to tear off its head, sought to clutch its body between her knees, it attacked her savagely, beating her face and breasts, beating at her so that she was at moments enfolded by the great white wings, so that bird and woman seemed to mingle struggling in a monstrous, mythical embrace. But her fatal hands were still upon its throat, and in that swanlike simulacre of the deed which for the male is always like a little death, it died.

So savage had this scene been that it was almost like an anticlimax when the sacrificial goat was now led through the doorway to the altar, but new and stranger things, contrasting, were yet to happen before other blood was shed. He was a sturdy brown young goat, with big, blue, terrified, almost human eyes, eyes which seemed not only terrified but aware and wondering. At first he bleated and struggled, for the odor of death was in the air, but finally he stood quite, though still wide-eyed, while red silken ribbons were twined in his little horns, his little hoofs anointed with wine and sweet-scented oils, and an old woman who had come from far over the mountain for this her brief part in the long ceremony sat down before him and crooned to him alone a song which might have been a baby's lullaby.

When it was finished, the papaloi sat down before the little goat and addressed to it a discourse in earnest tones. He told the little goat that it would soon pass through the final gates before us all, instructed it in the mysteries, and pleaded with it concerning its conduct on the other side. But before it passed through the gate, he explained, certain magical changes, making its path easier, would occur on this side. Therefore it need have no fear. Upon its forehead he traced a cross and circle, first with flour and afterward with blood of the doves. Then he presented to it a green, leafy branch to eat.

This goat had by now become inevitably personal to me. I had conceived an affectionate interest in him while the old woman was singing. I recalled what had happened to the other creatures at the moment they touched food, and I had an impulse to cry out to him, "Don't do that, little goat! Don't touch it!" But it was a fleeting, purely sentimental impulse. Not for anything, no matter what would happen, could I have seriously wished to stop that ceremony. I believe in such ceremonies. I hope that they will never die out or be abolished. I believe that in some form or another they answer a deep need of the universal human soul. I, who in a sense believe in no religion, believe yet in
them all, asking only that they be alive—as religions. Codes of rational ethics and human brotherly love are useful, but they do not touch this thing underneath. Let religion have its bloody sacrifices, yes, even human sacrifices, if thus our souls may be kept alive. Better a black papaloi in Haiti with blood-stained hands who believes in his living gods than a frock-coated minister on Fifth Avenue reducing Christ to a solar myth and rationalizing the Immaculate Conception.

And so I did not cry out.

And the goat nibbled the green leaves.

But no knife flashed.

In the dim, bare anteroom with its windowless gray walls, the girl Catherine had remained all this time huddled in a corner, as if drugged or half asleep. Emanuel had to clutch her tightly by the arm to prevent her from stumbling when they brought her to the altar. Maman Célie hugged her and moaned and shed tears as if they were saying good-by forever. The papaloi pulled them apart, and some one gave the girl a drink of rum from a bottle. She began to protest in a dull sort of angry, whining way when they forced her down on her knees before the lighted candles. The papaloi wound round her forehead red ribbons like those which had been fastened around the horns of the goat, and Maman Célie, no longer as a mourning mother but as an officiating priestess, with rigid face aided in pouring the oil and wine on the girl's head, feet, hands, and breast.

All this time the girl had been like a fretful, sleepy, annoyed child, but gradually she became docile, somber, staring with quiet eyes, and presently began a weird song of lamentation. I think she was extemporizing both the words and the melody. She sang:

Cochon marron saché chemin caille;  
Moins mandé ça li gagnin.  
"Nans Léogane tout moon malade O!"  
Béf marron saché chemin caille.  
Moins mandé ça li gagnin.  
"Nans Gros morne tout moon malade O!"

Cabrit marron saché chemin caille.  
Moins mandé ça li gagnin.  
"Nans Guinea tout moon malade O!"

M'pas malade, m'a p'mourri!
(The wild pig came seeking me;  
I said why have you come?  
"Every one is sick in Léogane!"

The wild bull came seeking me;  
I said why have you come?  
"Every one is sick in the mountains!"

The wild goat came seeking me;  
I said why have you come?  
"Every one is sick in Africa!"

So I who am not sick must die!)

And as that black girl sang, and as the inner meaning of her song came to me, I seemed to hear the voice of Jephtha's daughter doomed to die by her own father as a sacrifice to Javeh, going up to bewail her virginity on Israel's lonely mountain. Her plight in actuality was rather that of Isaac bound by Abraham on Mount Moriah; a horned beast would presently be substituted in her stead; but the moment for that mystical substitution had not yet come, and as she sang she was a daughter doomed to die.
The ceremony of substitution, when it came, was pure effective magic of a potency which I have never seen equaled in Dervish monastery or anywhere. The goat and the girl, side by side before the altar, had been startled, restive, nervous. The smell of blood was in the air, but there was more than that hovering; it was the eternal, mysterious odor of death itself which both animals and human beings always sense, but not through the nostrils. Yet now the two who were about to die mysteriously merged, the girl symbolically and the beast with a knife in its throat, were docile and entranced, were like automatons. The papaloi monotonously chanting, endlessly repeating, “Damballa calls you, Damballa calls you,” stood facing the altar with his arms outstretched above their two heads. The girl was now on her hands and knees in the attitude of a quadruped, directly facing the goat, so that their heads and eyes were on a level, less than ten inches apart, and thus they stared fixedly into each other's eyes, while the papaloi's hands weaved slowly, ceaselessly above their foreheads, the forehead of the girl and the forehead of the horned beast, each wound with red ribbons, each already marked with the blood of a white dove. By shifting slightly I could see the big, wide, pale-blue, staring eyes of the goat, and the big, black, staring eyes of the girl, and I could have almost sworn that the black eyes were gradually, mysteriously becoming those of a dumb beast, while a human soul was beginning to peer out through the blue. But dismiss that, and still I tell you that pure magic was here at work, that something very real and fearful was occurring. For as the priest wove his ceaseless incantations, the girl began a low, piteous bleating in which there was nothing, absolutely nothing, human; and soon a thing infinitely more unnatural occurred; the goat was moaning and crying like a human child. I believe that through my Druze and Yezidee accounts I have earned a deserved reputation for being not too credulous in the face of marvels. But I was in the presence now of a thing that could not be denied. Old magic was here at work, and it worked appallingly. What difference does it make whether we call it supernatural or merely supernormal? What difference does it make if we say that the girl was drugged—as I suspect she was—or that both were hypnotized? Of course they were, if you like. And what then? We live surrounded by mysteries and imagine that by inventing names we explain them.

Other signs and wonders became manifest. Into this little temple that lost among the mountains came in answer to goat-cry girl-cry the Shaggy Immortal One of a thousand names whom the Greeks called Pan. The goat's lingam became erect and rigid, the points of the girl's breasts visibly hardened and were outlined sharply pressing against the coarse, thin, tight-drawn shift that was her only garment. Thus they faced each other motionless as two marble figures on the frieze of some ancient phallic temple. They were like inanimate twin lamps in which a sacred flame burned, steadily yet unconsuming.

While the papaloi still wove his spells, his hands moving ceaselessly like an old woman carding wool in a dream, the priestess held a twig green with tender leaves between the young girl and the animal. She held it on a level with their mouths, and neither saw it, for they were staring fixedly into each other's eyes as entranced mediums stare into crystal globes, and with their necks thrust forward so that their foreheads almost touched. Neither could therefore see the leafy branch, but as the old mamaloi's hand trembled, the leaves flicked lightly as if stirred by a little breeze against the hairy muzzle of the goat, against the chin and soft lips of the girl. And after moments of breathless watching, it was the girl's lips which pursed out and began to nibble at the leaves. Human beings, normally, when eating, open their mouths and take the food directly in between their teeth. Except for sipping liquids they do not use their lips. But the girl's lips now nibbling at the leaves were like
those of a ruminating animal. Her hands, of course, were flat on the ground so that in a sense she perforce must have eaten without using them, somewhat in the manner of a quadruped; but in a castle near the edge of the Nefud desert I once watched closely a woman eating whose hands were tied behind her back, and that woman, opening her mouth and baring her teeth, took the fragments of food directly between her teeth, as any normal human being would. But this girl now pursed her lips and used them nibbling as horned cattle do. It sounds a slight thing, perhaps, in the describing, but it was weird, unnatural, unhuman.

As she nibbled thus, the *papaloi* said in a hushed but wholly matter-of-fact whisper like a man who had finished a hard, solemn task and was glad to rest, "Ça y est" (There it is).

The *papaloi* was now holding a machete, ground sharp and shining. Maman Célie, priestess, kneeling, held a *gomete*, a wooden bowl. It was oblong. There was just space enough to thrust it narrowly between the mystically identified pair. Its rim touched the goat's hairy chest and the girl's body, both their heads thrust forward above it. Neither seemed conscious of anything that was occurring, nor did the goat flinch when the *papaloi* laid his hand upon its horns. Nor did the goat utter any sound as the knife was drawn quickly, deeply across its throat. But at this instant, as the blood gushed like a fountain into the wooden bowl, the girl, with a shrill, piercing, then strangled bleat of agony, leaped, shuddered, and fell senseless before the altar.

At the moment the knife flashed across the goat's throat, the company had begun to chant, not high or loud but with a sort of deep, hushed fervor, across which the girl's inhuman bleating had shrilled sharp as another invisible blade. Now they continued chanting while the celebrants performed their various offices. They chanted:
and as she sang, she was a daughter doomed to die.

(Damballa and Ayida, behold the deed we have done as you commanded.)

The body of the goat was thrown as a ritually useless and no longer sacred thing through the door into the anteroom. The body of the unconscious girl, spattered with blood, was lifted carefully into Emanuel's arms and carried away, followed by two old women versed in magic who would attend her recovery. If Maman Célie, her face still like a terrible, inspired mask, bestowed one fleeting glance on either body, I did not see it. She was revolving slowly before the altar with the bowl in her outstretched arms and now held it to the papaloi, who received it, drank, then placed it on the altar, and with a little china cup poured libations within each of the three cabalistic circles on the earth. They also sang an invocation to Ybo, another of the ancient gods.

There was a pause, a lull, in which I who had been for hours too utterly absorbed to give myself a thought, recalled that all this ceremonial was leading up to an event which concerned me more deeply than any other present. The time had now come. A very old black man, deeply wrinkled, with a beard that was like Spanish moss turned snowy white, who had been sitting silent all the while, took from a bag at his feet a white cloth which he wound around his head, and a white embroidered garment like a cassock which he put over his shoulders. He invested himself without the aid of other hands as a black pope or emperor might have done. He was not of our mountain. He had come riding upon a donkey from beyond the great Morne. Maman Célie had

See Appendix, page 318.
summoned him and had paid the expenses from her own purse. It was a thing for which she would never permit me to repay her. As he arose and beckoned me to kneel at last before the altar, there was absolute silence. He was Voodoo of the Voodoo, but as he laid his hand upon my head it was neither in creole that he spoke, nor French, nor even the almost forgotten language of old-Guinea. I heard as in a dream, low, clear, and deep as the voices of old men rarely are, "In nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti. Amen."

And when still kneeling there with my eyes closed, I heard as from a great distance and as an echo from years long past his sure voice intoning that most marvelous and mysterious of all Latin invocations, "Rosa Mystica ... Tower of David ... Tower of Ivory ... House of Gold ... Gate of Heaven," it seemed to me that I heard too the rolling of mighty organs beneath vaulted domes....

Oil, wine, and water were poured upon my head, marks were traced upon my brow with white flour, and then I was given to eat ritually from the cakes upon the altar, to drink from the wine, rum, and syrups there. Parts of many cakes were crumbled together in a little cup and were put into my mouth with a spoon; likewise were mingled a few drops from each of the many bottles.

This, it seemed, had been a preliminary consecration rite in sincere inclusion of the Christian divinities, saints, and powers. Now the Voodoo chanting recommenced, and for the first time my own name was mingled with the creole and African words. They were beseeching Legba to open wide the gates for me, Damballa and Ayida to receive me. A sort of mad fervor was again taking possession of them all. The old hougan, shouting now so that his voice could be heard above the singing, demanded once more silence, and placing both hands heavily upon my head, pronounced a long mixed African and creole invocation, calling down to witness all the gods and goddesses of ancient Africa. Still commanding silence, he dipped his hand into the wooden bowl and traced on my forehead the bloody Voodoo cross.

Then he lifted the bowl, hesitated for a queer instant as if in courteous doubt—it was a strange, trivial thing to occur at such a moment—and then picked up a clean spoon. Maman Célie interfered angrily. So the bowl itself was held to my lips and three times I drank. The blood had a clean, warm, salty taste. In physical fact, I was drinking the blood of a recently slain goat, but by some mysterious transubstantiation not without its parallels in more than one religion other than Voodoo, I was drinking the blood of the girl Catherine who in the body of the goat had mysteriously died for me and for all miserable humanity from Leogane to Guinea.

One small thing yet remained to be done. I had been told that it would be done, and its meaning explained to me. I had been told also that for no white man alive or dead had it ever been done before. The papaloi took from the altar an egg which had surmounted a little pyramid of cornmeal, and holding it aloft in his cupped hands, pronounced incantation. As the blood had represented the mystery of death, sacrifice, and purification as it was poured upon the earth, the egg now represented rebirth, productivity, fertility, re-creation. Maman Célie, the priestess, took it from the hands of the papaloi, traced with it a new cross on my forehead, and dashed it to the earth. My knees were spattered. Then the priestess tore off her feathered headdress, and Maman Célie, the old woman, sank down beside me, put her arms around me, and cried, "Legba, Papa Legba; open wide the gates for this my little one."
Chapter II

"... DEAD MEN WORKING IN THE CANE FIELDS"

Pretty mulatto Julie had taken baby Marianne to bed. Constant Polynice and I sat late before the doorway of his colic, talking of fire-hags, demons, werewolves, and vampires, while a full moon, rising slowly, flooded his sloping cotton fields and the dark rolling hills beyond.

Polynice was a Haitian farmer, but he was no common jungle peasant. He lived on the island of La Gonave, where I shall return to him in later chapters. He seldom went over to the Haitian mainland, but he knew what was going on in Port-au-Prince, and spoke sometimes of installing a radio.

A countryman, half peasant born and bred, he was familiar with every superstition of the mountains and the plain, yet too intelligent to believe them literally true—or at least so I gathered from his talk.

He was interested in helping me toward an understanding of the tangled Haitian folklore. It was only by chance that we came presently to a subject which—though I refused for a long time to admit it—lies in a baffling category on the ragged edge of things which are beyond either superstition or reason. He had been telling me of fire-hags who left their skins at home and set the cane fields blazing; of the vampire, a woman sometimes living, sometimes dead, who sucked the blood of children and who could be distinguished because her hair always turned an ugly red; of the werewolf—chauche, in creole—a man or woman who

1 See Appendix, page 332.
...strange tales are told of Voodoo in the boudoir and salon.

"...DEAD MEN WORKING"

took the form of some animal, usually a dog, and went killing lambs, young goats, sometimes babies.

All this, I gathered, he considered to be pure superstition, as he told me with tolerant scorn how his friend and neighbor Osmann had one night seen a gray dog slinking with bloody jaws from his sheep-pen, and who, after having shot and exorcised and buried it, was so convinced he had killed a certain girl named Liane who was generally reputed to be a chauche that when he met her two days later on the path to Grande Source, he believed she was a ghost come back for vengeance, and fled howling.

As Polynice talked on, I reflected that these tales ran closely parallel not only with those of the negroes in Georgia and the Carolinas, but with the mediaeval folklore of white Europe. Werewolves, vampires, and demons were certainly no novelty. But I recalled one creature I had been hearing about in Haiti, which sounded exclusively local—the zombie.

It seemed (or so I had been assured by negroes more credulous than Polynice) that while the zombie came from the grave, it was neither a ghost, nor yet a person who had been raised like Lazarus from the dead. The zombie, they say, is a soulless human corpse, still dead, but taken from the grave and endowed by sorcery with a mechanical semblance of life—it is a dead body which is made to walk and act and move as if it were alive. People who have the power to do this go to a fresh grave, dig up the body before it has had time to rot, galvanize it into movement, and then make of it a servant or slave, occasionally for the commission of some crime, more often simply as a drudge around the habitation or the farm, setting it dull heavy tasks, and beating it like a dumb beast if it slackens.

As this was revolving in my mind, I said to Polynice:

"It seems to me that these werewolves and vampires are first cousins to those we have at home, but I have never, except in Haiti, heard of anything like zombies. Let us
talk of them for a little while. I wonder if you can tell me something of this zombie superstition. I should like to get at some idea of how it originated."

My rational friend Polynice was deeply astonished. He leaned over and put his hand in protest on my knee. "Superstition? But I assure you that this of which you now speak is not a matter of superstition. Alas, these things—and other evil practices connected with the dead—exist. They exist to an extent that you whites do not dream of, though evidences are everywhere under your eyes.

"Why do you suppose that even the poorest peasants, when they can, bury their dead beneath solid tombs of masonry?"

"Why do they bury them so often in their own yards, close to the doorway?"

"Why, so often, do you see a tomb or grave set close beside a busy road or footpath where people are always passing?"

"It is to assure the poor unhappy dead such protection as we can.

"I will take you in the morning to see the grave of my brother, who was killed in the way you know. It is over there on the little ridge which you can see clearly now in the moonlight, open space all round it, close beside the trail which everybody passes going to and from Grande Source. Through four nights we watched yonder, in the peristyle, Osmann and I, with shotguns—for at that time both my dead brother and I had bitter enemies—until we were sure the body had begun to rot.

"No, my friend, no, no. There are only too many true cases. At this very moment, in the moonlight, there are zombies working on this island, less than two hours' ride from my own habitation. We know about them, but we do not dare to interfere so long as our own dead are left unmolested. If you will ride with me tomorrow night, yes, I will show you dead men working in the cane fields. Close
sent away from the factory, from the noise and bustle of the railroad yards, the better it would be.

Better indeed, for these were not living men and women but poor unhappy zombies whom Joseph and his wife Croyance had dragged from their peaceful graves to slave for him in the sun—and if by chance a brother or father of the dead should see and recognize them, Joseph knew that it would be a very bad affair for him.

So they were assigned to distant fields beyond the crossroads, and camped there, keeping to themselves like any proper family or village group; but in the evening when other little companies, encamped apart as they were, gathered each around its one big common pot of savory millet or plantains, generously seasoned with dried fish and garlic, Croyance would tend two pots upon the fire, for as everyone knows, the zombies must never be permitted to taste salt or meat. So the food prepared for them was tasteless and unseasoned.

As the zombies toiled day after day dumbly in the sun, Joseph sometimes beat them to make them move faster, but Croyance began to pity the poor dead creatures who should be at rest—and pitied them in the evenings when she dished out their flat, tasteless bouillie.

Each Saturday afternoon, Joseph went to collect the wages for them all, and what division he made was no concern of Rasco, so long as the work went forward. Sometimes Joseph alone, and sometimes Croyance alone, went to Croix de Bouquet for the Saturday night bamboche or the Sunday cockfight, but always one of them remained with the zombies to prepare their food and see that they did not stray away.

Through February this continued, until Fête Dieu approached, with a Saturday-Sunday-Monday holiday for all the workers. Joseph, with his pockets full of money, went to Port-au-Prince and left Croyance behind, cautioning her as usual; and she agreed to remain and tend the zombies.

for he promised her that at the Mardi Gras she should visit the city.

But when Sunday morning dawned, it was lonely in the fields, and her kind old woman's heart was filled with pity for the zombies, and she thought, "Perhaps it will cheer them a little to see the gay crowds and the processions at Croix de Bouquet, and since all the Morne-au-Diable people will have gone back to the mountain to celebrate Fête Dieu at home, no one will recognize them, and no harm can come of it." And it is the truth that Croyance also wished to see the gay procession.

So she tied a new bright-colored handkerchief around her head, aroused the zombies from the sleep that was scarcely different from their waking, gave them their morning bowl of cold, unsalted plantains boiled in water, which they ate dumbly uncomplaining, and set out with them for the town, single file, as the country people always walk. Croyance, in her bright kerchief, leading the nine dead men and women behind her, past the railroad crossing, where she murmured a prayer to Legba, past the great white-painted wooden Christ, who hung life-sized in the glaring sun, where she stopped to kneel and cross herself—but the poor zombies prayed neither to Papa Legba nor to Brother Jesus, for they were dead bodies walking, without souls or minds.

They followed her to the market square, before the church where hundreds of little thatched, open shelters, used on week days for buying and selling, were empty of trade, but crowded here and there by gossiping groups in the grateful shade.

To the shade of one of these market booths, which was still unoccupied, she led the zombies, and they sat like people asleep with their eyes open, staring, but seeing nothing, as the bells in the church began to ring, and the procession came from the priest's house—red-purple robes, golden crucifix held aloft, tinkling bells and swinging incense-pots, followed by little black boys in white lace robes, little black
No one dared stop them, for they were corpses walking in the sunlight, and they themselves and all the people knew that they were corpses. And they disappeared toward the mountain.

When later they drew near their own village on the slopes of Morne-au-Diable, these dead men and women walking single file in the twilight, with no soul leading them or daring to follow, the people of their village, who were also holding bambouches in the market-place, saw them drawing closer, recognized among them fathers, brothers, wives, and daughters whom they had buried months before.

Most of them knew at once the truth, that these were zombies who had been dragged dead from their graves, but others hoped that a blessed miracle had taken place on this Fête Dieu, and rushed forward to take them in their arms and welcome them.

But the zombies shuffled through the market-place, recognizing neither father nor wife nor mother, and as they turned leftward up the path leading to the graveyard, a woman whose daughter was in the procession of the dead threw herself screaming before the girl’s shuffling feet and begged her to stay; but the grave-cold feet of the daughter and the feet of the other dead shuffled over her and onward; and as they approached the graveyard, they began to shuffle faster and rushed among the graves, and each before his own empty grave began clawing at the stones and earth to enter it again; and as their cold hands touched the earth of their own graves, they fell and lay there, rotting carrion.

That night the fathers, sons, and brothers of the zombies, after restoring the bodies to their graves, sent a messenger on muleback down the mountain, who returned next day with the name of Ti Joseph and with a stolen shirt of Ti Joseph’s which had been worn next his skin and was steeped in the grease-sweat of his body.

They collected silver in the village and went with the name of Ti Joseph and the shirt of Ti Joseph to a bocor
beyond Trou Caiman, who made a deadly needle ouanga, a black bag ouanga, pierced all through with pins and needles, filled with dry goat dung, circled with cock's feathers dipped in blood.

And lest the needle ouanga be slow in working or be rendered weak by Joseph's counter-magic, they sent men down to the plain, who lay in wait patiently for Joseph, and one night hacked off his head with a machete. . . .

When Polynice had finished this recital, I said to him, after a moment of silence, "You are not a peasant like those of the Cul-de-Sac; you are a reasonable man, or at least it seems to me you are. Now how much of that story, honestly, do you believe?"

He replied earnestly: "I did not see these special things, but there were many witnesses, and why should I not believe them when I myself have also seen zombies? When you also have seen them, with their faces and their eyes in which there is no life, you will not only believe in these zombies who should be resting in their graves, you will pity them from the bottom of your heart."

Before finally taking leave of La Gonave, I did see these "walking dead men," and I did, in a sense, believe in them and pitied them, indeed, from the bottom of my heart. It was not the next night, though Polynice, true to his promise, rode with me across the Plaine Mapou to the deserted, silent cane fields where he had hoped to show me zombies laboring. It was not on any night. It was in broad daylight one afternoon, when we passed that way again, on the lower trail to Picmy. Polynice reined in his horse and pointed to a rough, stony, terraced slope—on which four laborers, three men and a woman, were chopping the earth with machetes, among straggling cotton stalks, a hundred yards distant from the trail.

"Wait while I go up there," he said, excited because a chance had come to fulfill his promise. "I think it is Lamercie with the zombies. If I wave to you, leave your horse and come." Starting up the slope, he shouted to the woman, "It is I, Polynice," and when he waved later, I followed.

As I clambered up, Polynice was talking to the woman. She had stopped work—a big-boned, hard-faced black girl, who regarded us with surlly unfriendliness. My first impression of the three supposed zombies, who continued dumbly at work, was that there was something about them unnatural and strange. They were plodding like brutes, like automatons. Without stooping down, I could not fully see their faces, which were bent expressionless over their work. Polynice touched one of them on the shoulder, motioned him to get up. Obediently, like an animal, he slowly stood erect—and what I saw then, coupled with what I had heard previously, or despite it, came as a rather sickening shock.

The eyes were the worst. It was not my imagination. They were in truth like the eyes of a dead man, not blind, but staring, unfocused, unseeing. The whole face, for that matter, was bad enough. It was vacant, as if there was nothing behind it. It seemed not only expressionless, but incapable of expression. I had seen so much previously in Haiti that was outside ordinary normal experience that for the flash of a second I had a sickening, almost panicky lapse in which I thought, or rather felt, "Great God, maybe this stuff is really true, and if it is true, it is rather awful, for it upsets everything." By "everything" I meant the natural fixed laws and processes on which all modern human thought and actions are based. Then suddenly I remembered—and my mind seized the memory as a man sinking in water clutches a solid plank—the face of a dog I had once seen in the histological laboratory at Columbia. Its entire front brain had been removed in an experimental operation weeks before; it moved about, it was alive, but its eyes were like the eyes I now saw staring.

I recovered from my mental panic. I reached out and grasped one of the dangling hands. It was calloused, solid,
human. Holding it, I said, "Bonjour, compère." The zombie stared without responding. The black wench, Lamerie, who was their keeper, now more sullen than ever, pushed me away—"Z'a/fai' nèg' pas z'a/fai' blanc" (Negroes' affairs are not for whites). But I had seen enough. "Keeper" was the key to it. "Keeper" was the word that had leapt naturally into my mind as she protested, and just as naturally the zombies were nothing but poor, ordinary demented human beings, idiots, forced to toil in the fields.

It was a good rational explanation, but it is far from being the end of this story. It satisfied me then, and I said as much to Polynice as we went down the slope. At first he did not contradict me, even said doubtfully, "Perhaps"; but as we reached the horses, before mounting, he stopped and said, "Look here, I respect your distrust of what you call superstition and your desire to find out the truth, but if what you were saying now were the whole truth, how could it be that over and over again, people who have stood by and seen their own relatives buried have, sometimes soon, sometimes months or years afterward, found those relatives working as zombies, and have sometimes killed the man who held them in servitude?"

"Polynice," I said, "that's just the part of it that I can't believe. The zombies in such cases may have resembled the dead persons, or even been 'doubles'—you know what doubles are, how two people resemble each other to a startling degree. But it is a fixed rule of reasoning in America that we will never accept the possibility of a thing's being 'supernatural' so long as any natural explanation, even far-fetched, seems adequate."

"Well," said he, "if you spent many years in Haiti, you would have a very hard time to fit this American reasoning into some of the things you encountered here."

As I have said, there is more to this story—and I think it is best to tell it very simply.

2 See Appendix, page 334.

In all Haiti, there is no clearer scientifically trained mind, no sounder pragmatic rationalist, than Dr. Antoine Villiers. When I sat later with him in his study, surrounded by hundreds of scientific books in French, German, and English, and told him of what I had seen and of my conversations with Polynice, he said:

"My dear sir, I do not believe in miracles nor in supernatural events, and I do not want to shock your Anglo-Saxon intelligence, but this Polynice of yours, with all his superstition, may have been closer to the partial truth than you were. Understand me clearly. I do not believe that any one has ever been raised literally from the dead—neither Lazarus, nor the daughter of Jairus, nor Jesus Christ himself—yet I am not sure, paradoxical as it may sound, that there is not something frightful, something in the nature of criminal sorcery if you like, in some cases at least, in this matter of zombies. I am by no means sure that some of them who now toil in the fields were not dragged from the actual graves in which they lay in their coffins, buried by their mourning families!"

"It is then something like suspended animation?" I asked.

"I will show you," he replied, "a thing which may supply the key to what you are seeking," and standing on a chair, he pulled down a paper-bound book from a top shelf. It was nothing mysterious or esoteric. It was the current official Code Pénal (Criminal Code) of the Republic of Haiti. He thumbed through it and pointed to a paragraph which read:

"Article 249. Also shall be qualified as attempted murder the employment which may be made against any person of substances which, without causing actual death, produce a lethargic coma more or less prolonged. If, after the administering of such substances, the person has been buried, the act shall be considered murder no matter what result follows." 3

3 See Appendix, page 335.
courts, as may be seen from the following item in the daily newspaper, *Le Matin*, of January 27, 1927:

**Aux Assises**

Aimerle du mardi 23 Janvier

Azéma Douss originaire de Boucan-Carré, Commune de Mirebalais, a été mise au banc des accusés. Elle ignore son âge. Il n’importe. N’oubliez pas, les femmes, que l’âge qu’elles paraissent avoir? En tout cas, celle qui compare aujourd’hui est «maîtresse», de la justice, puisst grand mieux. Mais le de sa forme, son nez ne vous est pas à elle de l’ai encore éteinte, ouvrant largement elle aura à nier le fait est reproché, ferraient le chiuin de plus d’un, je ne m’étonne pas que le tût Benjamin ait dit son rôle d’accusation qu’elles s’était fait un visage de sœur de charité au cabinet d’instruction, alors qu’elle aurait précédemment avoué, et à la police et à la justice de prix, avoir réellement exercé le 13 août 1925, des actes de souillure sur un enfant qui en âgé mort.

Qu’il relevo comparaisons, dévastant d’abondance, il hésitait à répondre aux questions qui leur sont respectivement posées par le Ministère Public, M. Ed. Cassangnol, P. D. Plaisir et M. Charlemiers. Mais Azéma Douss, elle-même, n’evo que l’enfant de son petit neveu qui t’aurait vécu que 7 jours. À la fermeture des débats partiscoliers, on pouvait encore se demander si l’accusée avait véritablement coupable du crime qu’on lui reprochait.

...ently this woman confessed that she was a sorcier denied having caused the death of the child. She subsequently acquitted.

Stephen Bonsal, in *The American Mediterranean* ut, Yard and Company, 1912), gives the following of a case which occurred in 1908 during the presidency of Nord Alexis:

A man of the working-class in Port-au-Prince fell ill. He had at intervals a high fever which physicians could not reduce. He had joined a foreign mission church and the head of this mission visited him. On his second visit this clergyman saw the patient die and at the invitation of the dead man’s wife and his physician, he helped dress the dead man in his grave-clothes. The next day he assisted at the funeral, closed the coffin lid, and saw the dead man buried.

The mail rider to Jacmel found some days later a man dressed in grave-clothes, tied to a tree, moaning. He freed the poor wretch, who soon recovered his voice but not his mind. He was subsequently identified by his wife, by the physician who had pronounced him dead, and by the clergyman. The recognition was not mutual, however. The victim recognized no one, and his days and nights were spent moaning inarticulate words no one could understand. President Nord Alexis placed him on a government farm, near Gonaives, where he was cared for.

3. Here is the French text from the Code Pénal:

**Article 249.** Est aussi qualifié attentat à la vie d’une personne, l’emploi qui sera fait contre elle de substances qui, sans donner la mort, produisent un état léthargique plus ou moins prolongé, de quelque manière que ces substances aient administrées, quelles qu’en aient été les suites. Si par suite de cet état léthargique la personne a été inhumée, l’attentat sera qualifié assassinat.

**CHAPTER IV**

1. In Hayti for almost two hundred years the bulk of the people have been faithful in their allegiance to the snake god, worshiped not merely by the dregs of the colored populace, but also by many, if not by most, who are leaders of their race. In one of the Voodoo Temples hangs a banner of red silk presented to the serpent deity by the consort of Emperor Soulouque.—**Marvin Dana.**

That Soulouque, who ruled as the Emperor Faustin I in 1848-1859, as well as his consort Empress Adelina, were adherents of the Voodoo faith, is a known fact in Haitian history. Among the original manuscript documents in the collection of H. P. Davis is a letter written in ink which is faded yellow and almost illegible, addressed to...