

A DAY IN THE MOON

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A day in the moon by Théophile Moreux

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THÉOPHILE MOREUX

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THE MOON**



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A DAY IN THE MOON

I

THE MOON

To launch out into space, to rise ever upwards, to leave the Earth far away and fly on strong wings to the Moon, to descend upon its silvery surface, traverse its unknown plains and valleys, examine in detail the structure of that globe which we see suspended above our heads, and at last to come back and tell the people of the Earth the daring adventures of that distant journey . . . what a dream !

We have all had such dreams on some autumn evening when, as we returned in thoughtful mood from some long walk in the country, the thin crescent of the new Moon rose on the background of the sky, still tinted with the twilight glow.

And this reminds me of an evening in one of the vacations I spent in the Sologne, my native

district. I had accompanied my father on one of those walks of which he was particularly fond, and during which he never missed an opportunity of developing my interest in the various phenomena that Nature is each moment placing before our eyes.

Behind us the sun had set and night was coming on with a perfectly clear sky. We were walking along a footpath among clumps of heath and furze. A herdsman was singing as he slowly brought back his cattle to their shed, and gradually as the night came on the thousand sounds of Earth were hushed. One might have said that Nature was assuming a recollected silence the better to prepare man to feel the charm of the heavens that were soon all studded with stars.

And now, as the tints of the landscape faded away, my childish imagination was full of delight.

The wide unbroken plain extended to the horizon, which it seemed to touch, and I thought that the sea must present much the same appearance. Here and there the thickets of high-growing shrubs stood out in dark patches on the ground, and I imagined they were like great waves. The clumps of pines scattered here and there farther off, black,

ill-defined masses rising over all else, seemed to me to be big ships with their masts swaying gently in the light evening breeze.

Suddenly a glow like that of a fire gleamed out beyond them, the ruddy disc of the full Moon rose above all the things of Earth, and immediately my mind was prompted to other thoughts.

Why is it that the Moon does not always appear to be round?

What is the explanation of its phases?

I knew that with the naked eye one could only have a very rough idea of its aspect, and I had often levelled at its shining disc a telescope of very moderate power, the only astronomical instrument then in my possession.

Those greyish spots that one sees with the naked eye appeared more clearly defined even with a magnifying power of only ten, but my telescope was hardly powerful enough to show me the lunar craters and mountain-walled plains. I thought indeed that I could catch glimpses of them, but nevertheless I was always ambitiously dreaming already of more powerful instruments.

I used often to ask myself at that time if it was true that the Moon was strewn with giant mountains,