

**EN ROUTE. TRANSLATED  
FROM THE FRENCH  
WITH A PREFATORY  
NOTE BY C. KEGAN PAUL**

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En Route. Translated from the French with a Prefatory Note by C. Kegan Paul by J.-K. Huysmans & C. Kegan Paul

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**J.-K. HUYSMANS & C. KEGAN PAUL**

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EN ROUTE

# En Route

BY

J.-K. HUYSMANS

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C. KEGAN PAUL

"Convolve ad urbes refugii, ad loca videlicet religiosa, ubi possitis de præteritis agere poenitentiam, in præsentis obtinere gratiam et fiducialiter futuram gloriam præstolari."

SAINT BONAVENTURE.



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## TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.

It is seldom fair to an author, nor does it raise the value of literature to imagine too readily that a writer is himself depicted in his works. We rob Sir Walter Scott of much of his creative power if we assert that in *Redgauntlet* are exact portraits of himself and his father, nor is it just criticism to declare that Shakspeare left a likeness of himself in *Hamlet*. No one can of course create any fictitious character unless he have in himself undeveloped possibilities, some of which he sketches in his books, and, at times, he may have prophesied his own future course in the events under which he has brought the characters in his narrative.

It would be intrusive and impertinent to declare that M. Huysmans has written an analysis of himself or a full description of his own conversion under the name of Durtal, because—though it is quite needless for the understanding of "*En Route*"—Durtal is also the hero of a former book, "*La Bas*," wherein experience is made of Satanism, "Black Masses" and other forms of detestable impiety, known in France, and at this moment under investigation in the law courts, but, so far as we are aware, unknown in England.

In France, as a rule, the population is Catholic; French Protestants, who answer very much to our Unitarians, are confined for the most part to certain centres, form isolated knots in other places; they do not in any sense

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leaven the people. Hence when a Frenchman loses Faith he has not as in England a Protestant sect handy, in joining which he may believe as much or as little as he please, but in which morals at least are upheld; he plunges only too often into sinful excesses, now and then into some complicated and enormous crime, becoming actively hostile to the dominant religion of his country; since it meets him at every turn, he cannot be indifferent to, nor ignore it.

He is aided in his revolt, not by religious sects, bulwarks at least against the denial of God, but by societies of Free-thinkers, "Solidaires," Freemasons, etc., bound to an active warfare with the Church, and sworn to keep the priest away from their families, so far as in them lies; especially at the hour of birth, by refusing baptism; in the hour of death, by withholding the last sacraments; and after death, by insisting on civil funerals.

In the many episcopal approvals bestowed on an admirable little French book setting forth devotions, a guild, and a cloistered community, in aid of the dying, much is said of the work of Freemasons. We are probably safe in saying that English Freemasons are only members of a convivial society, who, knowing nothing of the splendour of Church vestments, banners and furniture, or of confraternities in which even the laity may share, have adopted their own ornate badges and ritual. Freemasons in England might well be let alone by the Church, and would do no harm, were it not that it is the boast of every Mason that his society is one all the world over; and in France, in Italy, and elsewhere, it has allied itself with much that is detestable and irreligious.

We may take it, then, that when in France a man of position puts himself in distinct antagonism to the Church, and this is of course very different to ignoring it, or taking it for granted without writing about it, he is appealed to, not as in England by Protestants, but by Freemasons,

"Solidaires," even by Satanism, and the more he thinks of religion, the viler and more terrible is the temptation that assails him, is the home which offers itself to his spirit.

This M. Huysmans has realized: he is a Frenchman who knows his people, and in the book now presented to the reader he shows us a man, who having passed through the most terrible ordeals of unbelief, has been suddenly converted to faith, but has not reformed his life. "En Route" is a story of the struggles of such an one, while incidentally it contains also essays on Church music, Architecture, and other Arts, on Monasticism, on the Lives of the Saints, and on Mysticism.

Faith is assumed, after a course of unbelief, and no explanation of the return to it is afforded. Many have taken in hand, particularly of late years, to give, each an *Apologia pro Vita Sua*, but it will be noticed that the exact process is as little explicable as the quickening of life in the womb. The soul awakes and says, "I believe," it has come about by the sudden irruption of Grace, and not by any statement of syllogisms, any admission of premisses, any conscious drawing of conclusions. Remembering this, the Catholic has no right to be disappointed if he feels tongue-tied in the presence of those who do not see as he sees; he cannot argue, he cannot hope to do outwardly, what God did in his own case secretly, he recognizes that in spiritual matters men are not swayed by argument, which may well defend, but not carry, a position; in religion debate seldom bears sway; the daughter of debate is not concord, but discord.

The Church collectively has learnt what each man individually learns, and to which he must perforce reconcile himself, that there is little active zeal for conversions among Catholic priests. Christ must be preached, the message has to be delivered, but in a nation where He is already known, all that the priest can do is to wait till the soul obeys divine grace, and then be ready with all necessary

help ; it is not the Church's business to go forth and argue with the intellects of those to whose hearts God Himself appeals, whom discussion would only harden. Preaching does not necessarily carry the gift of Faith to the listener, however true it may be that God often uses it as a vehicle for conferring the gift.

The gift of Faith is His greatest gift, and no Frenchman, no Italian, no Spaniard, no German—of that part of the great Teutonic nation which has remained Catholic—would hesitate for a moment to accept certain words of Cardinal Newman at which many of our own countrymen have cavilled. The Cardinal speaks of a beggar-woman who has the gift of Faith, but who may still have many vices, as nearer to the heart of God than many far more respectable than she. In M. Huysmans' book Faith is taken as axiomatic, and there is little attempt to explain it, though love for Art and hereditary tendencies had some part to play in the ready acceptance of the gift ; the book is the account of the Route taken by such an one towards a holy life. There is another reason why we have no right to assume that this is an autobiography. The inviolability of the Confessional has two sides ; the penitent has, as a rule, no right to make his verbal confession to the world as the hero is here presented as doing, though a writer may naturally give an imaginary confession, just as, to teach a penitent how to confess, an imaginary form might be suggested in a manual of moral theology ; and of course in rare cases, as that of Saint Augustine, there may be occasional reasons for breaking through the rule of expedient reticence.

The special trials in Durtal's way are those of the Flesh, and here again we recognize a vast difference between the temper and tone of the English and French nations. It is true that when the author brings his hero to actual statements and he asks " Is it necessary that I go into details ? " the monk who is exercising his office says, " No ; it is not

necessary," thereby agreeing with an experienced Jesuit Father who, a year or two since, told his Retreatants that when they unburthened their sins and sorrows they must "always be careful to respect the modesty of the Confessional," and that the Priest would understand a veiled language; yet Durtal writes in narrative certain matters which a translation must hide, and merely hint; that can be said in French, openly, which English *men* would not say to each other in private.

This arises from a fundamental difference in the manner in which the two nations view certain facts of human nature. A young Englishman, who goes wrong, throws as a rule some glow or glamour of imagination over his coarsest excesses, justifying his deeds, if he think of them, by his imagination, or by some over-mastering need; a young Frenchman takes the same acts as matters of course, needing no veil, and no excuse. The present book is essentially intact, some half-dozen passages are softened in phrase; it has not been considered necessary to the truth of rendering to give each word its exact equivalent, if, indeed, there be always such an equivalent. We have acted on the advice of the Trappist in the book, and the Jesuit in actual English life, to respect the modesty of the Confessional.

But however outspoken a Frenchman may be about his sins, he admits that they are sins, and that if he have Faith it behoves him to lead a decent life. Hence M. Huysmans is bound by the exigencies of his story to make Durtal endeavour to reform. Led by his love of Art, Church Architecture and Church Services appeal to him; and as in his former life he was attracted by the abnormal and the monstrous, so now the strange lives and experiences of the mystic saints help him on the road. The commonplace repels him. Hence he cannot away with the music in, and the architecture of the churches of Paris, he is not attracted