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DOCTOR CHIMERA

Joaquin Ortega

THIRTY-SIX MILES FROM MADRID, in the slopes of the Guadarrama, on a side road far from the main highway, there is a sprawling structure almost hidden from view by a pine grove. One afternoon, from the top of Navacerrada, our excursion leader, Don Paco, Olympic ex-champion, a man about town, who prided himself on knowing everybody and everything, had pointed it out to us, a bunch of eager teen-agers, as the Espuñés Sanatorium.

"This Dr. Espuñés," he explained, "is now dead, and the institution run by a committee of alienists. But he built the palace of insanity and directed it until the very day of his death. He shunned completely private practice, resigned his directorship of the State Hospital for the Insane, and lived there with his patients the last decade of his career. A bachelor, without near relatives, he decided to invest his large fortune in this project.

"When the building was being erected, rumors began to circulate that the eminent clinician showed some signs of unbalance. There was nothing to put one's fingers on, however. He expressed himself, when he met his former colleagues in the infrequent visits to Madrid, with the same scientific directness and keen penetration of men and affairs which had given him the reputation of a solid man. He still displayed even closer knowledge of the latest literature in psychiatry and that familiarity with the humanities that had surrounded his name with the aureole of wisdom.

"He supervised the erection of his new establishment with astute practical sense, bargaining with contractors, inspecting the blueprints and specifications. Technically inclined, he saw to it that the ventila-

Reception address for the Madison Literary Club (Wisconsin), one of the oldest town-and-gown societies in the Middle West, founded in 1877.

tion, heating, drainage, were of the best. But the architects started gossiping about queer orders he gave them. He told them, for instance, that he wanted a building well finished but left unfinished. He explained that the skeleton of the structure should be made susceptible, without great expense, to unexpected changes in the capacity of the rooms, in the placement of the windows, doors, staircases, and other appurtenances. As he put it, he wanted a dwelling so constructed that its interior would be collapsible into any desired shape. The architects went into a huddle and decided to use metallic casings with adjustments for the partitions, stairways and openings. Dr. Espuñés, for mysterious hydraulic reasons, prescribed a system of plumbing that should make it possible to hear running water in various volumes and speeds throughout the building, by the mere pressing of certain control switches. As he later explained, this was the nearest approach to dead mothers' lullabies he could find to put his mad children to sleep. On the other hand, he placed, on carefully selected strategic points in the rooms, rugs made with a mixture of wool and pulverized fossil sponges which had the property of absorbing all noises. This magic article had been invented in her death chamber by the deranged wife of a saxophone player. To protect further the inhabitants from outside reverberations of life, the walls were sprinkled through invisible spouts, day and night, with water from the Dead Sea. The lighting he devised in a complicated scheme of waning and increasing intensities combined with colors.

"When the time for furnishing came, he likewise sported singular ideas. He placed hangers six feet apart in every room and corridor. In between, there were shelves — actual or imaginary — with cigarettes, matches, shoelaces, collar buttons, soap, towels, powder, lipsticks, toothpicks, hairpins, safety pins, plain pins, combs, handkerchiefs, black pencils, blue pencils, red pencils, pink pencils, doctor bills, tax bills, dull razors and sharp razors, small pads, rubber bands, clips, erasers, formal and informal excuses, lotions, calendars, thermometers, barometers, inkstands, letters received and the answers, fountain pens, candies, lyrical poems informing the world how one's heart or other specific organ feels, nuts, aspirin, game boards, pills of all colors and sizes, contraceptives, gloves, chewing gum, playing cards, mail advertisements, various kinds of catalogues, catalogues of catalogues, bibliographies, barber's chatter, haircuts, fast watches and slow watches and correct watches, telephones, penknives, ash trays, ties, cuff buttons, formal

clothes for men, attaching collars, stiff shirts, finger rings, earrings, nose rings, fraternity pins, decorations, emblems, mottos, nobility titles, texts assassinated by footnotes, small change, iced water, wigs, milady's hats, 'I-ever-saws' and an assortment of hyperboles, jazz music, classical music, bookmarks, wardrobe checks, keys, back-scratchers, styptic pencils, railroad guides, scissors, thumbtacks, chains, telephone directories, business directories, university directories, movie tickets, walking sticks, radio sets, simplified methods to avoid stuttering, ah-ah's, and other impediments of speech, Hearst newspapers, English, Latin, French, Spanish, and German pronunciation charts, detective stories, gangster stories, success stories, love stories, funny stories, and all kinds of stories, postal cards, Christmas cards, birthday cards, Valentine cards, membership cards, visiting cards, umbrellas, introduction letters, recommendation letters, rubber shoes, flags of all nations waving in a self-indulgent breeze, artificial eyelashes, weighing scales, nail files, 'dear's,' 'honey's' and other saccharine miscellanea, cosmetics, phonographically recorded lectures, harangues, speeches, messages, motions, resolutions, and sermons on every subject and for every juncture, degrees—academic, climatic, social and otherwise—comic strips, readymade reports—committee and otherwise—on sundry topics, theses, funny man toys. In short, every conceivable minutia in the realm of the forgettable and the subsidiary was accessible at every turn, so that the population of the sanatorium, either free from their lack or sickened with their abundance, but at any rate unconcerned with their existence, could concentrate on their significant manias and be spurred untrammelled to creative enterprises.

"Underneath, neatly built in the walls, were the automatic shoe cleaners. These shoe cleaners were equipped with a very ingenious device whereby the line of the pants, by means of an electrical iron in the form of pincers that went up and down, was quickly restored to its rectilinear pristine condition. A master's thesis on *The Influence of Shoddy Shoes and Baggy Pants on the Intellectual Achievement of Teachers*, enthusiastically approved by the graduate faculty of one of the best teacher training institutions of the country, had conclusively demonstrated that the broken line of the pants breaks the normal line of thinking and behavior and unduly inhibits otherwise aggressive individuals. Dr. Espuñés had also observed that people, like peacocks, get depressed when they look down and see that their extremities are not up to the rest of their plumage. He had noticed too that women,

who are very sensitive to their own looks and to the direction of the male's looks, consider themselves well dressed if they wear smart shoes and silk stockings, even if the rest of their makeup and outfit is not so 'hot.' Finally, our admirable doctor had compared the English expression 'He looked at her from head to feet' with the Spanish one '*La miró de los pies a la cabeza*: He looked at her from feet to head,' and decided that the latter was more in consonance with the realities of life, for human beings rely heavily on their foundations.

"The building finished and ready for business, Dr. Espuñés did a most unusual medical thing. He wrote a very sensible letter to all his alienist friends in Spain and abroad and told them that he had endowed his new sanatorium with ample funds to provide free treatment and all the necessary living expenses for 'patients with interesting cases of madness.' Would they inform him whether they had any in hand? He would travel to whatever place they indicated, examine the patients during a week, and admit them or not to this life of bounty, according to the degrees of charm and inventive quality of their ailments. Be it well understood, this was no joke. How could anybody take it as such when he had just published the thirteenth and last volume of his monumental work on *The Ways, Byways, Subways and Highways of the Human Brain*, receiving international acclaim for his profound investigations? His sanatorium was not to be a show place for journalists and morbid sensation seekers. Exclusively relatives and very intimate friends of the inmates, placed in an elective list, would be admitted once a week, and this only if the latter did not object. Wealth or poverty was no objection, for there in the sanatorium all alike would be provided with everything they wanted.

"Strange as it may seem, the alienists all over the world, and especially in Spain, took kindly to the proposition. Dr. Espuñés went back and forth, and in two years he gathered a family of about fifty patients. None was violent, a prerequisite for candidacy.

"Both sexes were admitted on even terms, but as he expected, although the number of crazy women was larger, very few could qualify. Feminine nature, as stated by Dr. Espuñés, was intrinsically economic, hedonistic, and their disequilibria tended to remain in the sphere of the so-called social sciences, hardly ever rising to philosophic category. Unpredictable changes of speed or of direction in their behavior were occasioned by a mere lack of synchronization in the many independently rotating little wheels of their brain mechanism. Dr. Espuñés

had observed women motorists at street intersections dancing a kind of rhumba step with their cars and then turning to the right, or to the left, or following straight as their mental wane happened to point at the time—to the chagrin of drivers behind. He had also made a profound study of the mechanics of conjugal quarrels. The misnamed 'weaker sex' would resort, in spurts, to sentimental pleading or to violent insult, reserving, of course, her tears to perfect the confusion in Joe's brain wheel at the exact moment when this weary wheel, trying to channel the discussion into reason, was almost paralyzed with so many rotation adjustments. There was seldom in women what one might call 'single wheel trouble,' simply because that single wheel did not exist. That is why Dr. Espuñés had noticed during his long years of practice among female patients that as soon as one of them, by a freak of nature, was endowed with the central wheel, she began sooner or later cutting her hair, wearing pants and thick-soled shoes, swinging a broad stride, smoking cigars, seeking conquest, playing poker for high stakes, drinking hard liquor, swearing and in general indulging in all the niceties of the male species. Dr. Espuñés had decided that most types of craziness in women are neither interesting nor diagnosable, except for love purposes.

"To invest his place with more privacy, Dr. Espuñés bought all the adjoining forest land for two miles around and put a government licensed game-keeper, armed with a rifle, to ward off strangers from the premises. Each visitor had to show a countersigned pass, with his portrait and thumb prints. No outsider ever saw the whole plant. They were conducted exactly to the place where they were to meet the inmate.

"The patients were compelled to go bareheaded and to have a haircut every week without fail, for Dr. Espuñés held to the notion that the heaviest substances on earth are those maverick hairs that barbers purposely leave half-cut over the line of the ears and neck to make customers uneasy with their burden and entice them to frequent tonsurations. Dr. Espuñés did not want anything to weigh down the upper extremities of his children except air and sound.

"Dr. Espuñés had a particular theory of dietetics, too, if not decidedly novel — because the effect of certain foods on the human organism had already been speculated upon in ancient times — at least novel in its application. He prohibited in the Asylum's menus inert matter, such as plain meats, which for him were neutral substances with no other function in the body of the animal than to be there and passively receive the stimuli of the organs. He concentrated on functional food, such as

hearts, brains, kidneys, liver, giblets, eggs — life in embryo — sweet-breads, tongue and other viscera, which he believed would transmit their latent powers to his patients. Swallows' nests, jumping beans, fermented substances such as Roquefort cheese, sour milk and sauerkraut, spices, aqua vitae, fruit juices, cocoanut water, he also considered helpful. He held the opinion that we have not taken full advantage of food determinism. In a very scholarly paper with formulas, percentages, graphs, etc., published posthumously, he proved that much of the success of his institution in experimenting with the creative capacities of mad men had been due to this intelligent system of dietetics. In many respects, he is entitled to be considered a forerunner of the 'vitaminists.'

"Legends began to shape about the sanatorium. Persons spoke of little houses of all sizes and strange contours that had sprung among the trees, of windows in the main structure projecting into aerial walks which descended by chute-the-chutes to ponds of limpid water; of uncanny musical sounds that came forth in the dead of night; of floor-mattressed rooms with a trap in the center uncovering a bathtub into which the person could roll from bed; of stop and go, red and green lights in the lapels of some of the most taciturn patients indicating that the path for conversation was open or closed; of self-starting things, moving platforms and other paraphernalia of the kind. But nobody knew much definite about it, and those who did know something — the professional friends of the director — were pledged to medical secrecy by the sworn formula of Johns Hopkins, rewritten and enlarged by a House Committee.

"Dr. Espuñés died, and his institution lost much of its character, for it became impossible to maintain the high standards he had set. In spite of the fact that he, hopefully, left in his will a 'fat' endowment in the hands of a friendly Board of Administrators with the plea to continue his good work, he, sound to the last, foresaw the difficulties ahead and gave leeway to the trustees to make any necessary changes in the statutes, insisting only on his original idea that his sanatorium should always be a heaven for interesting mad men, and for no others."

Imagine, therefore, with this background of past history seething in my memory, with what joy I received some years later an invitation from my friend, Dr. Martín, suggesting that I lunch with him the next day at Dr. Espuñés' sanatorium, where he had recently become one of the resident physicians. I had not seen my college mate for five years,

since he went first to Italy and then to Germany to do research work among the fascists in civic insanity, a new branch of his specialty, and the anticipation of a tête-à-tête with him after his rare experiences abroad was more than stimulating. He explained in his telephone call that the strict prohibition of outside visits had been somewhat relaxed and that I could be his guest without hindrance on his part or remorse on mine, and see most of the remainders of the creative glory of Dr. Espuñés and his followers.

I took the train, wan and excited from a sleepless night. The view of the mountains, when I got off at San Rafael, was normal, and as I went so dramatically moved, did not leave in my mind any lasting sensorial impression. For convenience, I refer my readers to the many lengthy descriptions of the mountain chain at 12:45 p. m. of early autumn days, perpetrated in prose and verse by the professional literati of Madrid.

In the station taxi I reached the gate of the sanatorium. The porter, upon hearing my name, phoned to my friend and presently I found myself walking by his arm toward the central hall. I noticed that the gardens were arranged quite erratically, without any preconceived plan. For example, on our right, as we walked on, there were rocky cascades and very formally disposed little terraces and *parterres* with the shrubs and flowers in symmetrical rows, while at our left the vegetation grew in thickets, with nooks of dense brush as if to conceal someone behind. And in the distance, near the rear of the building, there emerged tall green clusters of box-hedges in the shape of an amphitheater, with a tiny entrance barely adequate to let pass the bulk of a person.

As we were nearing the building, our path intersected another that started from the left wing of an adjoining pavilion topped with a majestic tower. We observed an elderly man walking on it toward us. He was followed by what might be a butler — judging by his sideburns, winged collar, and large-sized boots and hands — who carried something flat under his left arm. The rapidly advancing gentleman was dressed in a long frock coat of bizarre cut, striped trousers, no spats, nor visible gold fillings in his teeth, black and white checkered patent leather shoes, silk sash, blue and white, with some astronomical pattern, which went up to the line of his arm pits, gold-rimmed glasses without lenses hanging from his neck on a black and white ribbon, and a black and white carnation in his lapel. The extraordinary nature of his habiliments held our attention first, but instantly we were taken by his beautiful

head. It was so perfect that it defies definitional words, one of those things that, because of their immaculate formal asepsia, dissolve into totalitarian adjectives. Demeanor and assurance. The forehead, high, and topographically suggestive of changing levels; the hair, niveous, thrown back, mane-like, as a wind-swept fire or a wavy stream; the long ends of his moustache forming upon meeting the unbroken vertical line of his thin, pointed goatee and aquiline nose, the perfect design of a dagger; and his eyes, nimble lightnings, dancing forward.

We waited for him, and on passing he bowed his head gracefully and uttered well-timbered words:

"Good morning, Dr. Martín. A good day to work. I have always expected that this high sun would reveal to me the secret. For the sun is the music and the light and the blood of the universe."

"This was the most beloved patient of Dr. Espuñés," commented my friend. "For all I know, the attraction he felt for him was perhaps due to the fact that Dr. Espuñés was a Catalan, sensuous and active, and this Castilian a man of virtue and contemplation. Through him I have learned to appreciate the greatness of our founder. What Dr. Espuñés did here was not merely a human enterprise, but a play with supermen worthy of the superman he was. I figure he got tired of mankind's stupidity in the last years of his life and determined to give himself the 'treat' — just as a well-earned vacation — of being in the society of interesting people. The gentleman who went by — for he is a gentleman in every sense of the word — was entered in the sanatorium records under the name of Dr. Chimera. His tastes for food, clothes, decoration, and other refinements of living are exquisite. He is versed in all learning. His library was already large when he came to live with Dr. Espuñés, and the latter contributed while alive to its enrichment with the best books from his own, bequeathing the remainder to him at his death. There you will find printed pages and manuscripts on every imaginable subject and in every tongue. His curiosity is insatiable, but he is disturbed by the thought that civilization tends to dispersal and not to unity, and that unity is the destiny of man—unity with his own self, unity with all throbbing nature, with the universe, with God. This mania took a queer turn in his case. . . . But let me not interrupt this sketch. Dr. Chimera is our most trusted adviser. He has the absolute confidence of every patient, comforts them all in their doubts, for he understands almost everything and when he does not understand he makes a willing effort to understand. He treats us with polite disdain

for we simply know—an exercise of reason—while he understands—an exercise of will. He tells us, patiently, what persuasion to use in each case. For him all these unfortunates are men afflicted with a disease of unity. Our endeavor should be to unite them with themselves. This, according to him, is the more difficult since they are burdened with an excess of desire for unity, phenomenal, cosmic. It is easy, he says, to preach unity to those outside who live disarticulate without being conscious of it, but to give satisfaction to those within these walls, who are disarticulate out of an excess of articulation, is an exacting and delicate task."

"All that is fascinating, my friend," I wedged in. "And what is that turn of his mania you alluded to? And pardon my impatience."

"He is probably at it now. His days are divided into three periods which for him are the vital periods of rational beings. Nights he devotes to learning, to studying, to penetrating the darkness. This he calls the Pregnancy. Mornings, to meditation. You will see him from dawn in his balcony-porch sunk in reflections. This is the Birth. Now, in the afternoon, he labors. This is the Destiny, his most frustrated hour. He has gone on, day after day, year after year, enacting this well-planned, inevitable tragedy. Come on to the house and we shall see from one of the upper windows part of his so-called studio."

And we saw.

His butler handed him an enormous pad and one of those long, thick carbon pencils the masons use. He whistled a complicated tune, listening intently to it with his head inclined sideways. Then, after a few seconds of suspense, his eyes lost in the air as if hypnotizing something that was flying, he feverishly traced a continuous line of the most intricate design, apparently, on the sheet of paper, stopped, shrunk to concentration, and slowly withdrew it from his face to gain a perspective. He made a sign of denial with his head, looked sadly to the attendant, tore the leaf from the pad, crushed it with his fist and threw it on the ground. And the same, again and again, only changing the music. The enclosure, strewn with white papers of all shapes, looked like an osarium with the skeletons of his ideas shining in the sun.

"He has been trying for twenty-five years, unsuccessfully, to draw his whistling." Dr. Martín spoke softly. "Every afternoon, good or bad weather, he comes to his studio. If it rains, or snows, he stands in that tiny shelter you see yonder by the path. Often he does not mind the elements and continues drawing. When darkness falls, his hair drenched,

falling over his temples, his clothes sagging, he comes out, slowly, quivering. His figure is pathetic and grotesque, not enlivened then by his usual orderly composure."

"And what kind of a fellow is the companion? Is he a mad man also?"

"Oh, no, not quite. Juan is a stolid peasant who followed the fortunes of Dr. Chimera a long time ago against the advice of family and friends. He does not understand many of the words of his master but he listens to them with respect. Silent, enduring, he furnishes faithfully the alleviation of his presence and of his menial services. I suspect that he has become a little deranged, by contagion. In unguarded moments he speaks seriously of 'our work.'"

"Does Dr. Chimera give any reasonable explanation of his mania?" I interjected.

"A perfect one, of course. There is a volume in manuscript which has circulated from room to room for several years and which he has occasionally improved with the suggestions of the other inmates. It is beyond my power to give even an approximate idea of its contents. It covers five hundred folios in closely written script and launches here and there, pell-mell, into alchemy and astrology, into abstruse theories of relativity and absolutivity illustrated with undecipherable algebraic formulae; but the gist of the matter is what he maintains in his conclusions, namely his belief that although arts — all arts — are inferior manifestations, by-products of the human mind, yet they are the greatest tangible efforts for the expression of the self, and that once he solves the problem of the unity of arts, he would be on sure ground to tackle the ultimate problem of the unity of men."

"And what is his attitude towards the famous critics and artists of the world?"

"Negative. Save with few: Plato, Dante, Da Vinci, Michelangelo, Santa Teresa, El Greco, Shakespeare, Spinoza, Goya, Goethe, Baudelaire, Dostoevski . . . and above all Cervantes, for he lingered more, free from adjective philosophizings, on the uncharted seas of what is and what is not, teaching us that all is and all is not. The lesser critics, no matter how famous, he calls theologians without a god; the lesser artists, no matter how famous, gods without a theology. And the historians, he calls morticians embalming dead papers with the fluid of their pseudo-interpretations, spurious at all times, whether contemporary—since it is impossible to tell veraciously one's own story and necessarily the more

so to tell the story of others—or whether, belated—since it is sheer absurdity to pretend to attain that symphronism necessary to capture the sensibility of times that no longer are. Among the western historians, he likes Gibbon, however, because he wrote well-documented fiction and had the good taste to doubt the greatness of his brethren in Christ, a feat the more creditable in view of the fact that he was a Britisher. The latest story-tellers, he says, will not be able even to write well-documented fiction, for most of the real history of today is done by telephone or interview. To test the vulnerability of historians, to see if they had any spark of potential life in them, he proposed one of the best he knew to write his memoirs ahead of time and later to record what did not happen. The historian — no mean wit himself — retorted that predictions are reserved for politicians, salesmen, militarists, presidents, lobbyists, athletic coaches, orators, preachers, and other mercurial genera, and to record what does not happen is the chief function of the press. But his pet aversion are the members of the academic clan. He had belonged to it, and found now a masochistic humor in abusing his other self with Rabelaisian epigrams. Here are two he gave me the other day when I dared praise one of my professors.”

Dr. Martín drew from his pocket a folded blue book and read:

PROFESSORIAL—*Repeat . . . repeat . . . in various manners, and scheduled times, until old things appear new.*

ACADEMIC MIND—*A quiet pond without a spring below where waters coming from all directions are devitalized by stagnation.*

“Well,” I underlined, “the old gentleman seems hard to tackle.”

“Rather.”

“Once, Dr. Espuñés, sympathetic, showed him some specimens of modern artists who seemed to have been preoccupied with the correlation of arts. He read their proclamations, pondered over their polysyllables, and concluded that their paintings, sculptures, literature, and music were confusion and not fusion, vile, outrageous, and immoral mystifications. For some time he was cold to Dr. Espuñés, believing that his dearest friend had joked with his integrity, his learning, and his idealism.”

“Will it be possible to have an interview with this eccentric creature? It will make a corking feature for my paper,” I advanced eagerly.

“Out of the question. Dr. Chimera is very reticent about com-

municating with newcomers for fear they may take him either too seriously or not seriously enough. He is also reticent about talking to people he knows too well for fear that they may hear what he does not say or pay no attention to what he says. The other day when I went on my weekly round of inspection, I did succeed in bringing him to the level of conversation. His room in that turret is simple, useful, and easy. I noticed the lack of pictures on the walls and exclaimed pleasantly in order to provoke a dialogue:

“ ‘By the way, why not pictures in the room of a great painter?’ ”

“ ‘Short-sighted, as usual,’ said he with aplomb. ‘Sir, if you look through those four windows from any angle of the room you will find, framed in, carefully, the best landscapes available from this point of the planet. I amused myself during the first months of my sojourn here with elementary problems of composition. Dr. Espuñés was kind enough to change the openings every week or so until we arrived at their most satisfactory location. Framing is an inferior occupation of our reason. Our spirit repudiates framing, which is limitation and isolation. But, yet, alas! we have to contend with this miserable frame of our bodies. Playing with frames gives us a certain idea of our importance. We believe we are creating when in reality what we are doing is putting fences to what is already there. Poor men, little children cutting pieces of a cake baked in an oven the thermodynamics of which they do not understand.’ ”

“He paused, registered a quizzical smile. ‘It was also in those early stages of my mental growth that I became interested in cheating Nature with travesties of growth. I succeeded partially. Juvenile experiments with mass, color, and odor! I developed a non-expansive bean by injecting into the stems serum of depression salaries. And a black and white carnation infused with the saps of night and day. This was quite simple: I plunged the carnation plant into total darkness in the day-time and into total light in the night-time. The seeds became confused into a dual growth. My odorless cabbage was a little more complicated. It took me fourteen months to discover the tiny nostrils of the cabbage located in the crux of the roots with channels up and down whereby it relentlessly smells, the victim of a mania for bad odors, all the puerperal humors of the mother earth. The delicate surgical operation of excising the olfactory organs so as to let the odors escape at the level of the soil and free the leaves from them was fraught with dangers. I murdered exactly one million, one thousand and one cabbages, cauliflowers, and

Brussels sprouts before perfecting my technique. The cabbage fields were unapproachable in the period of growth because of this constant release of smells from the openings in my incisions, but the odorless cabbages were an ample reward. Besides, those odors in the open air were much more easily dissipated and not so obnoxious as in closed spaces in the immediate society of human beings. I offered my discovery to the Irish, but the ungrateful ones, peeved at my slight of the familiar odor (odors are almost an irreducible element in the culture of peoples), managed to have the thirty-three main sects of Christianity—one for each year of the life of Christ—excommunicate me. It was the only case in history, my dear Dr. Martín, where churches have agreed on a question of heresy. (I only got encouragement from three Unitarian ministers.) After weighty counsel they condemned my cabbage surgery as an illegal operation.*

"Dr. Chimera shrugged and after looking intently into my eyes, continued: 'But I have liberated myself from all this nonsense of trying to frame and cheat Nature. I want now to commune with Nature and be the humble acolyte of Nature. And you come here to invite me to put pictures on my walls! Pictures are fixed, motionless, the carcasses of Nature, rotting in the air as boats run aground on the shores of

* My address before the Madison Literary Club was on February 11, 1935. In the February 27, 1935 issue of *The New York Times* appeared the following story: "Cornell Produces Odorless Cabbage. Six Years 'Breeding' of Savoy Type Produces Strain Which Does Not 'Smell Up House,' Ithaca, N. Y., Feb. 26 (AP).—An odorless cabbage that will not 'smell up the house' while cooking, yet dietetically and gastronomically perfect, was announced at Cornell University today.

"The way Professor C. H. Meyers of the Department of Plant Breeding got rid of the odor was said to prove that the ladies have been right in turning up their noses at cabbage.

"The familiar 'smell' turned out to have been only an evolutionary hang-over which disappeared when good breeding was introduced.

"It took 4,000 cabbages and six years to produce the aristocratic vegetable. Each year Professor Myers uprooted a few of the most sturdy early Savoy cabbages in the Cornell experimental gardens and placed them in cold storage for about two months. This gave the young cabbages a 'rest.' It was part of the 'hibernation' which many plants required to reach their best. Then he replanted the cabbages in greenhouses.

"There an expert substituted steel tweezers for bees, butterflies and other indiscriminating pollen spreaders. He took pollen from the antler of one cabbage flower and placed it on the pistil of another.

"Thus seeds were obtained perpetuating the best cabbage strains. This went on for five years, with cabbages annually getting a little better.

"They averaged about three pounds, dark green and crinkly leaves, crisp texture, less waste than ordinary, greater uniformity in shape and maturity and easier digestibility.

"This year, the sixth, the new quality appeared. The cabbages have lost their odor, but retain all the other qualities.

"The Department of Plant Breeding has 10,000 seeds of this new strain, too few to offer to farmers. A limited number of seed growers will be asked to cooperate in producing enough seeds to place the odorless variety on the market. That is expected to take about two years."

The author of *Dr. Chimera* had no intimation of such parallel endeavor. This is one case when imagination scooped science by a few days.

nowhere. All we seem to be able to apprehend of the life of Nature are its static moments, its suspense, its artificially arrested life or artificially concocted death. And not even this. At least my pictures are alive with the changing substances of time eternal. These walls will receive my pictures of unity when I get the secret, a mathematical secret of shifting equations, when I can reduce the tremolo, the music of the world—all the voices and pulses of it—to linear expression. In the meantime I content myself with books, books which are as false as the voice of man, corpses of the minds and rarely their second life, echoes of my own garburity, but which serve as consolations to my impotence. Language and music are the beneficent drugs that keep us in stupor; but painting and sculpture are all-inclusive representations, the silent sisters of the deep, absorbing all noises as the mirror does when we talk in front of it, agglutinating dimensions and qualities, leading us to the place where nothing sounds because all is sounding.'

"Checking himself sharply, as if he had heard an admonition from the deep, he apologized, troubled:

" 'I am afraid this has not been the dialogue it was meant to be.'

"To rally him, I remarked: 'There is no such a thing as pure dialogue. Only the utterly mediocre talk for others or depend for sustenance on the words of others. We always listen to ourselves and talk to ourselves in the others. Your soliloquy bore the dialogue within. Dialogue is a metaphor.'

" 'Exactly, my friend,' he beamed. 'Man is by essence baroque. It tends to disunity and circumvention. And the curse of man is metaphor. You have probably noticed that I, even I, have been using plenty of metaphors and similes when carried off by the flow of verbiage. We substitute words for words, words for sentiments, sentiments for words, ideas for words, words for ideas, sensations for ideas, ideas for sensations, and so on and on. And the terminology of the philosophers, why, that is the most flagrant metaphor, nothing but plugs to stop the leakages of the mind. If one follows closely, intently, as the pointer follows its quarry, the concepts of those molting owls of knowledge, through the multicolored and entangled skeins of their dialectics, one always stumbles upon something else. Spiritual impotence, Dr. Martín, or what is worse, spiritual hypocrisy. The impotents are caught in the net of the relative but pretend to themselves and to the others that they see the fundamentals. They are the most perverted and harmful. Men are engaged in expressing one thing with another, including their own selves, when

the noble work is to express everything with one thing, and one thing with everything.' ”

Dr. Martín had talked much, and the afternoon was falling or rising (that is a matter of literary clichés) into those changing colors of the Castilian light. An unpremeditated cloud kept puffing ashes on the horizon.

We wandered for a while over the grounds and buildings, posed indifferent questions to and received indifferent answers from some of the inmates and members of the staff, but our repartee never reached a high pitch.

I soon took leave of Dr. Martín. From the train, the now somber sky could be seen. I looked desultorily at my white pad still virginal of notes.

By the time I got off at the station in Madrid, a drizzle was sifting thin tears from nowhere. The sky was turning dark, rushing the night into being.

After a frugal meal, I opened my typewriter to see what would come out of my day's work. I wrote well into the early morning hours, fortifying my wit with black coffee and cognac and checking it with tidbits of crabmeat — a retrograde food (the memory of Dr. Espuñés' theories!). I must have written at least half a dozen complete, different stories of various lengths before, tired and confused, I fell asleep over the table with my arms crossed under my head — a fallen crucifix.

Some of those stories I still remember. One of them was a lively account, in staccato phrases, of my excursion, very peripatetic, depicting the queer surroundings and the queer creatures that had crossed my retina. Another was a sort of editorial, philosophizing about destiny, mind and matter, sanity and insanity, all punctuated with flashes of romantic description. Another was a “professional” job on the purpose and nature of insane asylums in general, giving the features of this particular one and propounding the need of injecting more imagination into our medical institutions so that the ailings of mankind may be better diagnosed. Another was a weak poetic attempt, very subjective and sentimental, on the motif “*ni están todos los que son, ni son todos los que están*” (“here are not all who are, nor are all who are here”). Another was a humorous piece, making broad fun of the vagaries of man, a piece which would undoubtedly have pleased the sensible readers of our sheet.

The last I wrote, the one upon which I fell and embraced with the cross of my arms, was composed chiefly with the words of Don Paco, Dr. Martín, and — by indirection — of the words of Dr. Espuñés and Dr. Chimera. For no reason at all, unless it be that father always loves a little more the youngest child, *that* was the piece I decided to submit to my boss.

"Leave it here," he said, pointing without looking at his overcrowded desk. "Come back at ten."

I did.

"Sorry, but there's no story here. Too highbrow. No human interest. No reader's appeal. Say, have you forgotten what a damn, red-blooded newspaper is for? To hell with your Dr. Watcha-call-'im? Why, son, this stuff won't do even as a filler for the Magazine Section, and you know that there we'll put almost anything."

I deferred to his practical opinion, then, and later. The story was never published, until now.