

A Hoaxer of Genius

Leo Taxil (1890-7)

by Alec Mellor

AT the close of an October afternoon in 1881 a court of Masonic justice had been sitting since nine o'clock in the morning. The hall had proved too small for the members attending and in the stuffy atmosphere the lights were like funeral candles and the faces of the brethren were dismal.

In its wish to become democratic the Grand Orient of France had some time previously abolished the judicial forms of the early days of the Obedience and modelled them on those of the courts in the outside world. Justice was rendered by so-called "fraternal juries."

The lodge in session was The Temple of Friends of French Honor, a worthy old one founded at the time of the Restoration. Roetiers de Montaleau had been one of the founder members.

On 1 August 1881 Worshipful Brother Esprit Eugene Hubert, who in civilian life was Counsellor to the Prefecture of Police and Editor of the magazine *The Chain of Union*, was presiding. He was a man in his sixties with a sad bewhiskered face. Brother Lechaut occupied the office of Orator corresponding to the Public Attorney and several high-ranking Freemasons with elaborate collars sat in the East, among whom was Very Illustrious Brother Thevenot, 33rd, head of the Administrative Secretariat of the Grand Orient, but also a member of the Lodge.

There were several visitors and the bright blue collars of the Grand Orient were mixed with those edged with red of the Supreme Council of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite. The case in question was indeed an important one.

The master had informed the members that the select committee of investigation had cleared the accused but, in accordance with Article 14 of the *General Rules and Regulations*, others had called for proceedings against the accusers. After a heated discussion, and a resolution passed by twenty-four votes to four, the accused had been sent again before his judges.

The accused member was an apprentice of recent date, twenty-seven years of age. His name was Gabriel Jogand, his pen-name being Leo Taxil, and he spoke with a Marseilles accent. He was requested to take a seat at a little table where writing material was provided. In a dull, even tone of voice the Master began questioning him.

"Brother Gabriel Jogand, you were born in Marseilles on 23 March 1853. You are a journalist and author under the pen-name of Leo Taxil. You contribute to *The Lantern* and *The Southern Republican* and you also write in your own magazine *The Anti-Clerical*. Your civilian past is already known to us from the inquiries made before your initiation and so is not relevant. I shall therefore go straight to the point, your Masonic past being too short to concern us. Three serious charges are made against you.

"The first one has been described by Brother Orator as 'literary piracy.' A poet, the late

Auguste Roussel, had written a work entitled *The Sermons of My Parish Priest* which you plagiarized. The widow made a complaint before a civilian court of justice, in this case the Tribunal of the Seine, and you were condemned to a fine of 1,000 francs and 2,000 francs damages for the benefit of the heirs. The Court of Appeal raised the latter figure to 4,000 francs. Our Masonic judiciary waited for the conclusion of the case before taking the matter any further. Is that correct?"

"Yes, Worshipful Master."

"Well the facts do not constitute a Masonic offense, but a lapse of honor. We are therefore competent to judge.

"The second charge is that, having contemplated standing for the elections, you claimed to have the patronage of Victor Hugo and men such as Louis Blanc, Floquet and Paul Bert. A public disavowal was inflicted on you in *The Truth*."

"I shall explain, Worshipful Master."

"Finally, you are the author of a book entitled: *The Secret Love Affairs of Pope Pius IX*."

"I do not think that is a Masonic offense."

There were loud guffaws at this whereupon the Orator rose and said:

"The offense consists in selling obscene matter to foolish and corrupt people under the guise of anti-clerical propaganda. I would inform the members of this lodge in this connection that, following on a complaint made by Count Masta, Pope IX's nephew, the Court of Montpellier severely condemned Brother Jogand. We do not need filthy pamphlets in order to attack the Church with philosophic arguments."

The discussion was lively. One of those who made a fierce attack on Taxil was Henry Bauer, hitherto his friend. A journalist, an old supporter of the Commune in 1871, he had been deported to New Caledonia and had returned to Paris following the general pardon of 1879. He was an illegitimate son of Alexander Dumas the Elder, whom he resembled by reason of his shock of hair.

Taxil spoke awkwardly in his own defense, trying to justify himself by attacking the Church with stupid jokes which produced only a stony silence. Regarding the electoral patronages that he had claimed he played upon words, producing a letter in which Victor Hugo had complimented him on an article in which he had attacked Bishop Dupanloup in *The Lantern*.

The summing up of the Orator was pitiless. He called for the application of Article 7 of the *General Rules and Regulations*. Accordingly, the Master requested Taxil to withdraw from the lodge, after which he put the following question:

"Is Brother Jogand, alias Taxil, guilty of a Masonic offense?"

Out of thirty-two votes, there were twenty-four for and ten against.

"To which category does the offense belong?"

There existed offenses of the first and the second category; the former were punished by temporary suspension, the second by loss of Masonic privilege and by permanent expulsion. Out of thirty-two votes, twenty were in favor of the second category and twelve for the first. Consequently, the Master in a weary voice and in accordance with article 7 of the judicial rulings of the Grand Orient, pronounced the penalty of permanent expulsion. The condemned man went away and the lodge room emptied, but the members continued to discuss the matter informally outside and in the local cafes.

Taxil was not an emotional kind of person. Avoiding those who wished to console him he made his way home on foot with cold rage in his heart. Along the boulevards and the Avenue de l'Opera, people were chatting on the terraces outside the cafes. He passed without

looking at them, crossed the river Seine, took the rue Bonapart and finished up in familiar surroundings having, with hate still in his heart, passed one by one all the members of the lodge. When he reached home, Taxil scoffed and as he was climbing the stairs he suddenly had a new idea.

At the next meeting of the lodge the Master read a letter from Leo Taxil enclosing a hundred franc note for the charity box. One brother haughtily declared that the lodge could not accept a donation from a man who had just been expelled on grounds of dishonesty. Brother Treasurer gave his opinion that the lodge could without scruple deduct the amount of unpaid subscriptions and return the balance. This was agreed and Taxil duly received the change together with an icy letter saying that the lodge was alone qualified to distribute charity.

Fearing another slap in the face, Taxil let the matter drop. Nevertheless, he remained a militant free thinker, hysterically anti-clerical. Consequently, the fact of having been expelled from the Grand Orient rankled bitterly in his mind. What was going to happen to the program he had hoped would be his for the rest of his life?

He lived in a small flat, 149 rue de Rennes, a commonplace but respectable kind of building in a district full of booksellers, antique dealers and poor-class cafes frequented by minor characters in literary circles. He used to spend quite a lot of his time in a beershop with the nostalgic name of Brasserie des Bords du Rhin (Beershop on the Banks of the Rhine) founded just after the 1870 war against Germany by an Alsatian named Lippman. It was pleasant to be there with a dish of pickled cabbage and a pot of beer and he became an habitue of the place which still exists and is now known as Chez Lipp. One evening after he had refreshed himself in that way he went home and began to muse. Deep in his armchair he lit his pipe and, contemplating the bluish smoke, indulged in a little introspective musing.

He was certainly of Roman Catholic origin and, as he was to relate in his memoirs, his education had been that of a child of good family brought up in religious schools. His school reports were a testimony to his good classical education. The Archbishop of Lyons had officiated at his confirmation. One of his teachers, wishing to extend the work of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, had founded a youth society in the College of Saint Louis in Marseilles, with the authorization of the headmaster, and young Gabriel had been one of the first instructors.

The school year 1867/8 was to be a turning point in his life. It was in this college that he first met his future partner "the Devil." A dormitory comrade had in muffled tones spoken to him about Freemasonry. He revealed the fact that his father belonged to the Order so that Freemasons could not be as bad as they were said to be. Gabriel was astonished.

"Your father? Then why did he send you to this church school?"

"He has to be careful for the sake of his job. He did not want to send me to a mixed sort of place. Will you swear not to disclose the secret I am going to entrust you with?"

"I swear."

"Well, I am a Lewis!"

"What is that?"

"I am the son of a Freemason and when I grow up I shall become one myself. Would you like me to lend you a book about Freemasonry?"

"Here? Are you not afraid of being expelled?"

"There is no danger. It was written by a bishop."

Gabriel read the book eagerly. It was by the Lord Bishop de Segur, son of the well-known Countess Rostopchine (to give her maiden name). It told him that there were about 1,600,000 Freemasons in France who met in the evenings in lodges where they celebrated the Devil's Mass. In Paris alone there were over 2,000 innkeeper Freemasons and also many Jews. On page 82 Gabriel read: *The Revue des Deux Mondes (The Review of the Two Worlds)* is in the service of Freemasonry and its sacrilegious work." This caused him great concern for his uncle, a most unworthy man, was a subscriber to it.

One evening in the dormitory they started talking again. Nudging his neighbor in the adjoining bed, Gabriel asked him:

"Do you really believe what they say in your book?"

"Of course not. It is enough for me to compare the life my father leads with this talk. If they tell such lies there must be something behind it, and it is certainly nothing bad."

Gabriel read the book again and made a critical summary of it which unfortunately fell into the hands of his teacher. He was summoned to the headmaster's study and questioned. Later on he was questioned a second time in the presence of his father, when he pulled out the bishop's book thinking that thereby he would be cleared. This showed his ignorance of the educational principles of the time, one of which consisted of putting into the minds of rebellious pupils the fear that they might be expelled. An underlying but permanent feeling of fear was always in the air and tale-telling was far from being discouraged. Thus, from the very beginning of his school days Leo Taxil realized that certain religious schools were nurseries of anti-clericalism.

The first indication of possible expulsion was a depressing atmosphere of malignant prejudice when a boy's comrades kept their distance as if he were contagious. Immediately after the cross-questioning in the interview with the headmaster, Gabriel felt that he had become disliked by everyone. This was followed by a feeling of revolt. He began to read clandestinely a number of revolutionary pamphlets, not because he wanted to become subversive but rather because he was seeking a kind of reconciliation with life. He finished by realizing, not without remorse, that he had lost his religious faith. One day when he was guilty of some disciplinary fault, one of the masters declared: "You will come to a bad end." This pedagogic pronouncement caused him to discover his real self like a flash of lightning.

Every year the boys at the school were compelled to observe Easter. The priest to whom he confessed came from outside and had no prejudice against him as he did not even know him. However, after listening to him for a while he was forced to conclude:

"I am afraid my child, that you are not in a fit state to receive communion, You tell me about your sins not like a confession but as if you were boasting about an adventure. You do not express the slightest contrition. Have you lost faith? Go on my boy, tell me the truth."

After hearing a few embarrassed explanations from the boy, the confessor could only say that he felt unable to give him absolution and that consequently he could not attend Holy Communion the following morning. Gabriel suddenly rose and, ceasing to call the priest "Father," said in a low voice:

"Whether you give me absolution or not, I shall receive the communion tomorrow."

"Such a communion would be sacrilegious," said the priest.

Taxil replied:

"Only one thing counts as far as I am concerned, and that is not to be expelled."

The priest suddenly understood. The psychosis of the terrible threat of expulsion had

acted like a blow. Perhaps he asked himself: "Who is the sinner now?"

Next day all the pupils lined up to take communion, Gabriel being among them. When he got back to his seat he saw a sudden commotion at the back of the chapel. His confessor had had a heart attack and was taken to the infirmary. Clenching his fists with emotion Gabriel realized what was the cause. In the afternoon he wanted to make inquiries about the priest but was afraid that his concern would arouse suspicion. Once again the spectre of being expelled came before his eyes and so he did nothing.

By a curious anticipation of the student troubles that were to erupt in May 1968, a similar happening took place exactly a century before. On Saturday 30 May 1868 the whole of France roared with laughter on reading the first issue of Henri Rochefort's review *The Lantern*. Gabriel bought it secretly and read: "France is composed, states the *Imperial Almanak*, of 36 million subjects, not counting the subjects of discontent." The Empire was under siege. A law regarding the Press abolished the hated regime of "warnings." Another law allowed meetings to take place freely. The young bloods felt themselves on fire.

No longer being able to bear life at the college Gabriel ran away but was soon arrested and brought back by the gendarmes to the Imperial Magistrate and severely admonished in the presence of his father who went further and, using his right to paternal correction, sent Gabriel to the Mettray reformatory colony. Convinced that his father had followed suggestions from the priest- which was not so - Gabriel retired within himself in an unsociable way. He wrote in his cell *The Psalms of Vengeance* and privately took the oath of hate, which he was to observe for the rest of his life.

His incarceration proved short. When he came out his father thought it wise to send him to a secondary school as a day-pupil, but he was a trouble-maker and, without there being any question of religion, he was expelled.

At the end of a lively election meeting he became friendly with young Clovis Hugues, editor of an extremist newspaper, *The People*.

The war of 1870 broke out and after the defeat there was the Commune. In Marseilles this was the occasion of a ridiculous bit of foolery in which Gabriel took part. This group voted to erect a guillotine on the Cannbiere to terrify the clericals. After having shouted all day and sung revolutionary songs on parade, Gabriel and his companions gathered in the evening, to drink pastis. On 1 January 1871, Gabriel was engaged as a journalist by the newspaper *Equality*. It was his first paid job. Some say that he was also a police informer.

It was at that period that his taste for practical joking and deception developed. The first evidence of this was the shark affair, a playful practical joke.

In 1873 order had been reestablished in Marseilles. General Espivant de la Villeboisnet who was in command had ordered a state of siege and, showing that he would not abide any chicanery, had restrained *La Marotte - Journal des Fous (Cap and Bells - A Paper for Fools)*. One day letters began to pour in from fishermen all along the coast saying that they had escaped from a terrible danger. Sharks were spreading terror from the Catamans to the beach of the Prado. There was a panic and an exit of bathers. There ensued great excitement in the Town Council. The mayor gravely expressed the opinion that a boat from Corsica had thrown a cargo of defective smoked fish into the sea. The general, asked to urgently provide a company armed with rifles to man an expedition with a tug, sent a hundred men fully

armed and an ample provision of cartridges. When the boat put out to sea, saluted with many cheers, the people of Marseilles breathed easily again. The band played and the mayor, wearing his sash of office, accompanied by the members of the Council waved their handkerchieves as the expedition set off. The roadsteads were explored in every direction but the boat returned empty-handed. An inquiry was made when it was found that all the letters were in the same handwriting. Gabriel kept the secret of his deception which he only divulged much later.

Three years passed during which he wrote articles in a number of anti-clerical and revolutionary papers after having permanently adopted the pen-name of Leo Taxil. In 1876 some trouble with the judiciary prompted him to seek refuge in Geneva. Finding the Swiss somewhat dull he first tried to exploit them by selling aphrodisical sweets which resulted in a complaint from the town confectioners. He then thought up another hoax: The scientific societies of Geneva learned of an extraordinary discovery - an underwater town had been observed at the bottom of the lake between Nyon and Coppet. All the archeological societies of Europe were informed and certain newspapers reported supposed excavations. A serious-minded scientist, after having read the *Commentaries of Caesar*, had found interesting confirmation in it, so the story went. The underwater town had undoubtedly been constructed in Roman times when the lake was narrower at the spot where the waters of the Rhone crossed it. Tourists hastened to the spot and the hotels were full. Excursions were organized and a clever tourist agency had oil spread over the water in order to see better." Also a Roman road and the remains of a forum were said to have been seen. A Polish archeologue came to see it and returned home with an article stating that he had seen the probable remains of a statue of a horse. Every evening Taxil would have a good laugh on his terrace in the company of a friend from Marseilles, Henry Chabrier. Two members of the Institute finally discovered the hoax. At the same time it seemed that the perpetrator was having trouble with the Swiss authorities. Providentially, a general pardon became law in France so that, although expelled from Geneva, Taxil was able to go back legally to France. He went to Paris, admired the Universal Exhibition and decided to stay.

Meanwhile, he had gone to live with a dressmaker from Marseilles. This woman used to deceive her husband to an extraordinary degree. A friend of the husband thought he ought to tell him about it and, on his expressing doubt, said that he himself had had intercourse with her. This resulted in a terrific quarrel with the wife, who, terrified, went to the tale-bearer and drove her scissors into his stomach. She was acquitted by the court and then, with her two children, was given a home by Taxil who was later to marry her.

Settled in Paris, Taxil cultivated anti-clerical associates and made pornography his profession. This despicable industry had previously flourished under the Revolution with books such as: *The Sacred Cannibals*, *The Priest's Testicles*, *Letter from the Devil to the Pope concerning the Suppression of Menstruation in Girls' Communities*; *Extraordinary Correspondence of the Ecclesiastical F.. kers*; *The Whores of the Third Estate and the Solicitors of the Fourth*. All he did was to revive a tradition and he flooded the market with monthly magazines collected in annual volumes with titles of a similar kind, e.g. *It's We Who whip those dirty Scamps*, *Shooting the Crows*; *The Sacred Blunders*; *Critical Review of Superstition*. At the same time, he wrote articles for *The*

Scoffer and founded *The Anticlerical*.

In 1879 Taxil had the good fortune to be the subject of a court action. His pamphlet *Down with the Clergy* had had a circulation of 130,000 copies. The scandal was such that Paul de Cassagnac denounced the publication in Parliament, demanding that the government take proceedings against the author. Taxil had sent his seconds to De Cassagnac but they were not even received. The Court of the Seine started proceedings against Taxil based on an old law of 17 May 1819 which proscribed "outrage against a religion recognized by the State." Taxil appeared before the Court in a confident almost arrogant manner. The Public Prosecutor, careful not to compromise his career by opposing a jury composed mainly of Voltairians, summed up mildly suggesting that there was a distinction between an "attack" against a cult, which he thought judicially admissible, and an "outrage." Taxil was acquitted after a friendly lawyer had made a simple plea. The left-wing press exulted. An orthodox paper: *Decentralisation* commented on the verdict as follows: "From now on dirt is at ease, without fear of the dustman." The real victim of the case was to be the law of 17 May 1819, doomed to obscurity.

At that time the Prefect of Police was the picturesque Andrieux who was a Freemason, but that did not worry Taxil. In the newspaper *The Democratic Vanguard* Taxil published an article entitled *His Holiness the Police*, embellished by a burlesque Credo: "I believe in His Holiness the Police, united and Holy, omnipotent and organizer of all things visible and invisible," followed by a Bull of Andrieux the First, servant of the servants of the Police. Andrieux, who was a man of wit, let it pass.

At the General assembly of the Freethinkers in September 1881 a group led by Taxil seceded and Taxil then founded The Anti-clerical League with headquarters at 338 rue de Vaugirard and which, under his management, enjoyed an immediate success. It published *The Secret Loves of Pope Pius IX*, attributed to an imaginary secret pupil given the name a "Volpi" by Taxil.

As a public speaker Taxil excelled himself. For a series of public lectures in the main towns of France he had chosen as his subject *The Crimes of the Inquisition*. He had learned all the methods of torture by reading various encyclopedias but he had found better ones. At these lectures he exhibited instruments of torture bought, he said, in the North of France from the heirs of an executioner. One of these instruments known as the spider had served to tear out womens' breasts. He claimed that it was a relic of *The FreeThinker* but in actual fact he had had it made by a certain Maget, a lock-maker in the rue de Bievre. A little rust had given these instruments the appearance of age.

He had even mystified the anti-clericals themselves. He had been blamed by an extremist paper *The Battle* for not having shown sufficient admiration for certain revolutionaries. The director of the paper, Lissagaray, thereupon received an anonymous letter signed "Jean-Pierre" claiming to be a secretary at the Archbishopric of Paris who was obliged to go into hiding. He offered to give free information concerning all the gossip that was going on: "If you accept me as a contributor, it is understood that you will not seek to ascertain my identity." The reply came immediately: "We accept wholeheartedly." There followed a series of hoaxes that worked marvellously .

The readers of *The Battle* learned that Jules Ferry and Jules Simon had secretly met

His Eminence Cardinal Guibert with a view to ensuring his succession by His Grace Archbishop Richard. Pushing the joke to absurd lengths "Jean-Pierre" then informed the readers of the paper that the canons had met in an underground chapel to put the instruments of torture into working order so as to be ready if the Count of Chambord was successful in restoring the legitimate monarchy. In the offices of the anti-clericals the members of the staff split their sides with laughter each time a letter was sent. The hoax lasted for a month. The serious newspaper *Time* was the only one to ask if Monsieur Lissagaray's staff had not become blind to the facts.

Taxil ended up by making open enemies even in the ranks of the anti-clericals which did not consist entirely of plagiarists and pornographers. The facts mentioned in his lodge were the drop that made the cup overflow. After his expulsion many people turned their backs on him or closed their doors to him. He was now only twenty-seven years old. What was going to become of him? After a great deal of thought he was still in a quandary.

One incident shows how many enemies he had made. At the beginning of August 1881 an important public meeting took place at the Casino des Fleurs, 219 rue de Charenton, presided over by a member of Parliament, Jules Roche. The Freethinker groups were represented by many of their members. The name of Leo Taxil was hissed and the newspaper *The Awakening* of 7 August, after having mentioned his Masonic troubles, gave an account of his public "execution ."

Taxil earned his living by organizing public meetings but not everyone liked them. In the course of one of them he gave as an illustration to his fiery speech the name of "Troppmann" who, on the scaffold, had called the chaplain "My father," and who had replied before the fall of the blade "My son." The conclusion was: Such a father, such a son. On another occasion the implements of torture attributed to the Inquisition not being enough for him, he used wax figures like those in Madame Taussaud's exhibition to represent the condemned criminals. They were covered with blood and were horrible to see.

In a small pamphlet entitled *The Amusing Bible* he tried to poke fun at the Book of Genesis. Adam, put to sleep in an earthly paradise, was depicted in the nude having dropped off to sleep when reading *The Universe*. Excluded from the Garden of Eden, Eve and he wore posters on their backs with the word "Gluttons."

In 1884 Taxil was discharged from *The Lantern* owing to certain discrepancies in his accounts.

On the other hand, the Church counter-attacked. In 1882 the impetuous Bishop of Grenoble, Fava, published his book *The Secret of Freemasonry*. It was a stupid book of limited scope but in 1884 Pope Leo XIII issued the Encyclical *Humanum Genus*. This time the lightning had really struck.

Taxil secured the *Encyclical* and read it carefully. The essential sentence was: "Tear the mask from Freemasonry. Show it as it really is." The mild-mannered Leo XIII had used the tone of the great Popes of the Middle Ages. No doubt there was an explanation of the sentence in the anti-religious fury of the Carbonari and other Italian sects that had influenced the lodges of the period, but out of context the sentence was terrible.

Realizing that he was at a dead end Taxil gave further thought to his position. The Free-Thinkers had ended up by treating him like a black sheep and, as a result, anti-clerical

literature was daily becoming less remunerative for him. Furthermore, pornography had always enjoyed a considerable success at certain periods but had likewise quickly suffered a decline. As he was unable to change himself into a successful novelist or a serious essayist Taxil's pen was becoming idle.

An idea came into his mind but was immediately rejected as being impracticable: to change direction and revert to The Church. Unfortunately for him his numerous libels blocked the way. Had he not outraged Leo XIII himself by treating him as a poisoner?

However, a quite unexpected event caused him to reconsider the problem. He had started to write an absolutely blasphemous life of Joan of Arc based on the usual theme of anti-clericalism of the pure heroine "burned by the clergy and abandoned by her King." An illustrious scholar named Jules Quicherat had published the Rouen records and had started to translate them. Taxil, pen in hand, and having secured a temporary permit to enter the French National Library read *A New Approach to the History of Joan of Arc* by this eminent director of the Ecole de Chartres (School of Paleography). Taxil's initial aim was to glean anything he could find against The Church, to castigate it without any scruple and to present a supposedly scientific version. However "Tel engeigne qui cayde engeigner aultray" (He learns who wants to teach others.) He emerged from these long sessions of research in the library as if in a dream and little by little a quite new version of Joan appeared to him, dazzling him as though a mirror was reflecting the sun into his eyes. He was worried about the heroine's Catholicism but conceived the idea of a kind of patriotic novel. Unfortunately, this would not satisfy either the anti-clerical Freethinkers or the Catholics.

Further thought gradually produced the following two ideas: the first was that since Saint Paul had suddenly been converted on his way to Damascus The Church had always taken great account of converts. Why then should not he become one? He even thought of writing a book entitled *Famous Conversions* (he was subsequently to publish it in 1891). If, like the prodigal son, he was to return to His Father's House, would not there be more joy for one sinner than for ninety-nine righteous persons? And in more personal terms he translated this as: What a wonderful recruit!!!

His second idea was that, even at the end of the nineteenth century, people had never talked so much about the Devil. A certain Abbe Decanu, author of a *History of Satan* had written: "As regards belief, we have to revert to those of the 15th century. We put forward this axiom first of all, so that those who do not wish to hear about the matter do not waste their time reading this book."

With his Robert the Devil, Meyerbeer brought the Devil to the Opera House. The poetic Satanism of Baudelaire, like that of Carducci in Italy whose *Hymn to Satan* was sung in certain lodges, had distressed conscientious people. Furthermore, anti-Masonic literature tended to make the Devil a matter of common belief. Not to mention him would look like being badly informed.

Taxil's thought evolved slowly, building its edifice brick by brick. He finally arrived at the conclusion that a dramatic conversion on his part would certainly be taken for a special miracle of grace and that the best guarantee he could give would be, after having "torn the mask from Freemasonry," to deliver the Devil with bound hands and feet. What a new career would then be open to him!! He would have to advance wisely, step by step.

The first difficulty was to get rid of the pornographic and anticlerical stock of the bookshop at good prices. The value of the goods plus cash in hand amounted to about 600,000 francs. The debts consisting of amounts due to suppliers and sundry other small items were about 75,000 francs. His monthly turnover was 25/30,000 francs. The situation was therefore sound but the creditors nevertheless received a letter from Marie Taxil, who kept the shop, suggesting an amicable arrangement. He obviously had to close this particular kind of business before proclaiming his conversion. The debts were finally paid and the shop closed.

An anti-clerical convention was held at about that time in Rome. Taxil attended: it was his last convention. He then wrote to his family informing them that he had been touched by grace, adding that he attributed the miracle to the probable intercession of Joan of Arc. Josephine Jogand, his aunt on his father's side and his godmother, a saintly person who had embarked on a religious vocation to secure the return of the prodigal son, had assumed the name of "Mary of the Seven Pains." She wept with happiness and all the family with her.

It remained to cross the Rubicon. Taxil was too well known in his district. Early one morning he crossed the river Seine and went into the old church of Saint-Merri in the rue St. Martin. He knelt in front of a confessional. The vicar heard him and was momentarily overcome with confusion. He then informed the unexpected penitent that he was in rather a special situation and that, speaking canonically, he did not have the right to give him absolution. He advised him to write, promised to intervene with the archbishop and, after a friendly talk asked him to come back again. Coming out of the church Taxil perceived at the top of a restored porch a carving of an androgynous bearded Satan before whom two angels were swinging a censer. It was a practical joke played by an anticlerical assistant of the famous architect Viollet le Duc. A mere coincidence no doubt. Laughing in his beard, Taxil could not help thinking that the Devil was certainly very clever.

The very next day he sent a letter of retraction written in the best style imbued in him as a youth by his priestly teachers and a week later he received an invitation to go into a retreat at the monastery at Clamart and prepare to make a general confession necessary to remove the censures to which he was liable. A former military chaplain who had turned Jesuit made him practice the spiritual exercises of Saint Ignace de Loyola. This gave him headaches but as he revealed later he kept a Parthian shot for the end. After having put forward all sorts of difficulties under the pretext that he had on his conscience a mortal sin extremely difficult to admit he ended up by pretending to admit defeat as a result of the confessor's exhortations. A mysterious murder had been committed which was the subject of much newspaper comment, the guilty person being still at large; without the slightest doubt the crime would result in the guillotine for the culprit. Taxil ended up by accusing himself.

The priest recoiled in amazement and, profoundly shocked, made Taxil promise to give a pension to the widow in an indirect way. He did not ask for any names but insisted on knowing whether or not there had been premeditation. Bowed with shame, Taxil admitted that there had been. He was never questioned by the police nor by a magistrate and was later to say that this practical joke had enabled him to put the secret of confession to the test. His victory was complete. Reporting to his superior, the Jesuit father said: "I will vouch for Leo Taxil."

Henceforth, he was able to make his conversion public. He received acid, stormy letters from the anti-clerical set. In the *Democrat* of the Loiret a high-ranking Freemason named Bonnardot, wrote: "The clerics have made a poor recruit. What height of folly!" In Masonic circles there was a great deal of talk. A Free thinker considered that Taxil must have gone mad and wrote to his wife offering to put her country house at her disposal for a rest cure.

The Garibaldi group of the Anti-Clerical League called a special meeting on 27 July 1885, the only item on the agenda being the expulsion of Leo Taxil. He, himself, received the summons which the secretary had automatically sent to him. Although his wife made a great fuss he decided to attend.

After dinner therefore he walked over to Bon Marche Square to wait for the bus. Luckily the horse-drawn bus had just turned the corner of the rue Abbe Gregoire and the animals were trotting along through the puddles. He got in and looked around but there was nobody he knew. Half an hour later he crossed the threshold of the Cafe de France at the corner of the rue de Turbigo and the rue du Temple, and went down to the basement. The meeting had just started and the room was full of tobacco smoke. In the corridor he had met his friend Paulon, who expressed his astonishment.

"You have come Leo?"

"You see that I have."

"Why?"

"I can tell you. To seek the opportunity of putting in a word that I shall be able to remind people of when the time is ripe."

Paulon was going to say something more but their entrance into the room was greeted with a moment of stupor, then of tumult:

"Go to Kingdom Come" and "Go to the devil."

The president read the motion to be put before the meeting: Considering that Gabriel Jogand-Pages, known as Leo Taxil, one of the founders of the Anti-Clerical League, has renounced all the principles he has hitherto defended, betrayed the Freethinkers and all his co-anti-religionaries, the leaguers present at the meeting of 27 July 1885, without seeking the reasons that have dictated the infamous conduct of Leo Taxil, exclude him from the Anti-Clerical League as a traitor and a turncoat .

There was loud applause but Taxil jumped up and shouted: "I wish to speak."

This was greeted with shouts and hisses.

"My friends, I accept this motion except for one word."

"This is really too daring, said the President with fury."

"You have the right to say that I am a turncoat since I published four days ago a letter of retraction; I explicitly reject all my writings against religion but I ask you to cross out the word 'traitor' which is not applicable to my case. There is not the shadow of treachery in what I am doing today."

"Oh, the bastard."

"You will not understand what I have just said, but you will later," retorted Taxil.

Not wishing to stay for the vote he went away but left some of them very perplexed. Outside an excited young man shouted to his face: "Everyone knows that you have just come from the Jesuits and that you regularly confess. You have never ceased practising religion ."

Taxil went home quite calm, going slightly out of his way to have a drink at Lipp's.

The next day he had a visit from a smiling Englishman with a rosy face; a journalist from *The Catholic Times* of London. He praised Taxil and proposed to introduce him to

His Grace di Rende, the Apostolic Nuncio to Paris. Leo could not believe his eyes and ears and from then on even his wife became milder in her attitude towards him. Dressed in a cap and knickerbockers with a fancy jacket the Englishman looked more like Phineas Fogg in Jule Verne's book *Around the World in Eighty Days* than a pontifical emissary.

His protege was nevertheless received in audience by the Papal Nuncio a few weeks later. The latter was an old clerical diplomat with a mild face. Playing his trump card, Taxil confided to him that he was thinking of entering the Order of the Chartreuse. He was not worthy to serve the Holy Church and he was tired with his wife's nagging. In a paternal manner the Nuncio dissuaded him and, considering the conversation to be quite an important event, suggested that he seek for audience with the Pope. The meeting finished in a curious manner: "I will write to the Pope, dear Mr. Taxil. Count on me."

The ex-founder of the Anti-Clerical League kissed the amethyst ring the Nuncio tended to him after which he went home to the conjugal domicile where his wife's humour had changed for the worse. When Marie Taxil learned that he was going to seek an audience with the Pope she created another scene, packed her bag and left the flat, slamming the door behind her and did not return for several days.

The *Anti-clerical Republic*, the Freethinkers' periodical, had a headline in its issue of 5 August 1885: "*The Execution of Leo Taxil.*" Paulon himself had quarrelled with his friend and wrote in a Freethinkers' paper:

Thus was the end of this freethinker who for seventeen years (and he has only lived thirty-five) had fought superstition and the clergy with such conviction. Is this the fruit of the clerical education that saturates the minds of the children in the seminary and Jesuit schools? If so, here is a fresh proof that our efforts should tend towards a full and complete prohibition of confession, the catechism and Biblical history.

This virtuous man's article ended with this exhortation: "Let us close our ranks."

The following day *The Anti-Clerical Republic* ceased publication. The article in question was contained in No. 339, the last issue.

Nevertheless, Paulon, who was a good-natured fellow, continued to see Taxil declaring that he found him incomprehensible. He would say to his friends: "It may be that one of these fine days he will spring a big surprise on us."

Having realized that Paulon had mental reservations, Taxil mistrusted him and stopped seeing him. When Paulon died Taxil had feelings of regret but in another way it was a relief.

For several years Taxil remained militant-minded. Gifted with prodigious powers of concentration he allowed his life's design to ripen slowly. Time was in his favor and on the surface he was actively preparing for the future. The outline of his grand design involved anti-Masonry, a force that was growing in a surprising way and he was firmly committed to establish a phantasy, that of the existence of Satan. He had to satisfy this need in a way that would as far as possible be acceptable to religious minds though without descending into ridicule. With the passing of the years this last reservation was almost to disappear so ready was human credulity to accept the most fantastic tales provided that the phantasy was faithfully presented and provided it flattered. It was not however the task of a single day and Taxil himself explained this psychological phenomenon in his final speech of 1897:

My first books on Freemasonry were a mixture of rituals with small additions that seemed to be unimportant and apparently harmless interpretations. Each time that a passage was

obscure I explained it in a way most agreeable to Catholics who saw in it Lucifer the supreme Grand Master of Freemasons. But that was hardly shown. I smoothed and prepared the ground first and then dug and sowed the mystifying seed that was to germinate so well.

However, his anti-clerical freethinking conscience remained pure in his own eyes for he reckoned on disclosing his prodigious deception on a suitable day thus dealing one of the most appalling blows The Church could ever receive. That was the explanation of his mysterious protest in 1885 against being called a traitor and of the prophetic words that went with it.

On the eve of the elections of 1885 that provided a success for the right-wing parties, Taxil published a book: *The Republic Unveils Itself*. Therein he developed the theory that the separation of Church and State already decided upon by the lodges would only be the prologue to the suppression of the churches. The Devil was still not present.

In 1886 he published an anecdotal history of the Third Republic which was not particularly interesting, but it was the year when he founded *La Petite Guerre (The Little War)*, a weekly satiric paper that included a humorous page: "*The Tribe of the Mac Benacs*." At the same time he did not lose sight of his own best interests. The review announced that his portrait was on sale in the form of a postcard for 0,60 franc.

In 1886 a pamphlet appeared entitled: *Rome will be Given Back to the Pope followed by Ali Baba and the 40 Ministers in which Jules Grevy and his government are recognizable*.

In the same year there appeared the intriguing anti-Masonic novel by Florest Bouhoure *The Freemason of the Virgin* which was obviously inspired by Taxilian thinking. His favorite themes were getting under way.

In 1889, with *Masonic Murders*, there was a theme in the preface which was destined to have a great future: the Lucifer-Adonal dualism of which more will be said later on.

It was in 1890 that Taxil published his *Martyrdom of Joan of Arc*. The collaboration of a priest, Abbe Paul Fesoh, was aimed at reassuring Catholics and the fact that the manuscript of Pierre Cauchon is preserved in the French National Library under No. 5965 of the Latin manuscripts is of considerable scientific importance.

Financially independent, Taxil then went to live for some time in the Lower Pyrenees where he wrote *Famous Conversions*, mentioning those of Madeleine de Magdala, Olier and Litre. The work was greatly praised by the Episcopal authorities.

About this time Taxil committed a grave error. He put forward his candidacy at the elections against Edward Drumont, the anti Jewish candidate, and then ostensibly withdrew, writing a violent libel entitled *Monsieur Drumont, a Psychological Study*. This made Drumont his implacable enemy and in *The Event* he thundered:

This manoeuvre smells badly of Jewish money... This man disgusts me. He joined Masonry to betray the Freemasons and make money with his revelations and, after having passed over to the Catholics, he is now selling them to the Jews.

The anti-Semites were to remember this skirmish.

Taxil was responsible for another scandal regarding the question: Are there women in Freemasonry? On the basis of information supplied by Taxil, Bishop Fava published a booklet in which he stated that womens' lodges constituted a sort of harem for the mens' lodges.

Taxil however suffered from a kind of nostalgia and that was for pornography. Weaned from it through his edifying conversion, anti-clerical pornography was now a dead letter to him but in 1891 he had a bright idea. Under the title *The Corruption of the End of the Century* he put on the market a 425 page indictment against prostitution which enabled him to reveal all the turpitudes of the brothels with the most repugnant details. The exploitation of pornography was becoming, under a very respectable label, an advocate of morality. Several ecclesiastical reservations having been put forward, he cynically replied that he would be prepared to withdraw his book if the Sacred Congregation of the Index condemned it. But Rome is never in a hurry; the first edition was quickly sold and in 1894 a second edition promised to be a considerable success. At almost the same time a favorable criticism by the Sisters of Charity appeared "for the benefit of the faithful."

Meanwhile, Taxil had followed the advice of the Apostolic Nuncio and had been received at the Vatican, first by Cardinal Rampollo del Tindaro, Secretary of State, and then by Cardinal Parocchi the Pope's Confidential adviser. These seigneurs told him that his books were perfect and that it was fortunate that a convert had at last published the Masonic rituals. They told Taxil that the waiting time for a pontifical audience had been especially shortened in his case and that at a date they would fix His Holiness Pope Leo XIII would receive him in his private library. The audience lasted for half an hour and Taxil noticed that the Pope had the refined face of an old Italian of the Renaissance. They spoke a lot about the Devil and at the end of the audience the Pope asked the kneeling Taxil:

"What do you want, my son?"

"Most Holy Father, my greatest wish would be to die at your feet this very minute."

"Your life is too useful for the combats of the Faith, my son."

Back in Paris with the apostolic blessing, Taxil received a visit from His Grace Father Meurin, a Jesuit bishop who had come from Mauritius to consult him in connection with a book he was writing entitled: *Freemasonry, the Synagogue of Satan*. Quite sure that the Freemasons worshipped the Devil, the pious bishop, who was an erudite Orientalist, had discovered satanic allusions in everything pertaining to Freemasonry: passwords, aprons, collars, etc. Taxil supplied him with the fodder he was looking for and spent many happy hours listening to the reading of his manuscript. When the book was published the Taxilian influence in it was obvious. The Masonic world was stunned and bewildered and the Catholics paralyzed by deep misgivings. Paul Rosen, an antiMason who had published large volumes packed with antiMasonic references and who was considered to be an authority, remained silent, never having dreamed of giving the Devil the place he now occupied. What a mistake!!

Taxil judged that the time had come to strike the final blow. Never since the practical joke of the sharks in Marseilles had he enjoyed himself so much. He had met at Lipp's a former schoolmate named Dr. Charles Hacks, a merry fellow who sported a beard and side-whiskers and who had become a doctor in a shipping company but had retired temporarily. Not without talent he had contributed articles to *The Little Cabin Boy*, *The Yacht* and to *Illustration*, and had then published a book entitled *Mail from China* which had produced a letter of congratulations from Pierre Loti. After having weighed up the matter for several months Taxil told Hacks the whole story over two tankards of beer. Hacks had never been a Freemason and was only a very lukewarm Catholic. His friendship

for Taxil was quite sincere and he listened to him intently. Taxil explained to him:

"My dear Charles," the Catholics are very keen on Lucifer being the Grand Master of Freemasonry. So let them have their way. We are going to write a book together based on this theme and it will cause a great stir."

"Collaborate, Leo?"

"Yes, you write very well. you have the style of Flaubert in *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*, something that will give false impressions but which will not seem to be misconceived. My contribution will be the Masonic - devilish nonsense to which you will give a kind of framework. It will be the book of the century. I have already found a name for the higher degrees of Freemasonry which will be beyond the sphere of the lodges and which will be the church of Lucifer. There used to be a sect of that name in the eighteenth century at Charleston in the United States. It went into darkness but was revived under the name of Reformed Palladism or Free and Regenerated Palladism. It was in Charleston that General Pike, the Sovereign Grand Commander of the Supreme Council of the Scottish Rite, lived. That will cause confusion."

"What will be the theme of the book?"

"Oh, we shall need a woman, perhaps even two of them. I have my own idea about this. She will be presumed to disclose all the horrid details normally at the peril of her life."

"And are you not fearful of this plot?"

Taxil burst out laughing, ordered another two tankards of beer, and continued:

"Lucifer will appear in spiritualist seances. That is not quite the same thing as summoning up the spirits but that will not be noticed. Come and see me tomorrow at my place and I will give you my outline. Furthermore, I have found a pen-name for you. You will sign yourself "Monsieur Bataille." I used to know an absolutely sensational humbug. He was called Sapeck but his real name was Bataille. I owe that to his sweet memory."

The conversation was continued the next day at Taxil's home while his wife busied herself with her domestic duties.

"Here is my outline. There are three classes of Freemasonry. The lodges, the higher degrees and, beyond them, Palladism. They practice spiritualism and Lucifer does the rest. Of course, his claws extend all over the world. There are even Grand Masters who are Palladists, for example Lemmi in Italy. We are not going to publish the rituals this time. I want you to write like a story-teller. You will not be a zealous Palladist but an heroic Catholic who, at the peril of his life, puts on a mask to conduct a macabre investigation. That is why I am giving you a pen-name. I shall just introduce you to a very small group of ecclesiastics. Just enough for you to be able to talk about confidential information. We will issue some forty installments and finally put them together in a great book."

"What will be the title?"

"The Devil in the 19th Century or The Mysteries of Spiritualism, in other words, Luciferian Freemasonry."

"What will be the story?"

"You are supposed to meet a fellow on a steamer who thinks he is damned You take pity on him and he will confide in you that he had let himself be recruited into Palladism. The Palladists' credo is a kind of paganism. There are two Gods: Lucifer or the good God and Adonai, the evil one. The former is of course none other than Satan for the super initiates and the second the God of the Christians, who unjustly condemned Lucifer. During the spiritualist seances phantoms appear: Luther, Voltaire and others. There are women who are the Masons of the Devil. The Luciferian meeting places are called 'triangles.' A woman reigns over them like a queen. I have called her Sophy Walder. Her lover is a devil named Bitru and she is the great grandmother of the anti-Christ. You will have to describe frightful

black masses and sex parties. By her friends she will be called Sophy-Sapho. We are in for a good time, you will see.

A few months later, *The Devil in the 19th Century* was released from the printing presses. The reader of the book learned from it that, in addition to the satanic parties, Grand Master Lemmi was an astrologer and had concocted the horoscope of the Pope the day after the *Encyclical: Humanum Genus*. In an astute way the author had warned his readers against psychical phenomena such as hallucinations and frauds that ought to be distinguished from genuine satanism.

In this connection the author praised those laudable specialists worthy of credence and mentioned among them Taxil, including him in the same class as the Abbe Clarin de la Rive, the director of the review *Freemasonry Exposed*. Renan was denounced as a Palladist as well as the English atheist Charles Bradlaugh, Stanislas de Gaita, Oswald Wirth, the Martinists and the Anarchists, not forgetting certain deranged women of the world such as the Duchess of Pomar, a spirit draped in scarlet who thought she was the reincarnation of Mary Stuart.

Dr. Encausse, a leading light in occultism, whose pen-name was "Papus," in a book entitled *The Devil and Occultism*, warned the Catholics that they were being hoaxed. Nevertheless, the book became a great success.

Taxil's imagination enabled him when necessary to talk in authoritative terms. Thus, he divulged to his readers the structure of Palladism. Mazzini had organized in Rome a Sovereign Executive Directory with himself as President. Similarly, Pike had formed a Supreme Superintending Directory in Charleston. There was a third organization with headquarters in Berlin. No bureaucratic detail was omitted. The whole might have figured in a treatise or manual of Luciferian Public Law.

The descriptive part followed. The readers learned that on 28 February 1884 in the course of a meeting of the "Supernatural Cabal" of the Grand Triangle of the Eleven-Seven, the roof of the temple opened and a fire-devil descended. It was the demon Asmodeus holding a sabre in his right hand and the tail of the Lion of SaintMark in the left, a trophy of a victorious battle over the legions of Jehovah. The description went to say that General Pike used to hold regular conversations every Friday afternoon with a personal devil sent by Lucifer; the workshops of the fortress of Gibraltar were directly connected with the fire of Hell; one Saturday inParis, a day consecrated to the Devil Moloch, a certain Sandeman, operating with a table, evoked the Devil and immediately the table hit the ceiling and then fell to the floor whereupon Meloch in the form of a winged crocodile sat at the piano and played a melody while ogling the bewildered mistress of the house.

Taxil was to discover something even better. His Sophy Walder had been invented merely to serve as a foil to another Luciferian who, like Taxil, had been touched by grace and was to be converted through the intercession of Joan of Arc.

But a woman of flesh and blood had to be found who would not be just the heroine of a novel for one day there might be an investigation. The first typewriters imported from America had just come on the market. A lady representative for Europe of a large American firm, whom Taxil had met during the exercise of his profession, agreed in exchange for a reward to enter into his game. Intelligent, whimsical, and pretty, her name was Diana

Vaughan and she was a free-thinker. The idea of receiving letters from Cardinals, Bishops and even the private secretary of the Pope and then replying and informing these eminent gentlemen about the Luciferians made her bubble over with laughter. What a joke!! Moreover, she had been introduced into several Poste Restante agencies such as the Alibi Office of New York and Taxil took advantage of this. she thus ended up by identifying herself with Sophy Walder. The day was to come when people would ask whether Diana Vaughan really existed. In fact, a woman of that name actually did exist. The one who did not was the mythical Diana Vaughan created by Taxil and this was to have considerable repercussions .

A year after Dr. Hack's book, a work entitled *Souvenirs of an Ex Palladist by Diana Vaughan* was published. She recounted that in the course of an initiation into the degree of "Mistress Templar" Sophy Walder, who was officiating, ordered her to profane the Eucharist which she refused to do, pointing out that she did not believe in its existence and the gesture would therefore have no significance. Other diabolical episodes followed which led to the culmination of the initiation ceremony. The book created quite a sensation.

In 1896 Taxil, under the same signature, published *The Restoration of Palladism, A Transition decreed by the Sanctum Regnum to prepare the Public Cult of Lucifer, a Book reserved for Ecclesiastics*. In Rome the Central Committee of the anti-Masonic Union had celebrated a three day Service of Prayer or Hymn to Joan of Arc, supposed to have been composed by the convert and the words and music were solemnly performed. Actually, the music was that of The Philharmonic Syringe, a musical carrousel composed by a friend of Taxil.

In the Universe of 27 April 1896 an eminent Dominican, Father Pegues, commented on the events as follows: "From the philosophical point of view, it is the most splendid and unexpected challenge thrown in the face of positivism and that on the very morrow of the death of Taine. The work of Miss Diana Vaughan gives us, we may say, a page of history that was not previously known to exist."

A supreme achievement was the inclusion in *The New Illustrated Larousse* of a two-column entry: *Palladism* and *Palladium*. However the spirit of criticism was not dead in France. The first ones to express doubts were the Exorcists, qualified partners of the Devil, who no longer recognized Taxil, so far had he departed from their way of thinking. Several Catholic authors followed, including Canon Delassus in *The Religious Week of Cambrai* and Abbe Janniaud in *The Religious Week of Autun*. George Bois wrote in *The Truth* of the shameless way in which Sophy Walder (according to Dr. Bataille) stripped to the waist to allow a snake possessed by the devil to write prophecies with the end of his tail on the reign of the Popes. Gaston Mery in his newspaper put the very existence of Diana Vaughan in doubt. He was a disciple of Edward Drumont and a great enemy of Taxil.

On the Masonic side, one review claimed that Diana Vaughan was no other than Mrs. Taxil herself. The Freemasons maintained an attitude either of ironic scorn or of superiority, but in Italy there were some thirty-third degree Masons who wanted to become Palladists.

Taxil's most dangerous opponent was an Austrian Jesuit named Father Gruber who wrote articles in which he did not mince his words. For example, in correspondence with a

friend of Taxil, Abbe de Bessonies, this shrewd man wrote the following on 20 August 1896: "Since the start of these revelations I have always had the conviction that the main assertions concerning Pike and his important role in Freemasonry, the cult of and the evocations to the Devil, the profanation of the Host in the lodges, the sovereign pontificate of Pike and Lemmi and the centralized direction of Freemasonry are completely false. Anyone who is at all familiar with Masonic facts and history can only laugh at such assertions."

Taxil had dared to claim that J. G. Findel, one of the pioneers of scientific and historical Masonic research, had been a Palladist. He was to repent. The illustrious German author also happened to be an editor so that Taxil was rewarded by scathing comments in a booklet on the subject. Taking Taxil much too seriously, the Professor waxed most indignant, pointing out that he had always been an adversary of the higher degrees. Furthermore, he saw in Taxil a tool of the Jesuits, a theme often commented on and very convenient, but in this case quite ridiculous.

The man considered by serious-minded people to be the expert on Satanism was undoubtedly Huysmans, especially since the outstanding success of his terrifying novel *Down There*, published in 1891. The journalists did not fail to criticize it but his candour was nonetheless frightening. Although Taxil might be considered a hoaxer, he calmly stated that it was not the same with Bishop Meurin. When Jules Bois asked him to preface his book *Satanism and Magic* he thought he ought to protest against the incursion of psychiatrists concerning whom many people had very definite views. In a peremptory way he decreed: "In the old days they burned quite a few people who were not possessed by the spirit of evil; now they drown those who are."

The summer of 1896 was a troubled one. Expressing himself through the pen of Diana Vaughan, Taxil described the Luciferian temple of Charleston. The Roman Catholic bishop of Charleston crossed the seas and went to Rome to contradict him adding that the Freemasons of Charleston were honorable and completely inoffensive Protestants. The Taxil clan spread the rumour that Pope Leo XIII had forced the bishop to keep quiet. People ended up by taking sides as to whether or not the deranged woman touched by grace actually existed. She was the subject of talk in Presbyteries, Sacristies and Roman Catholic drawing rooms all over the world. To show that she was not a myth Taxil circulated a photograph of his American woman. In Central Europe, under the influence of Father Gruber, all the media took up the matter. It was finally decided with the agreement of Rome to call an international convention to settle the matter. Playing double or quits, Taxil accepted.

The town of Trent, then Austrian, was chosen. The president of the convention was to be none other than His Eminence Prince Bishop Valuzzi. The acting president was Count Felipe de Consolate, Chamberlain to His Majesty the Emperor of Austria and the vice-president was Baron Giuseppe de Salvatori Bavatta. His Grace Simone D. Baldassari, Apostolic Chief Notary, was ecclesiastical assistant. The counsellors were chosen from amongst important persons of Rome and Trent. The place of meeting was the basilica of Sainte-Marie-Majeure where the Council of Trent was held in the Sixteenth Century.

There were to be four sections: 1. Masonic Doctrine. 2. Masonic Action. 3. Prayer. 4.

Anti- Masonic action. A strange convention indeed. Two powerful and formidable parties were in opposition, The Church and Freemasonry. They were summoned as Saint Augustus had "seen" them, as recalled in the *Encyclical Humanum Genus*. God against Satan. Yet this monstrous exploitation was only the work of a practical joker from Marseilles.

After the inaugural procession, a telegram from Pope Leo XIII was read and then the parties set to work. Both the lay and ecclesiastic notables read long reports for or against the existence of Diana Vaughan. The atmosphere was as serious as that of a synod. Taxil had never been so thrilled but he was the only one who knew the truth, hence his absorption in his self-glorification. The report presented by His Grace Bishop Gratzfeld representing Cardinal Krements, Archbishop of Cologne, was a complete summing-up. Other bishops were on his side and came forward with questions: what bishop or priest had received the abjuration of the ex-Palladist? Where, when and by whom had she been baptized? Where was she now? A shower of pamphlets rained on the convention consisting of press articles and studies from the German, Austrian, Italian and French newspapers. Father Gruber, who was ill, had not been able to be present but had sent a report. This time Taxil was alarmed for the report was crushing.

At the end of the first day there was an uneasy atmosphere. The members of the convention, grouped in the square of the Dome, felt the need to talk about something else and, quoting the words of Henry Heine: "Trent looks at us with its big Italian eyes," admired the painted fronts of the palaces, resembling Florence or Venice, and the tritons of Neptune's fountain. One of the men sententiously said: "Several centuries ago Trent was a great city. People knew how to amuse themselves. The bookmakers used to organize races for Jews on which they laid very high bets." "Our morals would not allow such competitions any longer even if embellished by steeplechases," said another.

It was good however to be on the banks of the river Adige in the shadow of the mountains. If the Council lasted a long time it was because nobody was in a hurry to leave. Prince-bishop Clesic, who had found his episcopal town made of wood and bricks, turned it into a masterpiece of stone and marble.

The second day was reserved for Taxil's speech. Eloquent, occasionally truculent, he was able, if not to convince his audience, at least to disturb it. There was a moment of humor when he read a letter from Canon Theure, the parish priest of Loigny, whose Presbytery he had visited with the American woman:

I do not hesitate a single moment in recognizing in the above photograph the actual features and the striking likeness of the illustrious woman visitor I had under my eyes on 1 March last and whose noble bearing so intrigued me.

However the small hat without trimmings or flowers and her rather simple dress deprived of any kind of worldly finery that she was wearing, gave her person quite an air of modesty and humility, without in any way detracting from the pride of her bearing.

On the last day Taxil was pressed with questions. Why had he not taken advantage of an occasion so exceptional as the convention to produce Diana? His reply, given in a serious tone that was almost pontifical, was always the same: Palladium i.e. all the forces of Hell, had sworn the death of the apostate to God and there could be no question, in the interest of The Church itself, of taking her away from the convent where she had found refuge. All they could get out of him was a promise that he would confide the secret to a bishop going to

Rome, who would inform the Sovereign Pontiff. The vote of the Convention was in favor of His Grace Lazzareschi. Taxil did everything he could to avoid him but the same evening witnesses spread the rumor in all the taverns and cabarets of the town that they saw him going to his hotel to pay him a visit.

The final meeting took place after a certain hubbub by a motion adopting the conclusions of the fourth committee. It was stated that "No absolute proof either for or against the existence or the conversion of or the authenticity of the writings of the so-called Diana Vaughan had been found." The confusion of this statement was proof of the troubled minds of those present. Taxil felt anxious. Were the fine days of Palladism now numbered? And was not the time approaching when things should be revealed?

He was a man whose movements were carefully premeditated. This very preparation was a sensual enjoyment and, in the circumstances, a new one. In the train on his way back to Paris he spent a lot of time looking at the scenery of the Dolomites and their exciting beauty, at the same time meditating on his own masterpiece which must not be allowed to become ridiculous or mediocre.

For several months he had seen by reading the Catholic press and his personal correspondence that there were cracks in the edifice. The criticisms of Father Gruber were in particular gaining credence. In *The French People* Abbe Leon Garnier, a fighting character, was openly hostile and in *The Cross* even Father Bailly who had been his enthusiastic supporter was expressing doubts. His most faithful ally was still Bishop Fava who in a vanguard action pushed ridicule to the point of asking for news of Diana Vaughan and whether the dear lady was in good hands. But Taxil did not know about the correspondence exchanged between certain of his supporters and Rome where the climate had little by little changed and given way to a very definite mistrust. The over-credulous Abbe de Bessonies, Director of the review *Freemasonry Unmasked*, Vicar of Notre Dame des Victoires and the confidant of Bishop Fava, was spending his time replying to critical letters from Father Gruber and a Roman prelate, Bishop Villard. The former, who was not for nothing the author of a severe criticism of Comte and Posivitism suggested the application of the "healthy rules of historical criticism" just as he had asked the opinion of alienists in the case of "the dear young lady." Father Gruber, who repeatedly asked for proofs and for the name of the confessor of Diana Vaughan, taking up an idea put forward in Trent, wrote on 30 November 1896 as follows: "In high circles peoples are doubtful and it is time that these doubts and those of the whole world were dissipated. Let Miss Vaughan choose a bishop she trusts; let her confide her secrets to him and entrust him, under the seal of the secret of confession, to go and communicate them to Our Holy Father the Pope, and to him alone."

In Italy Taxil's literature had found imitators. A book appeared directed against Crispi, "the Palladist statesman." Another one trumpeted the news that Lemmi was the Grand Master of Universal Freemasonry, a statement confirmed by Bishop Fava, and the Grand Orient of France, abandoning its silence, very seriously protested. *The Civiltà Cattolica* itself in its issue of September 1896, having extolled the merits and virtues of Diana Vaughan, "called from the depths of darkness to the light of God," had started publishing Father Gruber's latest articles. Yet, he was a Jesuit and the *Civiltà Cattolica* was the organ

of the Order in Rome. He was also supported by the Austro- German episcopate and in the *Kolnische Volkzeitung* of 25 August 1896 (No. 578) he had given his opinion of "Pious Publications."

The controversy spread to the United States where *The Catholic Record* of 12 November 1896 issued a warning to Abbe de Bessonies. But a hoaxer of the Taxil type published a report in all the Kentucky papers that he had personally known Diana Vaughan for several years and that the revelations regarding Palladism were true.

In Egypt a certain Zola calling himself ex-Sovereign Grand Commander solemnly abjured Freemasonry in the presence of Bishop Sallus, Commissioner of the Holy Office. In short, a spark from Marseilles had set fire to the whole world. By the end of February 1897 Taxil realized that the time had come to prepare the wood for the stake of Hercules and made a public announcement that on Easter Monday 19 April 1897 Diana Vaughan would appear in public in the hall of the Society of Geography, 184 Boulevard St. Germain in Paris at a meeting reserved exclusively for the international press.

The effect was violent. Taxil's enemies tottered as if under the effect of a blow in the solar plexus and Bishop Fava - whom Masonic publications called Professor Fava - could triumph with a *Te Deum*. Father Gruber remained icily mistrustful.

There was a great queue on the evening of 19 April 1897 in front of the old hall of the Society of Geography in Paris. Entrance was free but the seats were reserved for holders of invitation cards signed with the initials D. V. All the members of the Catholic press were there as well as some Freemasons and Parisian notables. People were showing one another *The Religious Week of Grenoble* in which Bishop Fava had written that the execution of the sentence of death against Diana Vaughan had to be prevented. He emphasized: "Freemasonry must not be allowed to perpetrate this new crime." Gaston Mery, usually very talkative, appeared quite unconcerned.

At exactly 8:30 p. m. the doors opened and a member of the staff appeared, saying: "Ladies and Gentlemen, you are strictly requested to leave in the cloakroom, which is free, all sticks and umbrellas. Anyone who does not comply will not be allowed admission." Abbe Garnier murmured: "Such a precaution is unusual. What is going on?"

They all took their seats in a courteous but rather nervous atmosphere, with growing excitement.

"At last, we are going to see her in flesh and blood," said a priest to his neighbor.

"Monsieur Meline must have received orders from Rome," the latter scoffed. Not wishing to start an argument with an anti-clerical, the priest did not reply.

A few minutes later Taxil appeared on the platform, greeted by the applause of some and shouts of others. He first of all announced that the seat numbers qualified for a draw for which the only prize was a superb typewriter imported from the United States. A sprightly young girl was asked to draw a number and the lucky winner received the typewriter and expressed his thanks. Then, Leo Taxil, replying to one from the audience who expressed astonishment that he was alone, said that he was going to reveal everything. He took a seat at a little table with a green mat, a few sheets of paper and a glass of water, and began:

"I have first of all to thank my colleagues of the Catholic press who started a campaign of

sensational attacks six or seven months ago and have produced this marvellous result we can see tonight and will see much better tomorrow; the quite exceptional disclosure of the truth in a matter which, without them, might have passed almost unnoticed. My first congratulations are therefore for my dear colleagues and in a minute they will understand how sincere and how justified they are indeed."

Suddenly changing his tone of voice, Taxil went on to say:

"Now I shall talk to the Catholics." For half an hour in a loud voice with his Marseilles accent which produced a curious effect he revealed everything. Diana Vaughan was only a myth and everything he had said and written over the previous twelve years was nothing but the phantasies of a free-thinker who for his own edification had come to wander in the adverse camp. A hoaxer by vocation, he told the story of the sharks and of the underwater city, then recalled the stormy meeting of 27 July 1885 when he had been expelled from the Anti-Clerical League, protesting only against one word, that of "traitor." "Now is the matter clear or not?"

Loud whistling and shouting broke out. He nevertheless continued, laughingly exposing all his outrageous practical jokes, quoting the letters he had received from cardinals and bishops congratulating him, encouraging him and blessing him. When he mentioned his audience with the Pope Leo XIII, there was a tumult. Swine, beastly swine, dirty bastard," cried some. "They did well to throw you out of the Grand Orient like a filthy swine," said others. Taxil looked the last interrupter straight in the eye. Although he had aged considerably he recognized his old friend Henry Bauer.

He went on to decry the Convention of Trent and congratulated the hoaxer of Kentucky like a colleague. Abbe Garnier thundered: Now we understand why you made us leave our sticks and umbrellas in the cloakroom." "You are a joker of the gutter," exclaimed an old gentleman who was wearing the Legion of Honor.

Taxil waited a few seconds to get his breath back, then in a final effort he shouted in a loud voice;

"Ladies and Gentlemen, you were told that Palladism would be squashed today. Better than that, it is destroyed; it no longer exists. When I made my general confession to the Father Jesuit of Clamart, I accused myself of an imaginary murder. Well I will now own up to another crime. I have committed infanticide. Palladism is now dead and dead for ever. Its father has just killed it."

In the midst of the pandemonium a man was quietly taking notes. It was Deray, a policeman of the 6th district who was getting facts together for his special report to his superiors which was to take its place in an enormous file "Jogand Gabriel known as Leo Taxil," which can still be consulted in the Archives of the Prefecture of Police.

At the same time Abbe Garnier was trying to gain the attention of the audience but in vain and if there had not been a screen of policemen between Taxil and the public the hero of the evening would have been torn to pieces. As soon as his last words were said Taxil rushed into the wings, reaching the exit amidst jeering and quickly disappeared. A quarter of an hour later he had crossed the Boulevard St. Germain and arrived at Lipps where, in a congenial atmosphere, he ordered a sourkraut and the Alsatian beer required to restore his strength.

The newspapers reported the event next day in various ways. *The Lantern* was sarcastic: "If Taxil had waited, Diana Vaughan would have been canonized." *The Authority*

called for penal proceedings for fraud, Camille Pelletan in *The Recall* was a moralizer. *The Morning* conceived the idea of going to the Archbishopric where a priest stated: "We believed in the sincerity of his conversion but never in his diabolical wanderings." Dr. Hacks, interviewed in his splendid apartment in the Boulevard Montmartre, uttered the following: "I was only a schoolboy compared with this admirable master." *The Humorist* published the speech of Taxil in extenso which has thus passed to posterity (issue of 25 April 1897). This humorous weekly added as an epigraph: "Kill them with laughter."

The fireworks over, Taxil retired with his wife to a little house near Paris, 5 rue Florian at Sceaux, situated a few yards away from the house of another trickster of a different kind who died in 1794. This was Jean-Pierre Claris, Knight of Florian, also a Freemason. He was a member of the famous lodge, The Nine Muses, and one to whom his brethren paid numerous tributes. During Taxil's retirement three books saw the light of day. The first two were *The Art of Good Buying (A guide for the housewife)* 1904, and *Good Family Cooking (Selected Recipes)* 1905. Perhaps the real author was his wife for some of the recipes were so complicated that the reader might well ask himself whether here again there had not been some leg-pulling. The third one was *The Enclave of Monaco* published privately by the author. In this Taxil denounced Monaco as "the sacred asylum of cheating" and called for its forced annexation to France, at the same time dragging the princely family in the mud though this may have been no more than an attempt at blackmail.

Taxil died on 5 May 1907, having again indulged in pornography and anti-clericalism. He had even re-edited his book *The Secret Loves of Pope Pius IX*, with a decidedly vulgar preface.

From then on the date of 19 April 1897 became an historic one. At the Grand Orient of France the reaction was immediate. Up to then it had maintained a scornful silence. It is true that the reports of the annual General Assemblies of 1896 and 1897 show that they had more important things to worry about, such as destroying the chapel built to the memory of Louis XVI or deciding to impose sanctions on school teachers who sang in church choirs. When Taxil's sensational speech was published there was a definite hilarious reaction in all the French lodges. The report of the Grand Orient for 1897-8 relates, for example, that on the occasion of the annual banquet of The True Brethren Lodge at Bergerac on 6 June 1897, Frederic Desmons (who in 1877 had succeeded in having deleted from the Constitutions the invocation to the Great Architect of the Universe) introduced a speaker who was to become famous. This was Emile Combes, ex-Minister of Education. At this banquet Brother Combes in a very humorous speech mentioned a few little known details about the gigantic hoax of Leo Taxil which caused laughter from the brethren.

The reactions of the clergy were somewhat painful. Cardinal Villard wrote from Rome to Abbe Bessonies on 29 April that Taxil was one of the most disgusting crooks the earth had ever borne and violently reproached the gullible abbe for having believed in him till the end, despite warnings from Rome:

"Frenchmen in general and Parisians in particular have a natural mistrust for everything that comes from Rome. The influences of Gallicanism are still being felt.... Abbe Mustel said that Italy was the country of Machiavelli. What shall we now say about France?"

One of Taxil's victims, Abbe Clarin de la Rive, wrote in the April 1897 number of *Freemasonry Disclosed*:

"With frightening cynicism the miserable person we shall not name here declared before an assembly especially convened for him that for twelve years he had prepared and carried out to the end the most extraordinary and most sacrilegious of hoaxes. We have always been careful to publish special articles concerning Palladism and Diana Vaughan. We are now giving in this issue a complete list of these articles, which can now be considered as not having existed."

This change of opinion was courageous but definitely out of character of the author who could not stop himself believing that the imposter had mixed the true and the false and who concluded:

Let us not get excited. Do not let us turn round so completely.

It is precisely because he has taken so much care to deny Palladism that I claim it still exists."

It is said that a high-ranking Freemason declared to a lodge, The Square, that he had belonged to Palladism. The Bishop of Carcassonne, His Grace Bishop Billard, told three hundred priests assembled on the occasion of an ecclesiastic retreat that he had seen Diana Vaughan and spoken to her.

On 11 June Abbe Clarin de la Rive wrote to Abbe Bessonnie: "I have no intention of going to the Archbishopric. I am disgusted with the hypocrisy of those in the environment of His Eminence and disgusted with defending people so unworthy of it and on the point of disappearing from the antimasonic combat."

In the courts there were cases of slander brought by some who had been called Palladists.

Taxilism was to survive Taxil himself. Although *L' Action Francaise* always refused to take him seriously, certain anti-Masonic leagues were to hold for a long time the opinion that the real falsehood of Taxil was his retraction. In 1928 the very worthy prelate Jouin, the director of *The International Review of Secret Societies*(R.I.S.S.), made it known that "by a providential set of circumstances" he had been put in possession of a mysterious manuscript, the work of a certain Countess of Coutanceau, an occult instrument of the Luciferian lodges. The manuscript was published under the title *The Elect of the Dragon*, the heroine, Clotilde Bersone, being a replica of Diana Vaughan. The author of the book was a certain Abbe Paul Boulain who claimed only to have collated the writings of a woman who ended by embracing the Catholic religion. All the politicians and even the Heads of State were mentioned in the book, which in the preface set out a principle: Satan is the real political master of France. It is curious to note that the novel finished by relating the visit to the convent of an initiate who is discomfited by a new sister who threatens to denounce everything to the judicial authorities. Luciferian allusions still occur from time to time in certain reviews of some sects.

Leo Taxil was certainly a hoaxer of genius. No doubt the credulity of certain so-called "right-thinking" circles of the end of the nineteenth century explains this success to some extent. Paps, who has already been mentioned, was able to write in a book that appeared after the great scandal of 1897:

"The Catholic world has recently been shamefully deceived. The deceiver had perceived that the Catholic world lived beyond the ordinary world. Sheltered behind newspapers written in a special style, careful not to read books not recommended by the newspapers in question, kept in almost complete ignorance of the mechanism of present-day society... this numerous Catholic society was the better prepared for the deception in that their means of verification

were almost entirely absent."

Even under the pen of an occultist this criticism was correct. Not until the twentieth century was it possible to witness the happy and fruitful union of psychiatrists and exorcists, one result of which was the publication of the book of Father Joseph de Tonquedec S. J.: *Nervous or Mental Illnesses and Diabolical Manifestations* (1938), of which an anti-clerical and scientific free-thinker was to say to the author: "Your Church has an advantage over the others: it maintains a cultured order in the field of the miraculous."

The explanation of the Taxil case does not however rest entirely on that. It should be considered within the framework of deceptions ingeneral, in that of deception considered as an art. Deception in itself is of a fraudulent nature but it differs from fraud in that monetary gain is not its essential object nor even a necessary one. Taxil himself never became rich in the manner of big swindlers. Without agreeing with his own statement that he never made a penny out of his schemes, he was certainly not a man of money. Was it a form of vanity? In one sense that is true, but there are many vain people who are basically good. But deception is an aggression, both unethical and anti-social, on the fringe of criminal activity. It clearly constitutes a complex phenomenon difficult to define. It extends from the coldest and most calculated cunning to the most harmless practical joke as in *The Pals of Jules Romains*, that hymnto juvenile friendship.

The list of literary deceptions is a long one. In the two centuries preceding ours it goes from the Ossian bard through Chatterton, Nodier and that extraordinary Ernest de Calonne, who claimed to have discovered an unknown play of Moliere, *The Doctor in Love*, which was produced and admired by the elite society of Paris at the time of Louis Philippe, in much the same way as *The Misanthrope*. Nearer to our time, the snobs must have been in raptures when reading *The Obscure Lamp*, mystical poems and other works attributed to a certain Julien Torma who had never existed, but whom lyrical swindlers claimed to have been born on 6 April 1902 at Cambrai and to have disappeared on 17 February 1933 during a solitary excursion in the mountains. His story was a deception by certain members of the College of Pataphysic.

A naked lie is easily suspected. The more a lie is clothed the more it has a chance of being believed. The example of Iago in Othello remains an obvious example. Archeology and the visual arts have also had their forgers and on occasion have been humiliating even for the greatest experts.

Freemasonry has not been spared. Rene Le Forestier in his book *Templar and Occult Freemasonry in the 18th and 19th Centuries*, quoting apparently authentic references, has related the episodes of the historic legend of the survival of the Order of the Templars, of the false Charter of Larmenius and the "sacred treasure" of the unfortunate Templars who were burned at the stake under Philip the Fair. One clever individual by the name of Fabre-Palaprat, an ex seminarist turned chiropodist and then Grand Master of the new Order of the Temple, offered for the veneration of the "chevaliers" a copper reliquary, shaped like a Gothic church containing (said he) a linen shroud with four fragments of burnt bone taken from the stake of the martyr of the Order, an iron sword with the handle in the form of a cross surmounted by a globe, presumed to have been used by the Grand Master Jacques de Molay, an iron mask with the visor adorned with dolphins and inlaid with gold,

presumed to have been the property of Guy the Dauphin of Auvergne, an old spur of copper gilt, a paten of bronze representing St. John under a Gothic arcade and other similar articles. These curios had been assembled by Fabre-Palaprat with the help of two accomplices who had prepared the burnt bones and bought the rest from a merchant of old iron in St. John's market. The helmet had been stolen from an armory museum. Under less crude forms the Templar imposture was nevertheless to have great success.

NOTE

1. A large file entitled "Gabriel Jogand so-called Leo Taxil" is in the historic archives of the Prefecture of Police in Paris under the reference 188 - 303. On one of the two files composing it the three Masonic dots are curiously traced upside down.

I wish to thank Mr. Roger Coutarel, head of the Department of the Historic Archives, through whose courtesy I had access to this file. It shows that throughout his life Taxil was followed and watched by the police. There is no reason to suppose that he was an informer.

2. If it were possible to resuscitate Leo Taxil's thought processes it would be enlightening for them to be analyzed by psychologists or even psychoanalysts. If one considers the years of work devoted to building up his system, motives of commercial profit are inadequate to account for it. Was he a converted mystic or one of those - they are more numerous than is often realized - who live in fear of the device? Was he inhibited by memories of childhood brought about by foolish persons who delight in frightening children with stories of terror? Was his ostensible conversion all that insincere?

Nothing could be more interesting than an analysis of this greathoaxer seen through his writings if only they could be interpreted. Be that as it may his story belongs to the history of anti-Masonry and therefore to that of Freemasonry itself and in the minds of some misguided people the devil will always be associated with Freemasonry.

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To: ALL From: magnalux@tibalt.supernet.ab.ca, GEORGE HELMER

Subj: Leo Taxil | Read: (N/A) Status: PUBLIC MESSAGE

Conf: alt.freemasonry (2245) Read Type: GENERAL (+)

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