

THROWN INTO NATURE

by Milen Ruskov

translated from the Bulgarian by Angela Rodel

There is hardly anything more natural than hating Nature. Yet people don't realize this due to their crazy ideas. For example, many think that this world is ruled by the Devil. As some of the ancients put it, the Devil saw the Kingdom of God and tried to make something similar. He is a sorry imitator, by their own admission. Yet not entirely inept, they add, and mighty cruel, too. But all of that is stuff and nonsense. Others reckon that the world is God's doing. If this is so, then He is not who they think He is but just some experimenting idiot. All that is stuff and nonsense, too. But if it's not the one, nor the other, then what is it? – you may ask. That is a stupid question. This is what: the world is simply mad Nature's work. Which is precisely why it looks the way it does, since it is her work. She is absolutely mad, the incarnation of chaos, a game of blind chance. I feel a deep-seated hatred of Nature. Yes, I do! If there is something I deeply and truly hate, it is Nature. Is there anything more endlessly energetic, more lavishly fertile and at the same time crazier than she? Of course not! If Nature put on a human face and strolled around the streets of Sevilla, she would have long since been locked up as a dangerous maniac, perhaps even burned at the stake by the Inquisition. She would be of the female sex, of course, giving birth to a child every five minutes, laughing and jumping about at the same time, and impregnated without a visible agent, as if by the wind itself. Yes, Nature is absolutely mad!

Yet she and she alone is the procreator of the world. Not the Devil or God, not some evil genius or some experimenting idiot, much less the Good Lord, but simply a mad, all-powerful, all-purblind, accidental and chaotic Nature. As a member of the medical profession, it actually becomes me to hold such an opinion. Moreover, it shows that I've found my true calling, since I sincerely and profoundly profess the above-stated opinions.

My name is Guimarães da Silva. The "Da Silva" part is made-up, by the way, since an aristocratic title causes people to pay more attention to what you say. And besides, Dr. Monardes wanted me to change my name so he could introduce me as his assistant without embarrassment. "This is my assistant Da Silva," Dr. Monardes now

says, and it really does sound better that way. Sometimes he even presents me as “Dr. Da Silva.” Of course, I am not yet a doctor – although I hope to be some day – but rather a mere helpmate and student of Dr. Monardes. Incidentally, he never mentions that I am Portuguese. The Portuguese are thought to smell bad, spread malaria (since they wade through the swamps around the city), constantly present themselves as noblemen who just happen to end up in Sevilla and who try to swindle everyone they can out of piddling sums. “I,” he says, “am João da So-and-So, and I have come to buy a parcel of land in Peñana at a good price” or “to build a ship in Cadiz.” Then he starts playing the fool, so that you’ll swallow the act and decide to join the venture, usually for cheap or at a huge profit, at which point he disappears with the ducats. The curious thing here is that the notorious seductive power of money addles the mind of the one forking it over – a relatively rare and interesting phenomenon that lies behind the prosperity of many a crook, for example, the owners of gambling houses – for if he had preserved even a bit of his presence of mind, he would have asked himself why anyone would come to buy land or to build a ship in Spain given that it is far cheaper to do so in Portugal. Yet clearly people cease thinking in such cases. For this reason, Sevilla is full of fake receipts from Portuguese shysters. Even Dr. Monardes has one.

At the inns, they now ask the Portuguese for their money upfront, since previously they would stop for the night, eat and drink their fill, but never so much as to not be able to get up before the first cock crowed the next morning and sneak away without paying. Rumor has it that they would only pay some servant to wake them up early in the morning. Since most of the servants at the inns are also Portuguese, this made it all the cheaper for them. A Portuguese would kill a man for a ducat and himself for two. The only thing preventing him from doing the latter is the fear that you would swipe them afterwards. A real sly dog.

Of course, all these revolting characteristics do not pertain to me. I consider my fellow countrymen to be complete abominations and if I were in the habit of paying attention to abominations, I would be ashamed of them. But I do not pay attention to such things, nor, in recent days, to practically anything. The side effect of this, however, is that one suffers from insomnia. Yet such disinterestedness is also one of Dr. Monardes’ pieces of advice. “Don’t pay attention to anything except medicine,” he says, “and to a

number of very simple and obvious everyday necessities, which are, in fact, so self-evident that you may easily carry them out without paying them any particular attention. You must” – the doctor insists – “always keep your mind focused on important things, and in the absence of such things, on nothing at all. Although in the latter case you ought to think long and hard about why and how you ever reached such a condition in the first place.” Yes, Dr. Monardes is a person from whom one can learn much, not just about medicine, but about life in general. He understands the modern world and human nature like no other.

My Portuguese provenance, of course, can easily be discerned from my name. So how did I hit on precisely that name? When Dr. Monardes requested I add an aristocratic title, I recalled the village where I was born. The principle behind such appellations, as everyone knows, is to indicate where you come from. However, the village had a nondescript name. Yet by way of compensation it was ringed by magnificent forests. Thus, I decided to christen myself “Da Silva” after the Latin for “forest.” Dr. Monardes approved the name, and I like it, as well – it was a good choice.

Perhaps my reader might object that this does not fit in well with my hatred of nature. First of all, I would like to state that it is in no sense obligatory for something to fit with anything else whatsoever, except for in the healing practices of medicine, but even then it is far from necessary in all cases and as one gradually comes to understand, sometimes it is impossible and even harmful. I know of many cases in which the most logical path to healing has turned out to be fatal. In my work with Dr. Monardes, I have been witness to cases in which the most illogical intuition turns out to be life-saving. Incidentally, Dr. Monardes is a person with exceptional intuition. The exercise of reason is something he places in strict boundaries and always keeps reigned in, like a horse trained under a heavy hand. “Every disease can have at least three causes,” Dr. Monardes says. “Your knowledge helps you to distinguish them. One of them always pops into your mind first. And it is usually wrong.”

I suspect that if this were not the case, every reasonably well-read person could become a medical man. So why do I want to become one? Above all because this profession is no worse than any other, and often more profitable, too. At the same time, it offers me the opportunity to confront nature. People are the victims of nature. Not that I

have any love lost for people. People... What can I say?... The craziness of the universal procreator is reflected in them, they are her offspring. But the sick person is a victim of nature. In her madness she has created within his body one endlessly complex and poorly regulated mechanism, always on the verge of breaking down, yet at the same time unpredictable, chaotic and random – he might collapse from the tiniest thing, yet he might also withstand the most monstrous experiences. Take, for example, the sailor, Francisco Rodrigues one of the eighteen survivors from Magellan's expedition (who was also Portuguese, by the way, which is surely one of the reasons he died in so absurd a fashion), who somehow endured a three-month fever in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, far from any source of succor, only to die from the prick of a rusty nail on the vessel *Hygiene* anchored in the Port of Sevilla of all places, as he was looking her over, deciding whether to join her crew – an endeavor that he incidentally was under no financial compulsion to undertake, since Magellan's spices had made him rich. He explained his intention to once again take to the seas with the fact that he was squandering his wealth so freely that in five or six years' time, as he liked to say, it would be all gone.

This unpredictability of the body – to get back to my original thought – is a consequence of the chaoticness, randomness and unpredictability of nature itself. Did I say unpredictability? In fact, this is not always the case. If there is any great marvel whatsoever in this world, it is that nature can sometimes be controlled. For that, of course, extensive skills and knowledge are necessary, but in principle it is possible. Figuratively speaking, you can drag nature out of the madhouse and force her to do something. Of course, she continues lurching and grimacing, keeps babbling nonsensically, but she does it. Then next time she won't do it. It depends.

There are certain means through which she can be forced, in particular circumstances, to act as we wish. Such a means, practically omnipotent, was discovered by our seamen in the Indies over the past half-century or so. This well-nigh magical means was completely unknown to Antiquity, whose number includes even Herodotus, Heraclitus, or whatever they called that mighty ancient healer, whose name escapes me for the moment. Of course, we are talking about the almost almighty tobacco. This is precisely the medicine to which Dr. Monardes has dedicated his book about its healing

powers. Dr. Monardes is an ideal innovator, a true discoverer. This was the first and, at the time, the only book of its kind in Europe. However, I will let the author speak for himself:

My assistant and colleague Señor Dr. Da Silva asked me to write a few words in his work – a request I responded to joyfully, being flattered by the faith shown in me, for which I wish to thank him sincerely. Henceforth I shall express myself more briefly (due to pressing engagements).

My tract about tobacco was published in Sevilla under the title “On Tobacco and Its Great Virtues, by Dr. Nicolas Monardes, M.D. LL.D. I.S.O. M.A. D.J. M.C.” The latter is a selection of my titles. It is also known by the same name in France (without the titles, however). The tract in question is part of my book “A Medical History of Remedies Brought from the West Indies,” or, in short, “Historia medicinal.” In England, due to the singular whim of its translator, it appeared under the title “Joyfull News out of the New Found World.” Following my indignant inquiry I was assured that in England if something does not begin with “Joyfull News” no one buys it and reads it. The English, as I came to understand, look upon all books, including medical writings, primarily as a means of entertainment to pleasantly while away one’s spare time, for which reason every other title there now begins with “Joyfull News.” For example, if the work in question addresses the massacre in Lancaster, the book will be published as “Joyfull News out of the Massacre in Lancaster.” I give this example because I have seen it with my own eyes. In short, I was forced to back down.

This was merely a clarification. Now I would like to offer the reader some useful advice:

- 1. Go to bed early. The best time is around eight o’ clock in the evening in the winter and nine o’ clock during the summer.*
- 2. No fewer than eight hours of sleep.*

The advice above could be paraphrased more simply as follows: Go to bed one hour after sundown, get up one hour before sunrise. The more attentive reader will most likely note that this is precisely a simplified paraphrase. However, with the passage of time I have become convinced that not only in England, where it is absolutely necessary,

but also everywhere else, it is best to state things in a simplified manner, as this is the only way they will be understood. With the exception of France, however, where it is preferable to state things as complexly as possible, ideally such that nothing whatsoever can be understood. Then in France they will declare you a philosopher

3. Food – three times a day. Lavish breakfast, fair-to-middling lunch, light supper. The reader may imagine food as a slide: in the morning you find yourself at its highest point, at noon in the middle, and in the evening at its lowest part. Its lowest part is not necessarily a place where one falls on one's arse and subsequently spends the next hour thus in the privy.

4. Meat dishes should be alternated with meatless ones, ideally on the same day, but if this proves impossible – then every other day. Overconsumption of meaty foods leads to diseases of the kidneys, while eating only meatless fare weakens the organism.

5. Moderate labor. If possible – none at all. Avoid working in the afternoon and especially the evening. Do not forget what the Bible teaches us – labor was something used to punish Adam.

6. Warm clothes during the winter. If when you look outside you reckon you will need one woolen jersey, put on two. It is of particular importance to keep your feet warm, thus the same applies to socks as well. Countless people die of colds that could easily be avoided, except in the cases of the most destitute, among whose ranks our reader can scarcely be counted. Furthermore, one's neck should be wrapped in a scarf.

3a) It is sufficient for a person to go to any pub whatsoever to see gluttonous animals. Overeating gathers all the bodily fluids in the stomach, leads to a feeling of heaviness and upsets the activity of the entire organism (from whose extremities the fluids are withdrawn so as to aid digestion within the stomach). In cases of systematic abuse, this leads to corpulence, which thins the bones and encumbers the heart. Stop gorging yourself!

3b (7.) It has been said many times, but let us repeat: Do not abuse alcoholic beverages. Two glasses of wine a day maximum, one at noon and one in the evening. Spirits – only in the winter, 75 gr. maximum. Yes, I know it seems like very little. This is not news to me.

The above-mentioned advice could be formulated in a more simplified manner (and summarized, which is, in fact, the same thing) as follows: He who eats and drinks a lot dies young. You have certainly heard the so-called blessing “Eat, drink and be merry!” To the same effect they may as well have told you: “Die sooner!”

8. Use tobacco habitually, in the form of smoke for inhalation. This protects the organism from infection and strengthens it as a whole. Señor Dr. Da Silva has informed me that in the present work he will discuss several illustrative examples of tobacco’s healing power, thus I will conclude, remaining

Your fervent well-wisher

and most humble servant,

Dr. Nicolas Monardes, M.D. LL.D. I.S.O. M.A. D.J. M.C.

P.S. For other examples of the healing power of tobacco see my above-cited tract “On Tobacco and Its, etc.”

My intention in the present book is to describe approximately 36 examples of the healing power of tobacco (it is I, Guimarães). I do not know whether it will be necessary to cite all of them – this question will be decided in the course of the writing. In any case, I can categorically claim that the unconquerable substance alluded to here can cure between 30 and 40 illnesses and bodily indispositions. Now I will begin to cite them, beginning with the most illustrative:

1. Against Death

Of course, I realize that death is neither an illness, nor a bodily indisposition. However, it could be considered their most extreme consequence and ultimate goal, thus in this sense it is uncontrovertibly – and inextricably – linked with them. Did I say inextricably? No! And no again! I personally witnessed how Dr. Monardes, with the help of the healing power of tobacco, resurrected a man from the dead, just as in biblical times the ancient Jew Lazarus was resurrected. This took place in the village of Casas Viejas. (the more recent case, that is), where we had been called to save a man suffering from sharp pains in the stomach accompanied by a fever. When we arrived – which given the

roads in Andalusia took a fair bit of time – he was no longer suffering from anything, but rather lying there stiff, stark and yellow on a wooden bed. The man was dead.

Murdered by nature! I thought to myself. She is mad – and heavy-handed, just as most madmen are. She had struck this man in the stomach or elsewhere, perhaps in several spots simultaneously, and had killed him. But why did she do it? This would be the logical question. Hadn't she herself given him life? Well, the simple truth is that she didn't do it on purpose. She didn't smack him deliberately, but rather in a fit of frenzied arm-flailing. The man just happened to be somewhere in the range of her numerous arms, in the wrong place, and now he was lying before us prostrate and, by all outward signs, dead.

Dr. Monardes' preliminary examination quickly confirmed my apprehensions.

"This man is dead," said Dr. Monardes. "How long has he been this way?"

Amidst the general wailing, we finally received the answer that he had been that way for only a short while. Then Dr. Monardes took a cigarillo out of his inside pocket, bit off the tip, looked around, and, not seeing a more suitable receptacle, spit it onto the floor (this was a typical village home), after which he lit it with much puffing. Here I surely need clarify what precisely a cigarillo is. It closely resembles that which is known in the south as a "cigar," and as a "cheroot" in the north, but is slightly thinner and rawer, for which reason it burns with more difficulty and much crackling. Normally the sailors at the port smoke cigarillos, since they are considered lower quality than cigars; however, since the tobacco in them is rawer and not as dried out, their healing power is far greater. So, as I was saying, Dr. Monardes took out a cigarillo and after a minute, or at most two, managed to light it. This so impressed those present that the wailing subsided, the only sound was the doctor's puffing and the cigarillo's crackling, accompanied by the heavy scent of tobacco, which enveloped us.

"Guimarães," said the doctor, handing me the cigarillo. "Breathe smoke into his mouth."

Now, this was something I had no desire whatsoever to do. These country folk are sick with all kinds of diseases, all manner of fevers, and I was afraid of being infected. Noticing my hesitation, the doctor said: "Don't worry, it's the perfect disinfectant."

I knew this was the case, yet sometimes fear just takes hold of you. I took several deep drags off the cigarillo, rolling the smoke between my cheeks as if gargling – and speaking of gargling, I asked the villagers for a glass of *pereira*, i.e. pear brandy, and gargled with that, too, took another drag off the cigarillo and was now ready for action.

First, I had to open the man's mouth, which turned out to be no easy task, but once I grabbed him by the cheeks with one hand and pulled at his jaw with the other, I finally managed to open his mouth. I exhaled the tobacco into it, making sure not to let my lips touch his. This did not work very well, however. The smoke entered his mouth and then exited again, so I had to blow on it to chase it back inside. I soon sensed that our heads were wrapped in smoke, yet only a small fraction of it was going inside the wretched peasant's mouth.

"That's not going to work," Dr. Monardes said with a certain – absolutely understandable – irritation, as he clapped me on the shoulder from behind. "Give it to me."

I stepped back ashamed, but relieved. Shame or no shame, "fear guards the vineyard," as they say in my homeland, Portugal, where, incidentally, they say all sorts of twaddle. Yet one shouldn't expect such people to say anything but twaddle. A while back Dr. Monardes' publisher, Señor Diaz, was collecting money for advance subscriptions to a publication he called "Folk Wisdom." I told him that such a title was misleading in its very essence and that such a book should be called "Folk Twaddle" and that only in such a case would I pay for it. Moreover, he was confused about the very character and function of such a book – he imagined it as something which you could read to learn life lessons, whereas in fact it could only be a collection of inanities which you could read for entertainment and a good laugh. He replied that this was not the case, and quoted several sayings which he clearly considered gems of folk wisdom, upon which I asked him what he would say about the proverbs "You can tell a man by his clothes" and "You can't tell a man by his clothes," which, by the way, could be found one after the other in the book subsequently published by said Señor Diaz. Upon which he replied that at the end of the day he was a publisher and his job was to make money and that no one would buy anything entitled "Folk Twaddle." Now there's a good argument, finally. I told him he should have begun with that and gave him a certain paltry sum. I read the book I later

received with great satisfaction as a collection of jokes, then gave it to a beggar in Sevilla. “A gift for you from your brethren,” I told him. He couldn’t read, but would surely find some other use for it – such people are very imaginative, when they happen to get their hands on something. In the end, their entire life passes in preparation for that.

But to return to our story. In any case, fear got the best of me and I stepped away from the dead man in relief. But Dr. Monardes! I would say that his very body, his stance, his shoulders, his feet firmly planted on the ground – all this radiated confidence and determination. He inhaled on the cigarillo two or three times, blowing the smoke from his nostrils like a fire-breathing rhinoceros, two thick streams of smoke rose from either side of his face and for a moment he reminded me of a mythical bull with horns of smoke, at which point he leaned over, pressed his lips tightly to those of the dead man, and began exhaling tobacco smoke into them.

“Guimarães,” the doctor cried shortly in a husky voice, his eyes watering, shouting over the cigarillo’s crackling. “Come here and pulbate!”

In this situation, “pulbate” means to press on the stomach. And that is what I did. When the doctor blew smoke into the man’s mouth, I would wait a moment and pulbate. We only needed to do this a few times, perhaps five at the most. After which the doctor abruptly drew back with impressive agility and raised the man’s head with his hand, such that for a moment it was level with mine, facing towards me as I bent over him. The man opened his eyes. What eyes! Although I only saw them for a moment, I will never forget them! Glassy eyes, huge and round as a fish’s, with a very strange emotion written in them: some mixture of horror and utter confusion. I suspect that this is how a person coming back from the dead looks. He positively cannot figure out what is going on. But all this lasted only an instant, like I said, because in the following moment Dr. Monardes turned the man’s head, deftly tucking it under his elbow. Then I, led by lucky intuition, pulbated him one last time. Lucky intuition is so called, since it shows up in the details, which no one could possibly teach you, so tiny and insignificant are they on the one hand, yet so often decisive on the other. And suddenly the glassy-eyed man took a breath with whistling lungs and proceeded to vomit. He continued to vomit as the doctor held his head to the side with one hand, while handing me the crackling and already half-extinguished cigarillo. I took it, inhaled a final drag and dropped it into the glass of

pereira where it went out with a loud hiss. I thought to myself: “If you are dead, it will raise you from the grave, if you are alive, it will send you there.” Of course, that was a completely unfounded outburst of superstition, stimulated by the powerful and exotic qualities of that vigorous substance.

The man was saved! He soon came to his senses, his breathing normalized and he even answered questions by nodding his head.

The doctor turned to the others, whose stupefaction is impossible to describe.

“He’ll recover. He needs to keep to bed and recover his strength, and he’ll be on his feet in a week.

Tired, but satisfied by a job well done, we climbed into our carriage and set off back to Sevilla. It had grown late, the sun was already setting behind the naked hills of Andalusia.

“Night is falling,” the doctor said.

“Yes, night is falling,” I nodded. At such a moment, one feels the urge to gaze at and revel in “the beauty of nature,” as they say. But what beauty? Sloping hills covered with grass yellowed by autumn, here and there scrawny olive groves, the red sun up above amidst a darkening sky the color of pale indigo, peeking through a grayish veil – if I may put it like this, – the dirt road ahead with its brown dust and small half-unearthed colorless stones. What disconsolate grayness, what boredom, what ugliness and what tiresome monotony!... It was only then that I realized what had happened!

“Señor,” I said. “We just raised a man from the dead! We saved him!”

“Well, he’ll die again,” Dr. Monardes smiled. “Only some other time.”

How modesty adorns a man! You’ll never catch Dr. Monardes getting puffed up over his unbelievable achievements, you’ll never see him wallowing in self-satisfaction like a pig in the mud. No, he is always disciplined, business-like, with brisk, energetic movements, careful, on his guard, concentrated yet calm at the same time. An inimitable medic! What luck I had to stumble across such a teacher. And so on.

2. Intestinal worms, enemas

Is it even necessary to continue after such a strong example? Yes and no. No, because the previous example was extraordinarily and definitively illustrative – such a powerful substance, which can raise someone from the dead, obviously needs no further

arguments in its defense. And yes, for two reasons: first, if I do not continue, this composition would become impossible, which I personally would find very upsetting. My career path clearly passes through it. And second, it is advisable to indicate other, more mundane examples, which nevertheless will be of use to the reader so that he may learn how to employ the powerful substance of tobacco in his everyday life, and not only when he dies. After all, a man doesn't die every day, he's not a fly. Rather, he struggles with other, often tiresome and shameful yet nevertheless vexing, problems and indispositions. And ceaselessly at that, I would say.

In his young years, when he was still trying to build his practice and thus save himself from the terrifying and deadly trap of poverty, from which perhaps even tobacco cannot save you and which usually hangs like the Sword of Damocles over every young person's head, Dr. Monardes specialized in a particularly widespread illness – intestinal worms. A huge number of children in Spain suffer from worms. More even than in Portugal. Here worms afflict both the rich and the poor, absolutely everyone. This, of course, is due to poor hygiene. No one washes his hands except before prayer. Some, by the way, also wash them after prayer, it must be admitted.

My point is that Dr. Monardes was exceptionally specialized in the healing of worms and hence became an exceptional specialist. His name as a master in curing this illness became known far and wide in Sevilla, all of Andalusia, certain regions of Portugal and even in the north all the way to Asturias and the Basque country, where it spread albeit in a changed form and was known as Masañas, transforming as it was passed by word of mouth. Rely on what people say and look what happens! But to return to our topic:

And so, Dr. Monardes made his name in worms and established a prospering practice. Actually, prosperity is often founded on some such thing. His wealth dates back to that time and even to this day it is based on the curing of that illness, and not the doctor's numerous, far more serious medical achievements. It could be said that Dr. Monardes' wealth is shored up by worms, that he has turned worms to gold. And since there are many worms in this country, the doctor's gold is also abundant. "If you want to get rich," the doctor says, "take up something small that everyone uses or which everyone

suffers from, but which few produce or cure. Worms, spices, and the like. Only fools throw themselves into grand undertakings and call their foolishness pluck.”

Petty things for a petty world, so to speak. But getting back to my original thought.

Many years later, when I was already studying with the doctor, he was called by the king himself, Felipe II, whose son, the future Felipe III, had come down with a case of worms. It was then that I saw the Escorial Palace for the first time. Some say it is the ugliest large building in the world, while others argue the opposite, i.e. that it is the largest ugly building in the world. In my opinion, both sides are right. As soon as I saw it from a distance, my soul felt oppressed and cringed like a wet cat. I had never seen anything like it – it resembled a giant prison with a parade entrance. And to complete the absurdity, statues of the Jewish kings had been erected over the entrance, with David and Solomon in the middle. And this by the same man who so cruelly persecuted the Jews. Which only confirms my conviction that we have a madman as king. His appearance strengthened this impression – with the Bible which he supposedly never lets slip from his hand, with a huge gold cross around his neck, and in his royal robes, he looked like the embodiment of un-combinable things, like a cross between fish and fowl. And just as dangerous, in a certain sense.

Although the palace looked quite severe on the outside, inside it was luxuriously furnished and its walls frescoed. The Catholic rulers lived well.

They sent us to the boy. When we entered little Felipe’s chambers, we caught him scratching his backside. Many believe that he later went mad, and if this is the case, I suspect it might be due to some extent to our encounter. Dr. Monardes decided to use not the usual, but instead an elite, tobacco treatment on him, fit for a kingly personage. To this end, we made an infusion from tobacco leaves, as well as tobacco syrup. We smeared Felipe’s navel with the syrup and gave him the infusion to drink. He vomited, but Dr. Monardes said this was a good sign, as the tobacco had obviously begun cleansing his organism, and made him drink some more. After that, in order for the treatment to be both maximally effective and quick, he decided to give the boy an enema. For this purpose I had to insert a small glass tube into his backside.

“Ouch!” Philip groaned.

“That’s enough ouching!” I said, rather peeved with a view to the following procedure I had to perform, which I will describe presently. But then a quick thought flashed through my mind, so I continued: “Your majesty, the ruler of the largest empire in the world cannot be moaning and groaning. He must be brave and strong.”

The boy looked at me and nodded. “What a fool!” I thought to myself. I am not particularly fond of children. Still less I like the spoiled little monsters from royal courts. And still less if they have Worms. And especially if I must insert a glass tube into their backsides and blow tobacco smoke into it, so as to cleanse their bowels from the inside, as was required for the procedure I was faced with. The persistent thought that some worm might crawl through the tube and into my mouth kept running through my head. Yet loyal to my duties, I lit a cigarillo and began exhaling tobacco fumes into the tube, blowing as hard as I could so they would not come back out. At the same time, the doctor gave young Felipe a bit more of the infusion, so as to attack the worms from both ends. This raised my misgivings to the level of acute alarm, as I imagined what would happen if he were to get the runs while I was blowing tobacco fumes into the tube. In Sevilla there is a man everyone calls Shit Mouth, thanks to his habit of constantly making gloomy prophecies (which incidentally never come true, except with respect to Shit Mouth himself), but, of course, this expression could also have a literal meaning. I imagined what Francisco Rodrigues would say in the pubs, if such a thing were to occur. He would say: “Hey, there’s our friend Guimarães, who ate royal shit.”

“But what if he...” I said, unable to fully suppress my misgivings.

Dr. Monardes shrugged, as if reading my thoughts. “This is medicine! It is a difficult profession, Señor Da Silva,” he added, standing by my side and looking down at me.

Difficult, yes, but sometimes you get lucky. The whole procedure went smoothly, we gave him the enema and the doctor left the boy, who looked completely dazed at that point, to sleep. We would wake him after two hours to give him some food and a mild laxative and with that, the doctor reckoned, his treatment would be successfully completed.

As we paced back and forth in the hallway, a priest appeared, sent to help us in case the need arose. I forgot to mention that this outwardly freakish building is also

freakish in content, combining as it does a royal palace and a monastery. The priests here are either hypocrites or fanatics, so you cannot hope to have a worldly conversation with them, and indeed, this one soon began prattling on about the soul. Dr. Monardes is in principle a calm man in his fifties, of average height with a well-trimmed, grayish beard, which he strokes with his hand when he portrays pensiveness. He is calm, as I said, yet the word “soul” is something that can infuriate him. I noticed how, as the priest kept talking and talking, Dr. Monardes stroked his beard tensely, trying to restrain himself. But the priest wouldn’t shut up. “Why not?” I asked myself. “Is he simply a windbag and now that he has found listeners, he cannot shut up? Or is he a fanatic who has taken it upon himself to preach to us? Or is he a hypocrite who is counting on us to praise his righteousness and zealous faith to high-ranking personages?” Who knows? In any case, at a certain point the doctor could not stand listening to any more of his slimy, somehow sing-song voice and said: “The soul, father? What exactly are you calling the soul? There is no such concept in medicine, señor. In medicine, the soul is a *functio* of your corporality. Your body has four fluids, four humours, warm and cold and two others, it also has organs, between which these fluids move. Your body is eight-tenths water. Water, padre. And while these things interact according to the laws of nature, something else appears, which you call the soul. But it is merely a kind of *functio* of the humours and organs.”

“That is not so, señor,” the priest objected. “The soul is immortal. How could that which you describe be immortal? The body decays, yet the soul remains.”

Fortunately, the doctor got a hold of himself and let the argument drop. The last thing I needed was for some ecclesiastical idiots to clamp my feet in an iron boot. Because their faith and love for their fellow man does not hinder them from torturing him like beasts in God’s name. Thus the cruel madness that nature has instilled in all her creation comes out in them. Fortunately, many things are forgiven to the members of the medical profession. For a long time now we haven’t heard of a medical man being persecuted by the Inquisition. This is so because our very profession is thought to make us quite absorbed by the body, hence some of our convictions are benevolently ignored as a type of occupational illness or mental injury. Otherwise they would have to burn up more or less all the medical men, yet even priests fall ill now and then and need a doctor,

since pain is difficult to cure with prayer, no matter what they might say. Despite this, however, a doctor still may not say everything he thinks without risking a wealth of troubles, and big ones, at that. Dr. Monardes knew that far better than me and prudently fell silent. “To risk making yourself dependent on other people’s benevolence is a serious form of madness or idiocy, which every intelligent person should avoid,” Dr. Monardes says. Of course, he says that in a different context, referring to medicine itself, having in mind how important it is to lead a healthy life, lest you have to resort to the benevolence and intellect of doctors, who could easily be both malevolent and stupid – such examples abound. However, that statement is admittedly true in a much wider sense as well.

The time finally came to wake up young Philip. As soon as we entered the room, something in his look unambiguously suggested to me that the boy was not well at all. He had not fallen asleep, but had passed out, as the doctor soon found.

“Complications have arisen,” Dr. Monardes said. “Quick, Guimarães, get the citronella.”

Citronella is a substance discovered by Dr. Monardes, which is made up of citrus fruits, glycerin and rose dust, and in the form of a tincture it is used for coming to after a faint. Most of our medications, however, were in a bundle we had left – due to its great weight – in an area near the entrance to the palace. We had taken only the cigarillos, tobacco infusions and one or two other items. Now here’s an opportunity, I thought to myself, for this monk to make himself useful.

“How is our regal lad, señor?” He asked me when I came out.

“Very well,” I replied. “He’s recovering.”

And then I sent him to bring the bundle of medicines.

“You should have gone yourself,” Dr. Monardes reproached me, as I came back into young Felipe’s chambers.

“I don’t know the way, I would get lost in the hallways,” I replied, which (in and of itself) was true.

“Listen here, Guimarães,” the doctor said, handing me a cigarillo. “If something happens to this little fool, I have money stashed in Sierra Morena and more left in trust in Cadiz. We’ll go there, get it and flee to France.”

“But how will we get out of here?” I asked. “We don’t know the way.”

“I remember it,” Dr. Monardes assured me. “That’s the first thing I notice when I go anywhere.”

“But how will we flee to France? They will be looking for us everywhere!”

“Don’t worry about that,” the doctor replied. “No one who has money and knows how to use it is ever found, as long as he knows they are looking for him. All the Italians know that. And my father was Italian... Remember our friend Frampton? We’ll sneak out the same way.”

Frampton was that Englishman engaged in wholesale trade in Spain who was locked up in Cadiz by the Inquisition, but escaped and later translated Dr. Monardes’ book in England. Of course I remembered him, how could I not! I must admit, as strange as it may seem, at that moment I felt a joyful excitement. The thought of fleeing to France with Dr. Monardes’ gold aroused in me an unexpected surge of strength. Not that I meant him any harm, God forbid!, but fate works in mysterious ways: What would happen if, when we went to France, some calamity befell Dr. Monardes? I would be left with all the money. How much was it? Certainly quite a lot – the doctor was a celebrated personage with a huge practice, famous throughout the entirety of Spain, under one name or another. And how nice it is to live without working! I would even say that is the meaning of life. No work, no responsibilities, just your heap of gold and the pleasurable life! Not such a great meaning, I agree. But, then again, it’s all you really have in the world of Nature, and you should be real, shouldn’t you? You are either real or a fool.

At that moment my thoughts and our tense conversation were interrupted by a weak cough. It came from the young Felipe.

“Cigarillo!” Dr. Monardes cried.

At the next moment, both of us huffed and puffed with all our might like a stove in the Pyrenees in January. My lucky intuition again called and I stood close to the patient’s bed, so as to administer to him at closer range. Dr. Monardes instantly followed me. The young Felipe, in a half-stupefied state, opened his eyes slightly and despite his weakened condition, raised himself up on his elbows and continued coughing painfully, as if coughing up his entrails.

“He’ll faint from the cigarillo!” I said.

“Come on, come on,” Dr. Monardes replied. “Strike the iron while it’s hot!”

With these words he blew a thick, enormous stream of smoke, which looked impossible for the human mouth to contain, toward young Felipe's face.

Did I say cough out his entrails before? No, I should have said that now. For a moment I thought that the boy would disintegrate before my very eyes.

"I can pulpat!" I suggested, led once again by my intuition.

"Under no circumstances!" Dr. Monardes restrained me with his hand. "His stomach is completely empty."

Clearly, my lucky intuition had led me astray this time.

At that moment we heard panting and the sound of a heavy object being dragged down the hallway – it was our bundle, along with the padre.

"Bring the citronella," said the doctor.

I readied myself and when I opened the door I exhaled a thick stream of smoke right in the padre's face. He stepped back as if hit by a pear or some such thing.

"Thank you!" I said, but then thought to add: "Drag it inside."

The padre, bent double with coughing as well, pulled the bundle into the room. When I turned towards Felipe, he was already sitting up in bed and trying to look at us through his coughing fit. The doctor handed the padre the cigarillos and told him to carry them out, while he himself took the tincture of citronella, wetted sponge with it and held it under the boy's nose. I opened the barred window. A cold autumn breeze wafted over me. What a wonder Nature is, nonetheless! The cigarillos had an effect, of course, but with their help alone I doubt we would have succeeded. No matter what the doctor might say, I think that Nature within this boy had awakened and, led by her indestructible instinct for survival had urged him to come to. Something in her gears had rattled, some lever was pulled and the whole mechanism began turning, clattering, roaring, inaudible to us, since it was happening somewhere in the depths of his body, in that lower abyss, unlike the heavenly one, in that microcosm, and now there he was, wide awake, with a cleansed stomach, trembling from weakness and the cold autumn wind. Yes, the young Felipe was sitting turned to one side amidst the ruffled silk sheets of his bed, next to which Dr. Monardes was squatting, staring at his backside, and if I did not shut the window the boy would certainly catch a chill in no time in such a state, but in any case he did not have worms anymore, as Dr. Monardes announced with a gleeful ring to his

voice. Well, if he does catch cold, most likely someone else will treat him. We were here for the worms. Yet chills seized me myself so I quickly shut the window. That's the last thing I needed right then, some cold.

After that we ate rounds of beef and drank Madeira in the company of Felipe II himself, king of this failed empire – the only one in the world that has gone bankrupt, even as galleons loaded with gold from the New World and spices from the Indies arrive in its ports daily. Why is it bankrupt? Because of the armies of thugs defending Catholicism in the Netherlands, in Italy, against the Turks or in the Indies? They do matter, but not much. It's all because of theft, what else? *But how is it possible to steal so much?*, someone might ask. Someone who is poorly acquainted with human nature. Oh, it's possible, I would reply, and how! In principle, if something is bad, it's possible. And there was one person here, in particular, who could explain exactly how it all happens, although he would surely take that secret with him to the grave. There he was, Señor Vazquez de Leca – a Corsican by birth, who grew up a slave of Algerian pirates, and later became a citizen of Sevilla and now first minister. Yes, fate is all-powerful! They say he has made some people richer than the Spanish treasury. Sandoval. Espinosa. Not himself directly, he's not that stupid. They say the whole network starts right from the ports. He has an attentive and intelligent gaze, refined manners, deferential language. They also say that he has an iron fist, but that doesn't show from his folded white fingers, upon which there is only one – but what a one it is! – ruby ring. Spain is bankrupt, because the money has passed into someone's private possession. If the country needs money for something, they turn to Señor De Leca. He usually finds it. That's why he is first minister.

Meanwhile, Don Felipe was saying something about God and the Catholic Church. Señor De Leca was nodding his head gravely. Dr. Monardes was eating a beef round. I was drinking Madeira. The boy was asleep in his chambers, healthy – or at least worm-free. Everything was fine.

Travelling back home in our carriage, I shared some of my thoughts regarding Señor De Leca with Dr. Monardes. “A strange fellow, that Señor De Leca,” I said. “If everything I've heard about him is true, he's made some people very rich, but not himself.”

“What’s so strange about that?” Dr. Monardes replied. “Power is what tempts him, not riches. People are different. Those like him are the most refined examples of the human animal species. He wants to rule, to make decisions and to govern. Through wealth he has made many people dependent on him. He has bound them with a golden chain, which no one breaks, and now they are loyal to him, literally to the grave. In all cases and on every occasion. He can always count on them, as long as he diverts what they want their way. Everyone at court owes something or other to the merchant Espinosa. Espinosa fills his own pockets thanks to De Leca. If someone at court does what De Leca wants, he’ll keep his possessions. If he doesn’t, Espinosa will call in his debts. A fine system, works flawlessly.”

“But why does he bother with all that?” I asked, even though I understood very well. I simply wanted to hear the doctor’s opinion. “He could make himself very wealthy and sit back and enjoy the good life.”

“He doesn’t want to sit back and enjoy the good life, Guimarães,” the doctor replied. “Like I just said, people are different. He is not like you. One man wants wealth, the other wants power. There are even some who want yet a third thing, but let’s leave them aside. As far as our question is concerned, the difference is clear: Wealth makes you free, while power gives you the opportunity to rule everyone else. Sometimes the two are mutually exclusive and you must choose one at the expense of the other.”

“But why are they mutually exclusive?” I objected. “If I have a trading company, then I rule everyone in it.”

“Don’t be stupid, Guimarães,” the doctor replied, slightly irritated. “That’s not the same at all. I’m imagining what Señor De Leca must feel about all those who own trading companies and surely even about people like Cristobal de Sandoval and Espinosa as well. He feels a deep contempt for them. And I think he is precisely right. As long as he wields power, he will have everything he needs, in exactly the quantity he requires. Thus, he is *de facto* and in *functio* in the same situation as the rich, but with one serious advantage over them – he can destroy them at any moment. He can make it such that they lose their wealth and even their lives. But they cannot do the same to him.”

“Who knows?” I objected, now utterly serious. “If he starts persecuting some of these people, they could still say plenty of things about him.”

“But they can’t prove them,” the doctor replied. “If he has not diverted funds towards himself, then no tracks lead back to him. The worst that could happen to him is that he could lose his post due to suspicions. But the worst that could happen to them is that they could swing from the gallows. By the way, he has surely taken care of himself,” the doctor continued after a pause, “and if they really started digging things up, they would find evidence against him. But first, they would really have to start digging things up, and that wouldn’t be easy and usually doesn’t happen. Besides, who would do the digging? The one assigned the task may have dipped his paws in the honey as well, so guess whose side he’ll be on in such a case – Señor De Leca’s or the person accusing him? The more you think about, the more difficult the whole business looks.”

“Ye-s-s-s, indeed,” I drawled and fell silent.

We travelled in silence for some time. Then the doctor took out two cigarillos and gave me one. We kindled them.

“What’s going on, señores?” The coachman Jesús yelled from his box. “Did something break?”

“Don’t worry,” I replied. “It’s just the cigarillos crackling.”

The doctor blew a few smoke rings and said, “Many try to be like Señor De Leca, but very few succeed. As the Bible says: ‘Many are called, but few are chosen.’ Most come to ruin for want of sufficient intelligence, discipline, or simply luck.”

“Yet isn’t it strange,” I said, exhaling a stream of smoke towards the ceiling of the carriage, “that all these Spaniards are so loyal to a Corsican? Not that it matters. I’m simply pointing it out as a curiosity, as a bit of folk wisdom.”

“Well, whom should they be loyal to? To Don Felipe? What kind of Spaniard is Don Felipe? All of his relatives are in Vienna. No one here is a Spaniard, Guimarães. You are not a Spaniard, De Leca is not a Spaniard, Don Felipe is not a Spaniard, even I am not a Spaniard. Like I’ve told you, my father was Italian and my mother was a Jewess. In any case, there are no Spaniards in Spain. At one time the Moors lived here, but they’ve been chased out and no longer do. Now there are Castilians, Andalusians, Catalonians and so forth who have come from Lord knows where, but there are no Spaniards in Spain. Perhaps only the stablemen are Spaniards.”

“The stablemen are usually Portuguese,” I said.

“So there’s not a single one,” Dr. Monardes replied.

“But if that’s the case,” I said after a short pause, “then there are no Portuguese in Portugal, either, according to the same principles.”

“Not surprising,” the doctor replied.

“Yes, but I’m Portuguese.”

“Or at least that’s what you think,” Dr. Monardes nodded. “People are constantly thinking all sorts of things, which in most cases make no difference whatsoever, and your case is just such a one.”

“Señor,” I said, changing the subject. “You are not patriotic in the least.”

“Oh, on the contrary! I am very patriotic!” Dr. Monardes exclaimed. “At least in every practical sense that does not contradict sound reason,” he added after a short pause.

“But how could the two things possibly fit together?” The question was on the tip of my tongue when I remembered that it was not at all necessary for them to fit together, but since I had already opened my mouth, I changed the subject to the first thing that came to mind: “It’s amazing how you managed to build such a career, señor, being the son of a foreigner.”

The doctor studied me for a long time with an astonished and reproachful gaze.

“Guimarães,” he replied, “I’ve told you a hundred times. Don’t make me think you’ve lost your mind.”

“Yes, I know about the worms but I still can’t believe things happened just like that, that from such a lowly thing such magnificent results could follow. Such a solid practice...”

“I’ve never said that things happened just like that, Guimarães... Do you even listen to me at all?”

“Yes, señor, of course. I just feel like chatting,” I admitted. “To make the time go faster...”

“Ah, so that’s it... Worms are worms, my friend, and I really did work hard, but if I hadn’t married the daughter of Dr. Perez de Morales, I might still be rummaging through the bums of poor little brats for a pittance to this very day. But Dr. Morales left me a fine practice. And 3,000 ducats. I was his assistant, just as you are mine now. But unfortunately, all of my daughters are already married...”

“Don’t worry, señor,” I said, raising my hand. “Once I master the trade, everything else will fall into place on its own.”

“If you say so,” Dr. Monardes replied. “I’m glad you think so. That’s for the best in your situation. You know, of course, that my surgery is in the house on Calle da la Sierpes. But you don’t know that the house belonged to Dr. Morales.”

“Really?” I replied in sincere amazement.

“Yes. I took over his practice and inherited his surgery and since then things have taken off in a whole new way. I now have a completely different clientele, in most cases.”

“Yes,” I nodded. “Sandoval. Espinosa. The king himself, obviously.”

“Precisely. Yet despite this I would not have achieved any particular financial prosperity if I were not also involved in trade. I inherited this trait from my father, along with my interest in books. My father had a keen flair for business.”

“Yes, but you’ve achieved far more than he ever did.”

“That’s true,” Dr. Monardes concurred. “But he dealt in books, not in slaves. The slave trade is far more lucrative. And I must admit that in this respect, too, I have been lucky. Back in the day, Nunes de Herrera suggested we form a partnership for slave trading in the New World. You’ve seen Nunes de Herrera, right?”

“Once,” I said. “He had returned from Panama.”

“Ah, yes. May he rest in peace. Although it’s hard to believe about a person like him, the truth is that homesickness for the motherland tormented him. He suffered from nostalgia. If you ask me, it shortened his life, since he lived without any joy. He only seemed truly happy when he returned to Spain. Which happened only rarely. But he had no choice. Back then, when the trade was expanding, he had to move to Panama, which made things much easier. It was obvious that I could not go. I had my practice here. He was the one who had to go. Besides, he was the real businessman of the two of us. He started off with slaves, then expanded into gold and other goods. Believe what you will, Guimarães, but I could drop my practice tomorrow and still make enough from trade to feed a hundred beggars in Sevilla. And I owe this in large part to Señor Herrera. To you, I will leave my olive press, to remember me fondly by. It can easily feed four or five people.”

“I’m more interested in your real estate business, señor,” I replied.

The doctor shook his head.

“That may be the case,” he said. “But that business is more risky. Back when Don Felipe declared Sevilla the central customs house for all goods from the New World, the city expanded greatly and one could make lots of quick money in real estate, but now things have quieted down and the market is slower, if there’s even a market at all. People have changed. Before, when someone arrived, he looked to buy a house or land where he could build one, whereas now they come and sleep on the streets or wherever they happen to land. Just look at what’s happened. Sevilla has filled up with beggars. They roam the streets practically in droves. The ones who came first were civil servants, merchants, those kinds of people. But now they’re ne’er-do-wells from the villages and ruffraff of every stripe.”

“But your friend Cervantes says that Sevilla is a beggar’s paradise. Here we have the fattest, best-fed beggars in the world, according to him.”

“Ah,” Dr. Monardes waved dismissively. “Don’t go believing everything he says... The things he says surely landed him in prison – where he is now for theft.”

“And petty theft, at that,” I added.

“And petty theft, at that, precisely,” Dr. Monardes nodded in agreement. “Otherwise I wouldn’t have mentioned it. It’s...”

At that moment we heard the voice of Jesús the coachman, who always knew the way.

“Señores, Sevilla.” I looked out the window – indeed, the lights of Sevilla were visible in the distance, heaped into several piles in the night, surrounded by gloom like coals in a dark room. Whose room? And for what reason? Nature’s room, señor. For no apparent reason. Indeed, it would be strange for anything at all to appear in such a pitch-dark night.

“Hey, Jesús,” Dr. Monardes yelled suddenly. “Are you a Spaniard?”

“Of course!” Jesús replied. “Why wouldn’t I be?”

“Where are you from originally?”

“Where am I from originally? I guess I’ve got to be from Sevilla. I don’t know. I can’t remember.”

“And where is your father from?”

“Well, my father is a different story! He came from the Holy Lands, señor. Hence the name. If I’d been a girl, I would’ve been called Maria Immaculata.”

Dr. Monardes turned to me. “See? Not one. Not a single one.”

My sincerest thanks to Señor Dr. Da Silva for granting me the opportunity to sincerely express and so forth, etc.

What do these various churchmen, these so-called philosophers and other clever windbags, mean when they use the word “soul”? What is the soul, in their view? In response to this question they offer some complex and entirely unfathomable answers, some conundrums and other such mind-bogglers, which depend entirely on their unfathomableness combined with a profuse stream of words to convince you of their correctness. The intelligent person, however, quickly notes their vacuity and even their naiveté, as well as their utter lack of familiarity with and understanding of human nature. Dr. Da Silva has informed me that earlier in his work he has revealed the true medical opinions on the so-called “soul,” how it is a type of interaction and actio pro functio et junctio of the four bodily humours with the numerous organs and so forth. Thus, I will not expound on these arguments. I will merely note the utter indefensibility of belief in the soul from the point of view of everyday common sense. Let’s take as an example that whole rabble one sees in the streets of Sevilla – all those drunkards, bandits, Portuguese vagrants, streetwalkers, laborers, beggars, crooks, murderers, out-of-work sailors, hayseeds and so on and so forth. All of them, we are told, have souls. Very well, let us assume that I am willing to accept this. But then they tell us, on top of everything, that these souls of theirs are immortal! That is just too much! Even by the windbags’ own logic, this is clearly nonsense. However, I am a Renaissance man, a humanist. Such things cannot fool me. From their words it appears that God is some dustman who collects and preserves everything. What a concept! But no, they say, he does not collect them, but rather sends them to hell, where they burn for eternity. For eternity? First, I would venture to say that this is one and the same thing, i.e. those utterly useless, vacuous, ugly and sometimes even terrifying souls are still being preserved. If this were

the case, the whole Universe would soon be filled with a mob of such souls, it would start to resemble a spiritual junkyard. Second... Etc.

And another thing. They say, or rather de facto presuppose as nativum givenum, that each soul is valuable in and of itself. This is the height of inanity! What value could the soul of a killer have? If you find this example extreme, how much value could there really be in the soul of that whole multitude inhabiting the cities as well as the villages, and even in the so-called “ordinary person” – what value could his soul really have? None, I say. Even if the soul really existed, it would resemble everything else we see in nature and the world, which is either well or poorly made, either precious or worthless, with all the levels between them, as between gold and charcoal. The soul of a fool would be exactly as he is – i.e. a foolish soul, while the soul of a thief would be a thieving soul, the soul of a beggar a beggarly soul, and so on and so forth, etc. Ergo, the world would be full of foolish, mediocre, useless, evil souls, which no one has any need or use for and which are simply trash, things to be thrown away. They would be a huge majority, just like the people who have them. Could those clever windbags possibly imagine that all this rabble was created by the God they speak of? This only goes to show what foolish – or perhaps hypocritical and deceitful – souls they themselves have. And just as nature throws away bodies after they die, assimilating them and turning them to dust, so should God throw away those souls, turning them into nothing, as they have no value whatsoever. So nature will reject their bodies and God reject their souls, and that circle in the middle is what they call their life. The rejected ones are bold enough to claim they are God’s creation. It’s laughable! They hardly deserve the majesty of Nature, let alone the God they speak of. In Spain you’ll often hear it said: “I swear on my immortal soul!” Your immortal soul, did you say? It is most likely not worth a thing, my friend, and is entirely superfluous. The whole mistake begins here – they think that the soul is of value, and from there follows an entire series of mistaken conclusions. Whereas in reality, the soul, if it exists, could not possibly be anything particularly special – it would be something like the leaves on the trees, like drops of rain, the stones on the road or the grass in the field. In other words, it would simply be a part and functio of nature, something right alongside the rest, which in no way occupies any special place within the system of nature, as the churchmen and all philosophers since that madman Plato would

have you believe; something of no particular significance at all, simply a part of the great natural cycle of creation and destruction as an end in itself. Incidentally, despite the fact that this cycle is repetitive, nothing ever returns, any such claims are empty gibberish. Once you're gone, that's the end, it's over. There is no second time. Because Nature really does revolve, but not around your so-called "soul." She revolves around her own self.

And Plato really is a madman. A reader need only read his description of life in Athens during the Age of Atlantis to realize that he filled his writings with every more or less coherent fable that occurs to him and that taking his absurdities and ravings seriously constitutes a grave and laughable mistake. If all of his works were to disappear in an instant, this would be no loss whatsoever to humanity. Incidentally, I would argue that it would be no loss whatsoever to humanity even if it itself were to disappear. Humanity is unbreakable; in other words, and that's precisely what humanism is. Yet Plato did it great harm. He is the source of that utterly mistaken conception of man and his nature, which is also to blame for these meaningless formulations about the soul. I will not enter into detailed discussion of this, etc., suffice to say that from the medical point of view, man is simply a biological species, one of many, with certain abilities that differentiate him from the other animals, yet in general outlines and in his fundamental principles fully sharing their nature, which, by the way, is far more varied than we tend to realize. Although not every humanist would admit it, the truth is that man is simply a pipe— as are all biological species in their essence, with the exception of plants and minerals. Man is one of these creatures. A pipe, through which nature passes – it goes in through one side and out through the other. This is one of the ways Nature keeps herself in circulation, in eternal motion. (I hasten to add, however, that the tempting opposite suggestion, namely that Nature is a pipe through which man passes – going in through one side and out through the other – is not true! In principle, tempting things are not true. The most pitiful things are usually the closest to the truth, etc.) What soul? What immortality? Do they realize what they are saying? Does the pig that they gobble up on Christmas – as if to show through the connection of these two things what profound nonsense has pierced their minds – does the pig, I say, have a soul, and is it immortal? But no, they consider themselves something far more special, something entirely

different. Although they themselves may live like swine, and frequently do far more revolting, terrible and preposterous things than those good-natured animals. And of course, they are far more gluttonous. And incomparably more vain. This is the most terrifying of all the animals, I say, and it is no accident that it rules.