

Metamorphosis

*Penguin Island*

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St. Maël's Navigation on The Ocean of Ice.

THE Devil, having tucked his clothes up to his arm-pits, dragged the trough on the sand, and fitted the rigging in less than an hour.

As soon as the holy Maël had embarked, the vessel, with all its sails set, cleft through the waters with such speed that the coast was almost immediately out of sight. The old man steered to the south so as to double the Land's End, but an irresistible current carried him to the south-west. He went along the southern coast of Ireland and turned sharply towards the north. In the evening the wind freshened. In vain did Maël attempt to furl the sail. The vessel flew distractedly towards the fabulous seas.

By the light of the moon the immodest sirens of the North came around him with their hempen-colored hair, raising their white throats and their rose-tinted limbs out of the sea ; and beating the water into foam with their emerald tails, they sang in cadence :

Whither go'st thou, gentle Maël  
In thy trough distracted ?  
All distended is thy sail  
Like the breast of Juno  
When from it gushed the Milky Way.

For a moment their harmonious laughter followed him beneath the stars, but the vessel fled on, a hundred times more swiftly than the red ship of a Viking. And the petrels, surprised in their flight, clung with their feet to the hair of the holy man.

Soon a tempest arose full of darkness and groanings, and the trough, driven by a furious wind, flew like a sea-mew through the mist and the surge.

After a night of three times twenty-four hours the darkness was suddenly rent and the holy man discovered on the horizon a shore more dazzling than diamond. The coast rapidly grew larger, and soon by the glacial light of a torpid and sunken sun, Maël saw, rising above the waves, the silent streets of a white city, which, vaster than Thebes with its hundred gates, extended as far as the eye could see the ruins of its forum built of snow, its palaces of frost, its crystal arches, and its iridescent obelisks.

The ocean was covered with floating ice-bergs around which swam men of the sea of a wild yet gentle appearance. And Leviathan passed by hurling a column of water up to the clouds.

Moreover, on a block of ice which floated at the same rate as the stone trough there was seated a white bear holding her little one in her arms, and Maël heard her murmuring in a low voice this verse of Virgil, *Incipe parve puer*.

And full of sadness and trouble, the old man wept.

The fresh water had frozen and burst the barrel that contained it. And Maël was sucking pieces of ice to quench his thirst, and his food was bread dipped in dirty water. His beard and his hair were broken like glass. His habit was covered with a layer of ice and cut into him at every movement of his limbs. Huge waves rose up and opened their foaming jaws at the old man. Twenty times the boat was filled by masses of sea. And the ocean swallowed up the book of the Holy Gospels which the apostle guarded with extreme care in a purple cover marked with a golden cross.

Now on the thirtieth day the sea calmed. And lo ! with a frightful clamor of sky and waters a mountain of dazzling whiteness advanced towards the stone vessel. Maël steered to avoid it, but the tiller broke in his hands. To lessen the speed of his progress towards the rock he attempted to reef the sails, but when he tried to knot the reef-points the wind pulled them away from him and the rope seared his hands. He saw three demons with wings of black skin having hooks at their ends, who, hanging from the rigging, were puffing with their breath against the sails.

Understanding from this sight that the Enemy had governed him in all these things, he guarded himself by making the sign of the Cross. Immediately a furious gust of wind filled with the noise of sobs and howls struck the stone trough, carried off the mast with all the sails, and tore away the rudder and the stem.

The trough was drifting on the sea, which had now grown calm. The holy man knelt and gave thanks to the Lord who had delivered him from the snares of the demon. Then he recognized, sitting on a block of ice, the mother bear who had spoken during the storm. She pressed her beloved child to her bosom, and in her hand she held a purple book marked with a golden cross. Hailing the granite trough, she saluted the holy man with these words :

*“ Pax tibi Maël ”*

And she held out the book to him.

The holy man recognized his evangelistary, and, full of astonishment, he sang in the tepid air a hymn to the Creator and His creation.

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### The Baptism of The Pensuins

AFTER having drifted for an hour the holy man approached a narrow strand, shut in by steep mountains. He went along the coast for a whole day and a night, passing around the reef which formed an insuperable barrier. He discovered in this way that it was a round island in the middle of which rose a mountain crowned with clouds. He joyfully breathed the fresh breath of the moist air. Rain fell, and this was so pleasant that the holy man said to the Lord :

“ Lord, this is the island of tears, the island of contrition.”

The strand was deserted. Worn out with fatigue and hunger, he sat down on a rock in the hollow of which there lay some yellow eggs, marked with black spots, and about as large as those of a swan. But he did not touch them, saying :

“ Birds are the living praises of God. I should not like a single one of these praises to be lacking through me.”

And he munched the lichens which he tore from the crannies of the rocks.

The holy man had gone almost entirely round the island without meeting any inhabitants, when he came to a vast amphitheatre formed of black and red rocks whose summits became tinged with blue as they rose towards the clouds, and they were filled with sonorous cascades.

The reflection from the polar ice had hurt the old man’s eyes, but a feeble gleam of light still shone through his swollen eyelids. He distinguished animated forms which filled the rocks, in stages, like a crowd of men on the tiers of an amphitheatre. And at the same time, his ears, deafened by the continual noises of the sea, heard a feeble sound of voices. Thinking that what he saw were men living under the natural law, and that the Lord had sent him to teach them the Divine law, he preached the gospel to them.

Mounted on a lofty stone in the midst of the wild circus:

“ Inhabitants of this island,” said he, “ although you be of small stature, you look less like a band of fishermen and mariners than like the senate of a judicious republic. By your gravity, your silence, your tranquil deportment, you form on this wild rock an assembly comparable to the Conscript Fathers at Rome deliberating in the temple of Victory, or rather, to the philosophers of Athens disputing on the benches of the Areopagus. Doubtless you possess neither their science nor their genius, but perhaps in the sight of God you are their superiors. I believe that you are simple and good. As I went round your island I saw no image of murder, no sign of carnage, no enemies’ heads or scalps hung from a lofty pole or nailed to the doors of your villages. You appear to me to have no arts and not to work in metals. But your hearts are pure and your hands are innocent, and the truth will easily enter into your souls.”

Now what he had taken for men of small stature but of grave bearing were penguins whom the spring had gathered together, and who were ranged in couples on the natural steps of the rock, erect in the majesty of their large white bellies. From moment to moment they moved their winglets like arms, and uttered peaceful cries. They did not fear men, for they did not know them, and had never received any harm from them ; and there was in the monk a certain gentleness that reassured the most timid animals and that pleased these penguins extremely. With a friendly curiosity they turned towards him their little round eyes lengthened in front by a white oval spot that gave something odd and human to their appearance.

Touched by their attention, the holy man taught them the Gospel.

“ Inhabitants of this island, the early day that has just risen over your rocks is the image of the heavenly day that rises in your souls. For I bring you the inner light ; I bring you the light and heat of the soul. Just as the sun melts the ice of your mountains so Jesus Christ will melt the ice of your hearts.”

Thus the old man spoke. As everywhere throughout nature voice calls to voice, as all which breathes in the light of day loves alternate strains, these penguins answered the old man by the sounds of their throats. And their voices were soft, for it was the season of their loves.

The holy man, persuaded that they belonged to some idolatrous people and that in their own language they gave adherence to the Christian faith, invited them to receive baptism.

“ I think,” said he to them, “ that you bathe often, for all the hollows of the rocks are full of pure water, and as I came to your assembly I saw several of you plunging into these natural baths. Now purity of body is the image of spiritual purity.”

And he taught them the origin, the nature, and the effects of baptism.

“ Baptism,” said he to them, “ is Adoption, New Birth, Regeneration, Illumination.”

And he explained each of these points to them in succession.

Then, having previously blessed the water that fell from the cascades and recited the exorcisms, he baptized those whom he had just taught, pouring on each of their heads a drop of pure water and pronouncing the sacred words.

And thus for three days and three nights he baptized the birds.

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#### An Assembly in Paradise.

WHEN the baptism of the penguins was known in Paradise, it caused neither joy nor sorrow, but an extreme surprise. The Lord himself was embarrassed. He gathered an assembly of clerics and doctors, and asked them whether they regarded the baptism as valid.

“ It is void,” said St. Patrick.

“ Why is it void ?” asked St. Gal, who had evangelized the people of Cornwall and had trained the holy Maël for his apostolical labors.

“ The sacrament of baptism,” answered St. Patrick, “ is void when it is given to birds, just as the sacrament of marriage is void when it is given to a eunuch.”

But St. Gal replied :

“ What relation do you claim to establish between the baptism of a bird and the marriage of a eunuch ? There is none at all. Marriage is, if I may say so, a conditional, a contingent sacrament. The priest blesses an event beforehand ; it is evident that if the act is not consummated the benediction remains without effect. That is obvious. I have known on earth, in the town of Antrim, a rich man named Sadoc, who, living in concubinage with a woman, caused her to be the mother of nine children. In his old age, yielding to my reproofs, he consented to marry her, and I blessed their union. Unfortunately Sadoc’s great age prevented him from consummating the marriage. A short time afterwards he lost all his property, and Germaine (that was the name of the woman), not feeling herself able to endure poverty, asked for the annulment of a marriage which was no reality. The Pope granted her request, for it was just. So much for marriage. But baptism is conferred without restrictions or reserves of any kind. There is no doubt about it, what the penguins have received is a sacrament.”

Called to give his opinion, Pope St. Damasus expressed himself in these terms :

“ In order to know if a baptism is valid and will produce its result, that is to say, sanctification, it is necessary to consider who gives it and not who receives it. In truth, the sanctifying virtue of this sacrament results from the exterior act by which it is conferred, without the baptized person co-operating in his own sanctification by any personal act ; if it were otherwise it would not be administered to the newly born. And there is no need, in order to baptize, to fulfill any special condition ; it is not necessary to be in a state of grace ; it is sufficient to have the intention of doing what the Church does, to pronounce the consecrated words and to observe the prescribed forms. Now we cannot doubt that the venerable Maël has observed these conditions. Therefore the penguins are baptized.”

“ Do you think so ?” asked St. Guénolé. “ And what then do you believe that baptism really is ? Baptism is the process of regeneration by which man is born of water and of the spirit, for having entered the water covered with crimes, he goes out of it a neophyte, a new creature, abounding in the fruits of righteousness ; baptism is the seed of immortality ; baptism is the pledge of the resurrection ; baptism is the burying with Christ in His death and participation in His departure from the sepulcher. That is not a gift to bestow upon birds. Reverend Fathers, let us consider. Baptism washes away original sin ; now the penguins were not conceived in sin. It removes the penalty of sin ; now the penguins have not sinned. It produces grace and the gift of virtues, uniting Christians to Jesus Christ, as the members to the body, and it is obvious to the senses that penguins cannot acquire the virtues of confessors, of virgins, and of widows, or receive grace and be united to—”

St. Damasus did not allow him to finish.

“ That proves,” said he warmly, “ that the baptism was useless; it does not prove that it was not effective.”

“ But by this reasoning,” said St. Guénolé, “ one might baptize in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, by aspersion or immersion, not only a bird or a quadruped, but also an inanimate object, a statue, a table, a chair, etc. That animal would be Christian, that idol, that table would be Christian! It is absurd !”

St. Augustine began to speak. There was a great silence.

“ I am going,” said the ardent bishop of Hippo, “ to show you, by an example, the power of formulas. It deals, it is true, with a diabolical operation. But if it be established that formulas taught by the Devil have effect upon unintelligent animals or even on inanimate objects, how can we longer doubt that the effect of the sacramental formulas extends to the minds of beasts and even to inert matter ?

“ This is the example. There was during my lifetime in the town of Madaura, the birth-place of the philosopher Apuleius, a witch who was able to attract men to her chamber by burning a few of their hairs along with certain herbs upon her tripod, pronouncing at the same time certain words. Now one day when she wished by this means to gain the love of a young man, she was deceived by her maid, and instead of the young man’s hairs, she burned some hairs pulled from a leather bottle, made out of a goatskin that hung in a tavern. During the night the leather bottle, full of wine, capered through the town up to the witch’s door. This fact is undoubted. And in sacraments as in enchantments it is the form which operates. The effect of a divine formula cannot be less in power and extent than the effect of an infernal formula.”

Having spoken in this fashion the great St. Augustine sat down amidst applause.

One of the blessed, of an advanced age and having a melancholy appearance, asked permission to speak. No one knew him. His name was Probus, and he was not enrolled in the canon of the saints.

“ I beg the company’s pardon,” said he, “ I have no halo, and I gained eternal blessedness without any eminent distinction. But after what the great St. Augustine has just told you I believe it right to impart a cruel experience, which I had, relative to the conditions necessary for the validity of a sacrament. The bishop of Hippo is indeed right in what he said. A sacrament depends on the form ; its virtue is in its form ; its vice is in its form. Listen, confessors and pontiffs, to my woeful story. I was a priest in Rome under the rule of the Emperor Gordianus. Without desiring to recommend myself to you for any special merit, I may say that I exercised my priesthood with piety and zeal. For forty years I served the church of St. Modestus-beyond-the-Walls. My habits were regular. Every Saturday I went to a tavern-keeper called Barjas, who dwelt with his wine-jars under the Porta Capena, and from him I bought the wine that I consecrated daily throughout the week. During that long space of time I never failed for a single morning to consecrate the holy sacrifice of the mass. However, I had no joy, and it was with a heart oppressed by sorrow that, on the steps of the altar I used to ask, ‘ Why art thou so heavy, O my soul, and why art thou so disquieted within me ?’ The faithful whom I invited to the holy table gave me cause for affliction, for having, so to speak, the Host that I administered still upon their tongues, they fell again into sin just as if the sacrament had been without power or efficacy. At last I reached the end of my earthly trials, and falling asleep in the Lord, I awoke in this abode of the elect. I learned then from the mouth of the angel who brought me here, that Barjas, the tavern-keeper of the Porta Capena, had sold for wine a decoction of roots and barks in which there was not a single drop of the juice of the grape. I had been unable to transmute this vile brew into blood, for it was not wine, and wine alone is changed into the blood of Jesus Christ. Therefore all my consecrations were invalid, and unknown to us, my faithful and myself had for forty years been deprived of the sacrament and were in fact in a state of excommunication. This revelation threw me into a stupor which overwhelms me even today in this abode of bliss. I go all through Paradise without ever meeting a single one of those Christians whom formerly I admitted to the holy table in the basilica of the blessed Modestus. Deprived of the bread of angels, they easily gave way to the most abominable vices, and they have all gone to hell. It gives me some satisfaction to think that Barjas, the tavern-keeper, is damned. There is in these things a logic worthy of the author of all logic. Nevertheless my unhappy example proves that it is sometimes inconvenient that form should prevail over essence in the sacraments, and I humbly ask, Could not eternal wisdom remedy this ?”

“ No,” answered the Lord. “ The remedy would be worse than the disease. It would be the ruin of the priesthood if essence prevailed over form in the laws of salvation.”

“ Alas! Lord,” sighed the humble Probus. “ Be persuaded by my humble experience ; as long as you reduce your sacraments to formulas your justice will meet with terrible obstacles.”

“ I know that better than you do,” replied the Lord. “ I see in a single glance both the actual problems which are difficult, and the future problems which will not be less difficult. Thus I can foretell that when the sun will have turned round the earth two hundred and forty times more. . . .”

“ Sublime language,” exclaimed the angels.

“ And worthy of the creator of the world,” answered the pontiffs.

“ It is,” resumed the Lord, “ a manner of speaking in accordance with my old cosmogony and one which I cannot give up without losing my immutability. . . .

“ After the sun, then, will have turned another two hundred and forty times round the earth, there will not be a single cleric left in Rome who knows Latin. When they sing their litanies in the churches people will invoke Orichel, Roguel, and Totichel, and, as you know, these are devils and not angels. Many robbers desiring to make their communions, but fearing that before obtaining pardon they would be forced to give up the things they had robbed to the Church, will make their confessions to traveling priests, who, ignorant of both Italian and Latin, and only speaking the *patois* of their village, will go through cities and towns selling the remission of sins for a base price, often for a bottle of wine. Probably we shall not be inconvenienced by those absolutions as they will want contrition to make them valid, but it may be that their baptisms will cause us some embarrassment. The priests will become so ignorant that they will baptize children *in nomine patria et filia et spirita sancta*, as Louis de Potter will take a pleasure in relating in the third volume of his ‘ Philosophical, Political, and Critical History of Christianity.’ It will be an arduous question to decide on the validity of such baptisms ; for even if in my sacred writings I tolerate a Greek less elegant than Plato’s and a scarcely Ciceronian Latin, I cannot possibly admit a piece of pure *patois* as a liturgical formula. And one shudders when one thinks that millions of new-born babes will be baptized by this method. But let us return to our penguins.”

“ Your divine words, Lord, have already led us back to them,” said St. Gal. “ In the signs of religion and the laws of salvation form necessarily prevails over essence, and the validity of a sacrament solely depends upon its form. The whole question is whether the penguins have been baptized with the proper forms. Now there is no doubt about the answer.”

The fathers and the doctors agreed, and their perplexity became only the more cruel.

“ The Christian state,” said St. Cornelius, “ is not without serious inconveniences for a penguin. In it the birds are obliged to work out their own salvation. How can they succeed ? The habits of birds are, in many points, contrary to the commandments of the Church, and the penguins have no reason for changing theirs. I mean that they are not intelligent enough to give up their present habits and assume better.”

“ They cannot,” said the Lord ; “ my decrees prevent them.”

“ Nevertheless,” resumed St. Cornelius, “ in virtue of their baptism their actions no longer remain indifferent. Henceforth they will be good or bad, susceptible of merit or of demerit.”

“ That is precisely the question we have to deal with,” said the Lord.

“ I see only one solution,” said St. Augustine. “ The penguins will go to hell.”

“ But they have no soul,” observed St. Irenaeus.

“ It is a pity,” sighed Tertullian.

“ It is indeed,” resumed St. Gal. “ And I admit that my disciple, the holy Maël, has, in his blind zeal, created great theological difficulties for the Holy Spirit and introduced disorder into the economy of mysteries.”

“ He is an old blunderer,” cried St. Adjutor of Alsace, shrugging his shoulders.

But the Lord cast a reproachful look on Adjutor.

“ Allow me to speak,” said he ; “ the holy Maël has not intuitive knowledge like you, my blessed ones. He does not see me. He is an old man burdened by infirmities ; he is half deaf and three parts blind. You are too severe on him. However, I recognize that the situation is an embarrassing one.”

“ Luckily it is but a passing disorder,” said St. Irenaeus. “ The penguins are baptized, but their eggs are not, and the evil will stop with the present generation.”

“ Do not speak thus, Irenaeus my son,” said the Lord. “ There are exceptions to the laws that men of science lay down on the earth because they are imperfect and have not an exact application to nature. But the laws that I establish are perfect and suffer no exception. We must decide the fate of the baptized penguins without violating any divine law, and in a manner conformable to the decalogue as well as to the commandments of my Church.”

“ Lord,” said St. Gregory Nazianzen, “ give them an immortal soul.”

“ Alas! Lord, what would they do with it,” sighed Lactantius. “ They have not tuneful voices to sing your praises. They would not be able to celebrate your mysteries.”

“ Without doubt,” said St. Augustine, “ they would not observe the divine law.”

“ They could not,” said the Lord.

“ They could not,” continued St. Augustine. “ And if, Lord, in your wisdom, you pour an immortal soul into them, they will burn eternally in hell in virtue of your adorable decrees. Thus will the transcendent order, that this old Welshman has disturbed, be re-established.”

“ You propose a correct solution to me, son of Monica,” said the Lord, “ and one that accords with my wisdom. But it does not satisfy my mercy. And, although in my essence I am immutable, the longer I endure, the more I incline to mildness. This change of character is evident to anyone who reads my two Testaments.”

As the discussion continued without much light being thrown upon the matter and as the blessed showed a disposition to keep repeating the same thing, it was decided to consult St. Catherine of Alexandria. This is what was usually done in such cases. St. Catherine while on earth had confounded fifty very learned doctors. She knew Plato’s philosophy in addition to the Holy Scriptures, and she also possessed a knowledge of rhetoric.

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An Assembly in Paradise.

*(Continuation and End)*

ST. CATHERINE entered the assembly, her head encircled by a crown of emeralds, sapphires, and pearls, and she was clad in a robe of cloth of gold. She carried at her side a blazing wheel, the image of her persecutors, the one whose fragments had struck her persecutors.

The Lord having invited her to speak, she expressed herself in these terms:

“ Lord, in order to solve the problem you deign to submit to me I shall not study the habits of animals in general nor those of birds in particular. I shall only remark to the doctors, confessors, and pontiffs gathered in this assembly that the separation between man and animal is not complete since there are monsters who proceed from both. Such are chimeras—half nymphs and half serpents ; such are the three Gorgons and the Capripeds ; such are the Scyllas and the Sirens who sing in the sea. These have a woman’s breast and a fish’s tail. Such also are the Centaurs, men down to the waist and the remainder horses. They are a noble race of monsters. One of them, as you know, was able, guided by the light of reason alone, to direct his steps towards eternal blessedness, and you sometimes see his heroic bosom prancing on the clouds. Chiron, the Centaur, deserved for his works on the earth to share the abode of the blessed; he it was who gave Achilles his education ; and that young hero, when he left the Centaur’s hands, lived for two years, dressed as a young girl, among the daughters of King Lycomedes. He shared their games and their bed without allowing any suspicion to arise that he was not a young virgin like them. Chiron, who taught him such good morals, is, with the Emperor Trajan, the only righteous man who obtained celestial glory by following the law of nature. And yet he was but half human.

“ I think I have proved by this example that, to reach eternal blessedness, it is enough to possess some parts of humanity, always on the condition that they are noble. And what Chiron, the Centaur, could obtain without having been regenerated by baptism, would not the

penguins deserve too if they became half penguins and half men ? That is why, Lord, I entreat you to give old Maël’s penguins a human head and breast so that they can praise you worthily. And grant them also an immortal soul but one of small size.”

Thus Catherine spoke, and the fathers, doctors, confessors, and pontiffs heard her with a murmur of approbation.

But St. Anthony, the Hermit, arose and stretching two red and knotty arms towards the Most High :

“ Do not so, O Lord God,” he cried, “ in the name of your holy Paraclete, do not so !”

He spoke with such vehemence that his long white beard shook on his chin like the empty nose-bag of a hungry horse.

“ Lord, do not so. Birds with human heads exist already. St. Catherine has told us nothing new.”

“ The imagination groups and compares ; it never creates,” replied St. Catherine dryly.

“ They exist already,” continued St. Anthony, who would listen to nothing. “ They are called harpies, and they are the most obscene animals in creation. One day as I was having supper in the desert with the Abbot St. Paul, I placed the table outside my cabin under an old sycamore tree. The harpies came and sat in its branches ; they deafened us with their shrill cries and cast their excrement over all our food. The clamor of the monsters prevented me from listening to the teaching of the Abbot St. Paul, and we ate birds’ dung with our bread and lettuces. Lord, it is impossible to believe that harpies could give thee worthy praise.

“ Truly in my temptations I have seen many hybrid beings, not only women-serpents and women-fishes, but beings still more confusedly formed such as men whose bodies were made out of a pot, a bell, a clock, a cupboard full of food and crockery, or even out of a house with doors and windows through which people engaged in their domestic tasks could be seen.

Eternity would not suffice were I to describe all the monsters that assailed me in my solitude, from whales rigged like ships to a shower of red insects which changed the water of my fountain into blood. But none were as disgusting as the harpies whose offal polluted the leaves of my sycamore.”

“ Harpies,” observed Lactantius, “ are female monsters with birds’ bodies. They have a woman’s head and breast. Their forwardness, their shamelessness, and their obscenity proceed from their female nature as the poet Virgil demonstrated in his ‘ Æneid.’ They share the curse of Eve.”

“ Let us not speak of the curse of Eve,” said the Lord. “ The second Eve has redeemed the first.”

Paul Orosius, the author of a universal history that Bossuet was to imitate in later years, arose and prayed to the Lord :

“ Lord, hear my prayer and Anthony’s. Do not make any more monsters like the Centaurs, Sirens, and Fauns, whom the Greeks, those collectors of fables, loved. You will derive no satisfaction from them. Those species of monsters have pagan inclinations and their double nature does not dispose them to purity of morals.”

The bland Lactantius replied in these terms:

“ He who has just spoken is assuredly the best historian in Paradise, for Herodotus, Thucydides, Polybius, Livy, Velleius Paterculus, Cornelius Nepos, Suetonius, Manetho, Diodorus Siculus, Dion Cassius, and Lampridius are deprived of the sight of God, and Tacitus suffers in hell the torments that are reserved for blasphemers. But Paul Orosius does not know heaven as well as he knows the earth, for he does not seem to bear in mind that the angels, who proceed from man and bird, are purity itself.”

“ We are wandering,” said the Eternal. “ What have we to do with all those centaurs, harpies, and angels ? We have to deal with penguins.”

“ You have spoken to the point, Lord,” said the chief of the fifty doctors, who, during their mortal life had been confounded by the Virgin of Alexandria, “ and I dare express the opinion that, in order to put an end to the scandal by which heaven is now stirred, old Maël’s penguins should, as St. Catherine who confounded us has proposed, be given half of a human body with an eternal soul proportioned to that half.”

At this speech there arose in the assembly a great noise of private conversations and disputes of the doctors. The Greek fathers argued with the Latins concerning the substance, nature, and dimensions of the soul that should be given to the penguins.

“ Confessors and pontiffs,” exclaimed the Lord, “ do not imitate the conclaves and synods of the earth. And do not bring into the Church Triumphant those violences that trouble the Church Militant. For it is but too true that in all the councils held under the inspiration of my spirit, in Europe, in Asia, and in Africa, fathers have torn the beards and scratched the eyes of other fathers. Nevertheless they were infallible, for I was with them.”

Order being restored, old Hernias arose and slowly uttered these words :

“ I will praise you, Lord, for that you caused my mother, Saphira, to be born amidst your people, in the days when the dew of heaven refreshed the earth which was in travail with its Savior. And I will praise you, Lord, for having granted to me to see with my mortal eyes the Apostles of your divine Son. And I will speak in this illustrious assembly because you have willed that truth should proceed out of the mouths of the humble, and I will say : ‘ Change these penguins to men. It is the only determination conformable to your justice and your mercy.’ ”

Several doctors asked permission to speak, others began to do so. No one listened, and all the confessors were tumultuously shaking their palms and their crowns.

The Lord, by a gesture of his right hand, appeased the quarrels of his elect.

“ Let us not deliberate any longer,” said he. “ The opinion broached by gentle old Hermas is the only one conformable to my eternal designs. These birds will be changed into men. I foresee in this several disadvantages. Many of those men will commit sins they would not have committed as penguins. Truly their fate through this change will be far less enviable than if they had been without this baptism and this incorporation into the family of Abraham. But my foreknowledge must not encroach upon their free will.

“ In order not to impair human liberty, I will be ignorant of what I know, I will thicken upon my eyes the veils I have pierced, and in my blind clear-sightedness I will let myself be surprised by what I have foreseen.”

And immediately calling the archangel Raphael :

“ Go and find the holy Maël,” said he to him ; “ inform him of his mistake and tell him, armed with my Name, to change these penguins into men.”

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### Metamorphosis of The Penguins.

THE archangel, having gone down into the Island of the Penguins, found the holy man asleep in the hollow of a rock surrounded by his new disciples. He laid his hand on his shoulder and, having waked him, said in a gentle voice :

“ Maël, fear not !”

The holy man, dazzled by a vivid light, inebriated by a delicious odor, recognized the angel of the Lord, and prostrated himself with his forehead on the ground.

The angel continued:

“ Maël, know thy error, believing that thou wert baptizing children of Adam thou hast baptized birds ; and it is through thee that penguins have entered into the Church of God.”

At these words the old man remained stupefied.

And the angel resumed :

“ Arise, Maël, arm thyself with the mighty Name of the Lord, and say to these birds, ‘ Be ye men !’

And the holy Maël, having wept and prayed, armed himself with the mighty Name of the Lord and said to the birds :

“ Be ye men !”

Immediately the penguins were transformed. Their foreheads enlarged and their heads grew round like the dome of St. Maria Rotunda in Rome.

Their oval eyes opened more widely on the universe ; a fleshy nose clothed the two defts of their nostrils ; their beaks were changed into mouths, and from their mouths went forth speech ; their necks grew short and thick ; their wings became arms and their claws legs ; a restless soul dwelt within the breast of each of them.

However, there remained with them some traces of their first nature. They were inclined to look sideways ; they balanced themselves on their short thighs ; their bodies were covered with fine down.

And Mael gave thanks to the Lord, because he had incorporated these penguins into the family of Abraham.

But he grieved at the thought that he would soon leave the island to come back no more, and that perhaps when he was far away the faith of the penguins would perish for want of care like a young and tender plant.

And he formed the idea of transporting their island to the coasts of Armorica.

“ I know not the designs of eternal Wisdom,” said he to himself. “ But if God wills that this island be transported, who could prevent it ?”

And the holy man made a very fine cord about forty feet long out of the flax of his stole. He fastened one end of the cord round a point of rock that jutted up through the sand of the shore and, holding the other end of the cord in his hand, he entered the stone trough.

The trough glided over the sea and towed Penguin Island behind it ; after nine days’ sailing it approached the Breton coast, bringing the island with it.

Penguin Island (1908)

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