

The Death of France



Landscape from Jura, Gustave Courbet, 1868

Heathen darkness
Hovers over France,
Whose kings called themselves
Most Christian, once.
Unbelief, cacodoxy,
And Islam tear
Her flesh and rip
Her tender bowels.
She writhes and shudders
In her agony;
She cries aloud
To her self-made trinity –

Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité –
But it brings her no relief.

Deep within
The Jura Mountains
Two lantern-lights
Still flicker,
Lit long ago
By the Holy Ghost
In the first flowering
Of the Gallican Church:
The glorious
Ascetic strivers
St Lupicinus
And his younger brother
St Romanus.

By the Cross and their prayers
The demons were driven
From the rocky crags.
The roiling passions, too,
Through fasting and modesty,
Were calmed inside
The caverns of their hearts.
Having found healing
For themselves,
They were able to give it
Also to others,
Curing even
Vile leprosy
With a simple touch.

From them, the sweet fragrance
Of monastic life
Spread across the land.
But who speaks now of them?

Their names, long forgotten.

The soul of France is still,
The suffocating shadow
Of Death approaching her.
With trembling, watery eyes
She looks once more
Towards the Jura,
Where the two brothers,
Radiating warm streams
Of golden, crystal Light,
Reach out their hands to her.
She weakly lifts
A withered hand;
The demons lunge in anger . . .

The nations, anxious,
Await the outcome
Of the fearsome struggle.