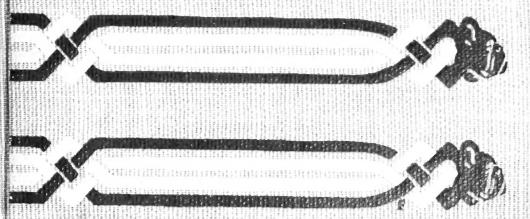


THUDOG

MAVRICE MAETERLINCK





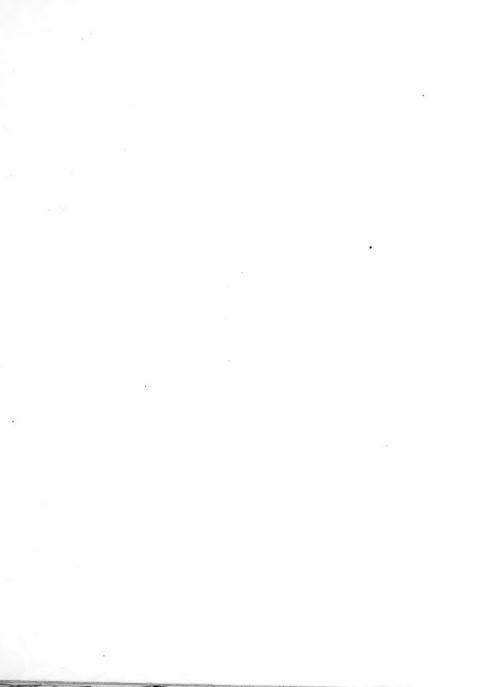
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OVR FRIEND, THE DOG





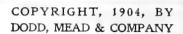


OVR FRIEND THE DOG 69

MAVRICE MAETERLINCK
Author of THE LIFE OF THE BEE etc.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS by PAVL J. MEYLAN and DECORATIONS by CHARLES B. FALLS:

NEW YORK DODD, MEAD & COMPANY 1905



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I

HAVE lost, within these last few days, a little bull-dog. He had just completed the sixth month of his brief existence. He had no history. His intelligent eyes opened to look out upon the world, to love mankind, then closed again on the cruel secrets of death.

The friend who presented me

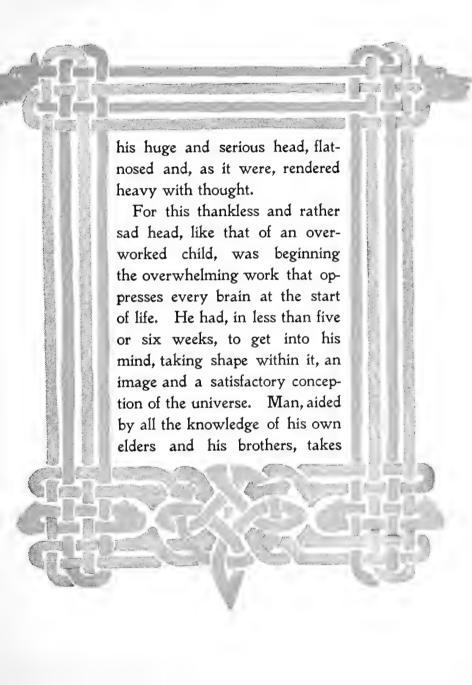
with him had given him, perhaps by antiphrasis, the startling name of Pelléas. Why rechristen him? For how can a poor dog, loving, devoted, faithful, disgrace the name of a man or an imaginary hero?

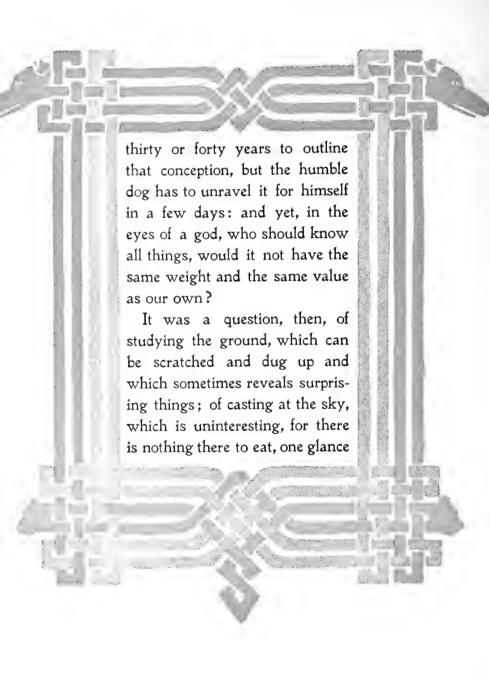
Pelléas had a great bulging, powerful forehead, like that of Socrates or Verlaine; and, under a little black nose, blunt as a churlish assent, a pair of large hanging and symmetrical chops, which made his head a sort of massive, obstinate, pensive and three-cor-

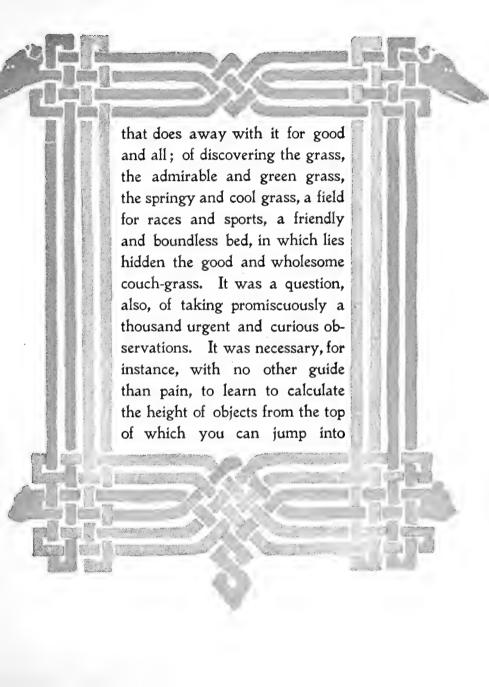
nered menace. He was beautiful after the manner of a beautiful, natural monster that has complied strictly with the laws of its species. And what a smile of attentive obligingness, of incorruptible innocence, of affectionate submission, of boundless gratitude and total self-abandonment lit up, at the least caress, that adorable mask of ugliness! Whence exactly did that smile emanate? From the ingenuous and melting eyes? From the ears pricked up to catch the words of man? From

the forehead that unwrinkled to appreciate and love, or from the stump of a tail that wriggled at the other end to testify to the intimate and impassioned joy that filled his small being, happy once more to encounter the hand or the glance of the god to whom he surrendered himself?

Pelléas was born in Paris, and I had taken him to the country. His bonny fat paws, shapeless and not yet stiffened, carried slackly through the unexplored pathways of his new existence





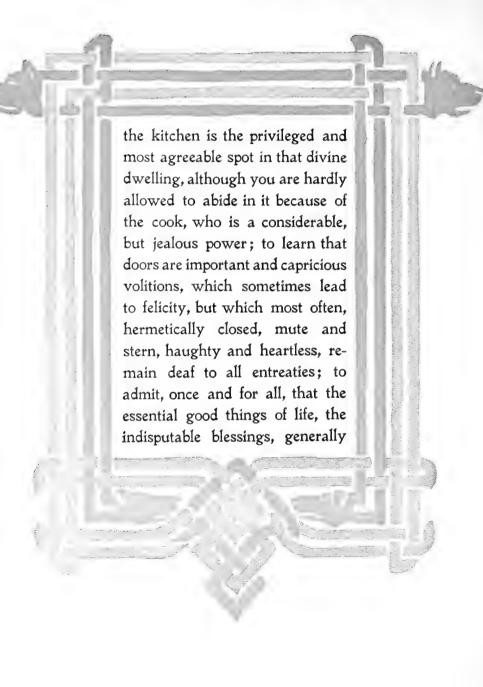


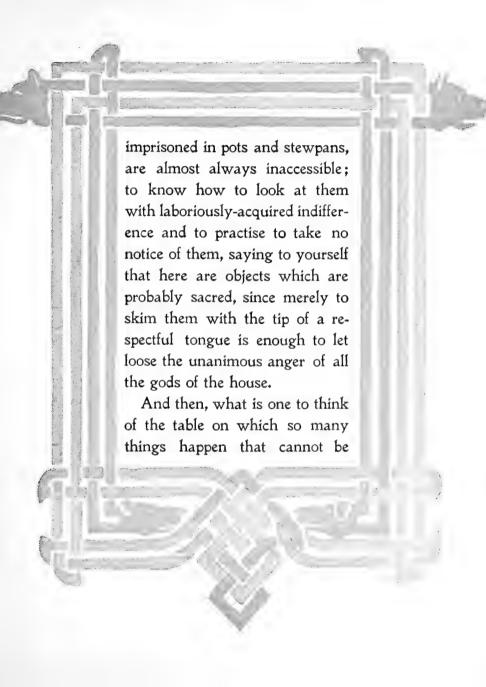
space; to convince yourself that it is vain to pursue birds who fly away and that you are unable to clamber up trees after the cats who defy you there; to distinguish between the sunny spots where it is delicious to sleep and the patches of shade in which you shiver; to remark with stupe-faction that the rain does not fall inside the houses, that water is cold, uninhabitable and dangerous, while fire is beneficent at a distance, but terrible when you come too near; to observe that





the meadows, the farm-yards and sometimes the roads are haunted by giant creatures with threatening horns, creatures good-natured, perhaps, and, at any rate, silent, creatures who allow you to sniff at them a little curiously without taking offence, but who keep their real thoughts to themselves. It was necessary to learn, as the result of painful and humiliating experiment, that you are not at liberty to obey all nature's laws without distinction in the dwelling of the gods; to recognize that



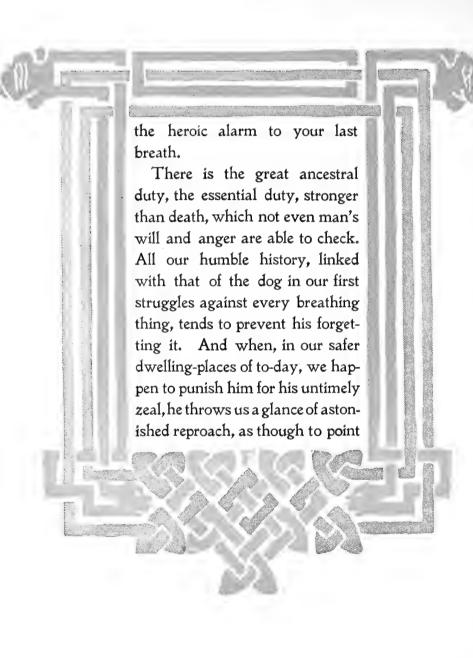


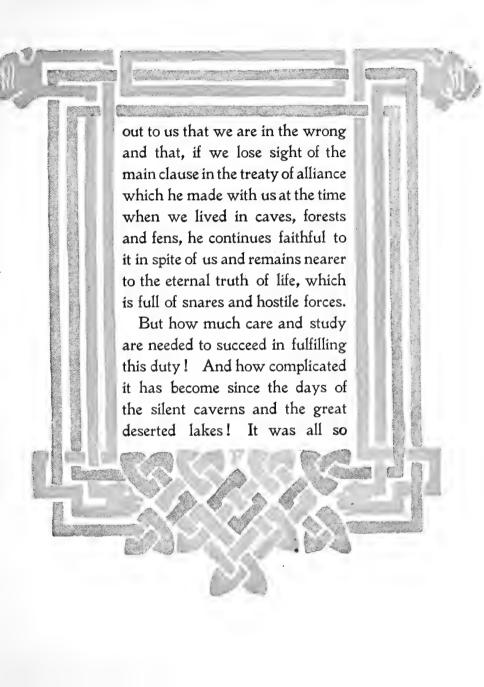
guessed: of the derisive chairs on which one is forbidden to sleep: of the plates and dishes that are empty by the time that one can get at them: of the lamp that drives away the dark? . . . How many orders. dangers. prohibitions. problems, enigmas has one not to classify in one's overburdened memory! . . . And how to reconcile all this with other laws, other enigmas, wider and more imperious, which one bears within one's self, within one's instinct, which spring up and develop from one hour to the other, which come from the depths of time and the race, invade the blood, the muscles and the nerves and suddenly assert themselves more irresistibly and more powerfully than pain, the word of the master himself, or the fear of death?

Thus, for instance, to quote only one example, when the hour of sleep has struck for men, you have retired to your hole, surrounded by the darkness, the silence and the formidable solitude of the night. All is sleep in the

master's house. You feel yourself very small and weak in the
presence of the mystery. You
know that the gloom is peopled
with foes who hover and lie in
wait. You suspect the trees, the
passing wind and the moonbeams.
You would like to hide, to suppress yourself by holding your
breath. But still the watch must
be kept; you must, at the least
sound, issue from your retreat,
face the invisible and bluntly disturb the imposing silence of the
earth, at the risk of bringing down

the whispering evil or crime upon yourself alone. Whoever the enemy be, even if he be man, that is to say, the very brother of the god whom it is your business to defend, you must attack him blindly, fly at his throat, fasten your perhaps sacrilegious teeth into human flesh, disregard the spell of a hand and voice similar to those of your master, never be silent, never attempt to escape, never allow yourself to be tempted or bribed and, lost in the night without help, prolong





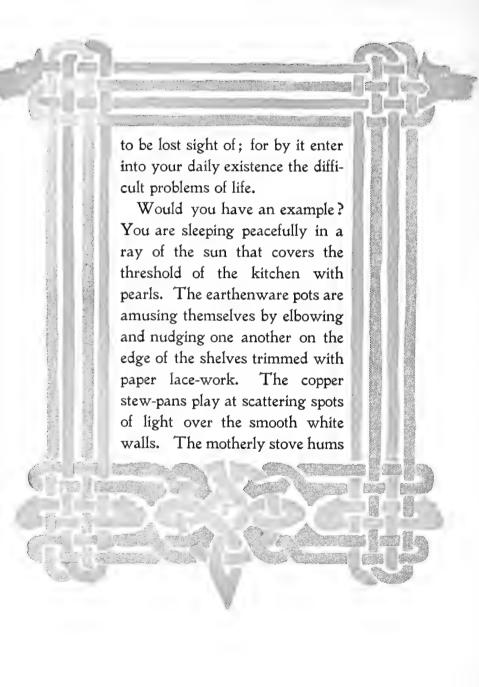
The lonely hollow opened upon the side of the hill, and all that approached, all that moved on the horizon of the plains or woods, was the unmistakable enemy.

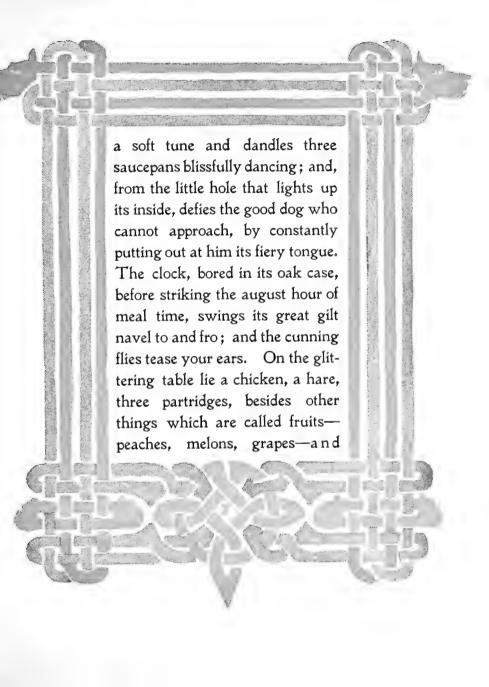
... But to-day you can no longer tell.

... You have to acquaint yourself with a civilization of which you disapprove, to appear to understand a thousand incomprehensible things.

Thus, it seems evident that henceforth the whole world no longer belongs to the master, that his property con-

forms to unintelligible limits. . . . It becomes necessary, therefore, first of all to know exactly where the sacred domain begins and ends. Whom are you to suffer, whom to stop? . . . There is the road by which every one, even the poor, has the right to pass. Why? You do not know; it is a fact which you deplore, but which you are bound to accept. Fortunately, on the other hand, here is the fair path which none may tread. This path is faithful to the sound traditions; it is not



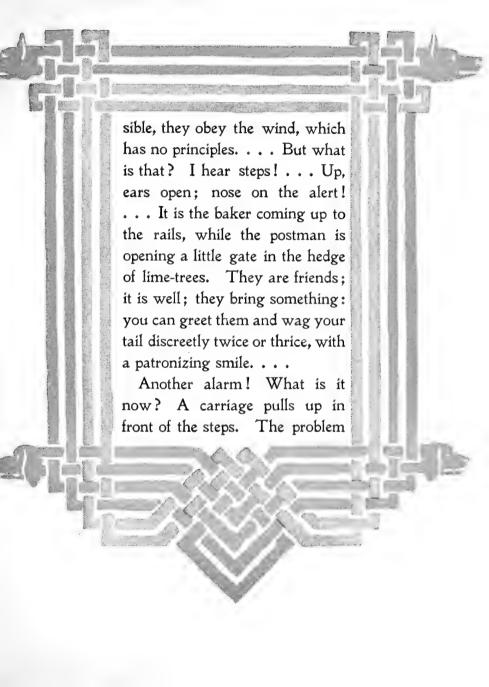


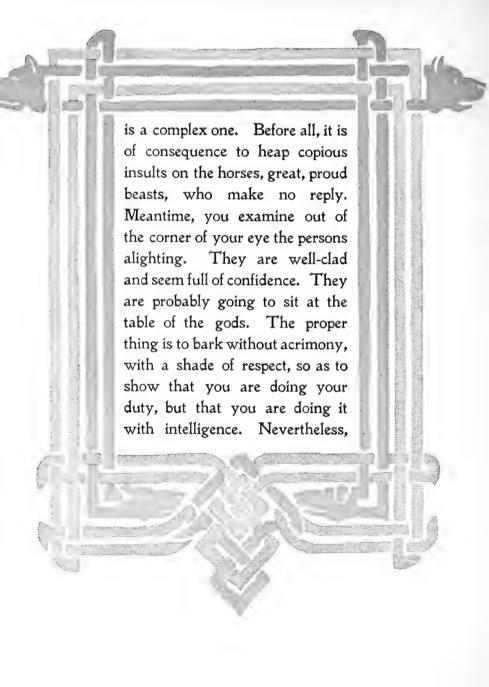
which are all good for nothing. The cook guts a big silver fish and throws the entrails (instead of giving them to you!) into the dust-bin. Ah, the dust-bin! Inexhaustible treasury, receptacle of windfalls, the jewel of the house! You shall have your share of it, an exquisite and surreptitious share; but it does not do to seem to know where it is. You are strictly forbidden to rummage in it. Man in this way prohibits many pleasant things, and life would be dull indeed and your

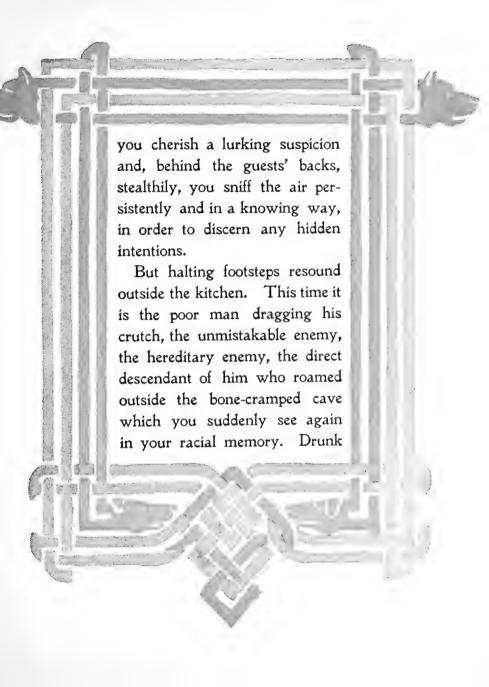
days empty if you had to obey all the orders of the pantry, the cellar and the dining-room. Luckily, he is absent-minded and does not long remember the instructions which he lavishes. He is easily deceived. You achieve your ends and do as you please, provided you have the patience to await the hour. You are subject to man, and he is the one god: but you none the less have your own personal, exact and imperturbable morality, which proclaims aloud that illicit acts become most lawful

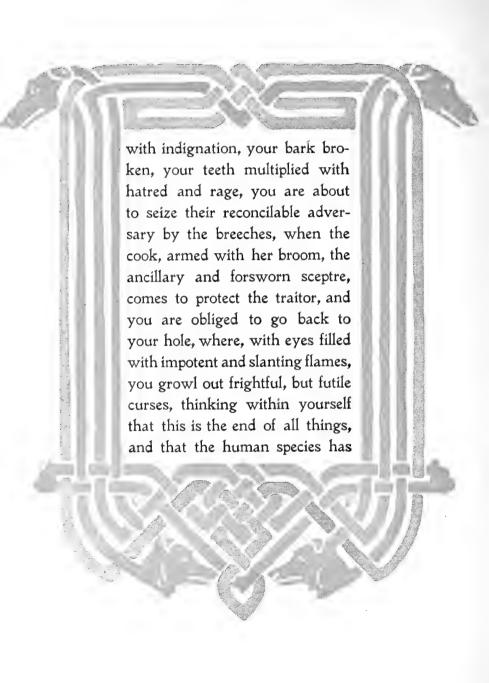
through the very fact that they are performed without the master's knowledge. Therefore, let us close the watchful eye that has seen. Let us pretend to sleep and to dream of the moon. . . .

Hark! A gentle tapping at the blue window that looks out on the garden! What is it? Nothing; a bough of hawthorn that has come to see what we are doing in the cool kitchen. Trees are inquisitive and often excited; but they do not count, one has nothing to say to them, they are irrespon-









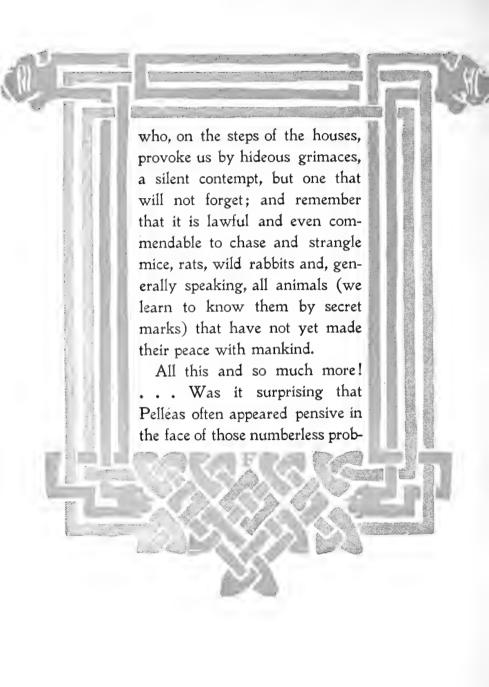
lost its notion of justice and injustice. . . .

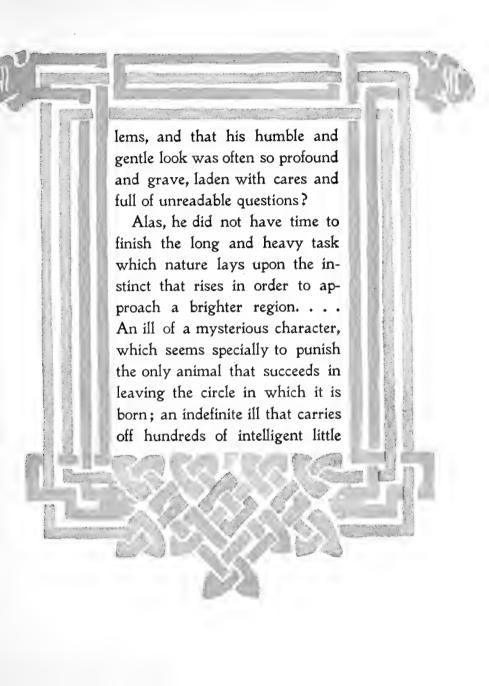
Is that all? Not yet; for the smallest life is made up of innumerous duties, and it is a long work to organize a happy existence upon the borderland of two such different worlds as the world of beasts and the world of men. How should we fare if we had to serve, while remaining within our own sphere, a divinity, not an imaginary one, like to ourselves, because the offspring of our own brain, but a god actually

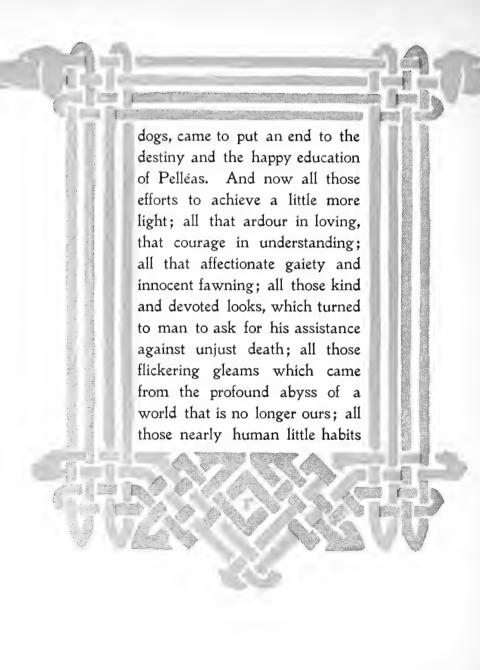
visible, ever present, ever active and as foreign, as superior to our being as we are to the dog?

We now, to return to Pelléas, know pretty well what to do and how to behave on the master's premises. But the world does not end at the house-door, and, beyond the walls and beyond the hedge, there is a universe of which one has not the custody, where one is no longer at home, where relations are changed. How are we to stand in the street, in the fields, in the market-place, in the

shops? In consequence of difficult and delicate observations, we understand that we must take no notice of passers-by; obey no calls but the master's; be polite, with indifference, to strangers who pet us. Next, we must conscientiously fulfil certain obligations of mysterious courtesy toward our brothers the other dogs; respect chickens and ducks; not appear to remark the cakes at the pastry-cooks, which spread themselves insolently within reach of the tongue; show to the cats,







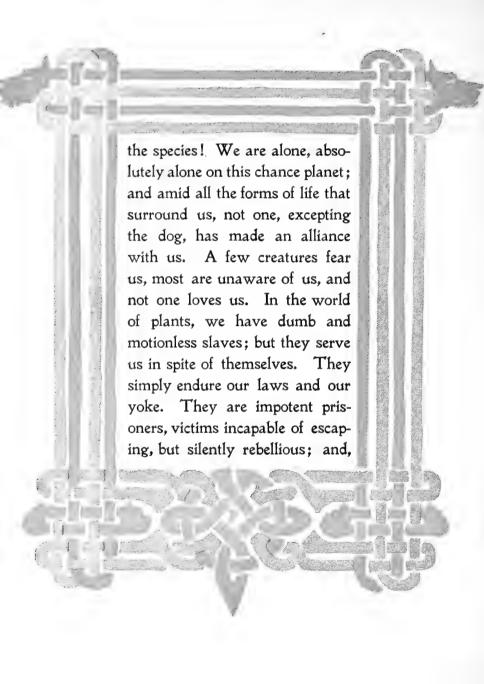


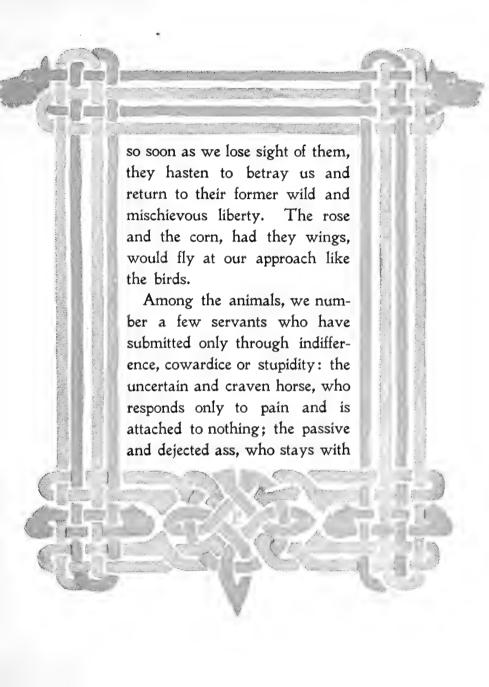


lie sadly in the cold ground, under a flowering elder-tree, in a corner of the garden.

П

Man loves the dog, but how much more ought he to love it if he considered, in the inflexible harmony of the laws of nature, the sole exception, which is that love of a being that succeeds in piercing, in order to draw closer to us, the partitions, every elsewhere impermeable, that separate

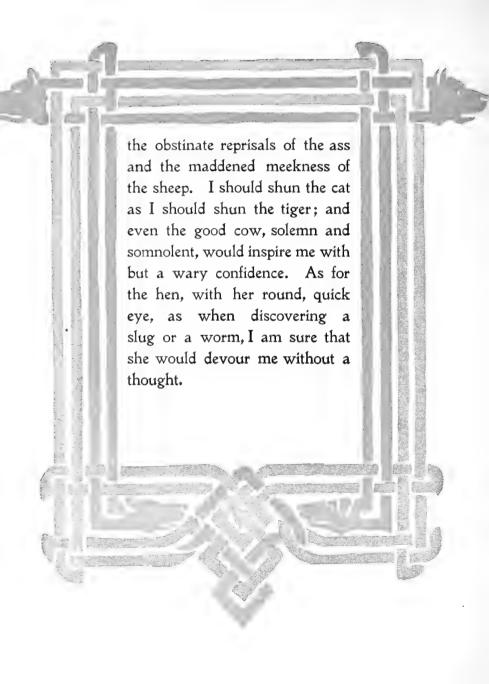




us only because he knows not what to do nor where to go, but who nevertheless, under the cudgel and the pack-saddle, retains the idea that lurks behind his ears; the cow and the ox, happy so long as they are eating, and docile because, for centuries, they have not had a thought of their own; the affrighted sheep, who knows no other master than terror; the hen, who is faithful to the poultry-yard because she finds more maize and wheat there than in the neighbouring forest. I do

not speak of the cat, to whom we are nothing more than a too large and uneatable prey: the ferocious cat, whose sidelong contempt tolerates us only as encumbering parasites in our own homes. She. at least, curses us in her mysterious heart; but all the others live beside us as they might live beside a rock or a tree. They do not love us, do not know us, scarcely notice us. They are unaware of our life, our death, our departure, our return, our sadness, our joy, our

They do not even hear smile. the sound of our voice, so soon as it no longer threatens them; and, when they look at us, it is with the distrustful bewilderment of the horse, in whose eye still hovers the infatuation of the elk or gazelle that sees us for the first time, or with the dull stupor of the ruminants, who look upon us as a momentary and useless accident of the pasture. For thousands of years, they have been living at our side, as foreign to our thoughts, our affections, our habits as though the least fraternal of the stars had dropped them but yesterday on our globe. In the boundless interval that separates man from all the other creatures, we have succeeded only, by dint of patience, in making them take two or three illusory steps. And, if, to-morrow, leaving their feelings toward us untouched, nature were to give them the intelligence and the weapons wherewith to conquer us, I confess that I should distrust the hasty vengeance of the horse,

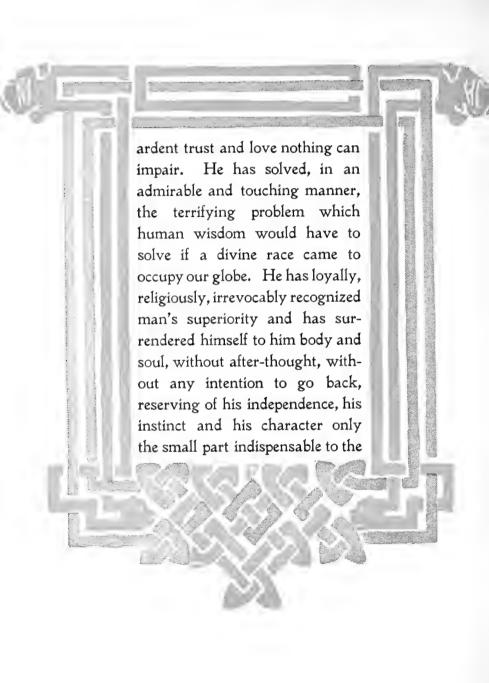


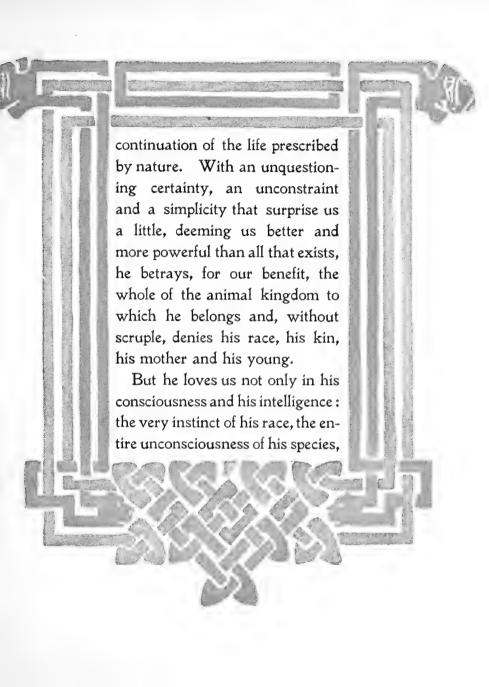


death alone establishes cruel relations of cause and effect between neighbouring lives, where not the smallest sympathy has ever made a conscious leap from one species to another, one animal alone. among all that breathes upon the earth, has succeeded in breaking through the prophetic circle, in escaping from itself to come bounding toward us, definitely to cross the enormous zone of darkness, ice and silence that isolates each category of existence in nature's unintelligible plan. This

animal, our good familiar dog, simple and unsurprising as may to-day appear to us what he has done, in thus perceptibly drawing nearer to a world in which he was not born and for which he was not destined, has nevertheless performed one of the most unusual and improbable acts that we can find in the general history of life. When was this recognition of man by beast, this extraordinary passage from darkness to light, effected? Did we seek out the poodle, the collie, or the mas-

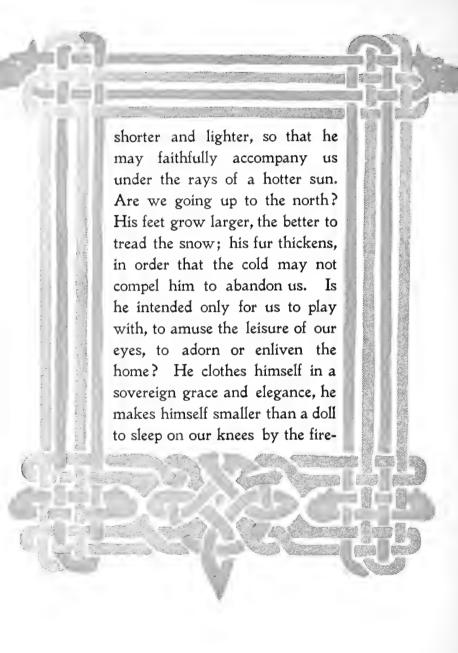
tiff from among the wolves and the jackals, or did he come spontaneously to us? We cannot tell. So far as our human annals stretch, he is at our side, as at present; but what are human annals in comparison with the times of which we have no witness? The fact remains that he is there in our houses, as ancient, as rightly placed, as perfectly adapted to our habits as though he had appeared on this earth, such as he now is, at the same time as ourselves. We have not to gain his confidence or his friendship: he is born our friend; while his eyes are still closed, already he believes in us: even before his birth, he has given himself to man. But the word "friend" does not exactly depict his affectionate worship. He loves us and reveres us as though we had drawn him out of nothing. He is, before all, our creature full of gratitude and more devoted than the apple of our eye. He is our intimate and impassioned slave, whom nothing discourages, whom nothing repels, whose

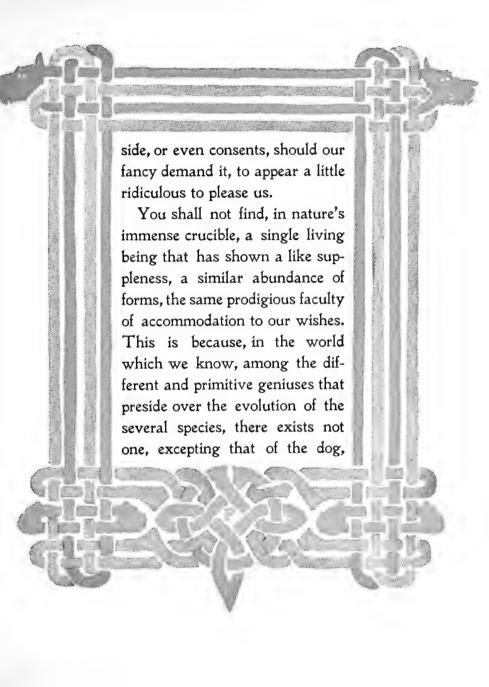




it appears, think only of us, dream only of being useful to us. To serve us better, to adapt himself better to our different needs, he has adopted every shape and been able infinitely to vary the faculties, the aptitudes which he places at our disposal. Is he to aid us in the pursuit of game in the plains? His legs lengthen inordinately, his muzzle tapers, his lungs widen, he becomes swifter than the deer. Does our prey hide under wood? The docile genius of the species, forestalling our

desires, presents us with the basset, a sort of almost footless serpent, which steals into the closest thickets. Do we ask that he should drive our flocks? The same compliant genius grants him the requisite size, intelligence, energy and vigilance. Do we intend him to watch and defend our house? His head becomes round and monstrous, in order that his jaws may be more powerful, more formidable and more tenacious. Are we taking him to the south? His hair grows

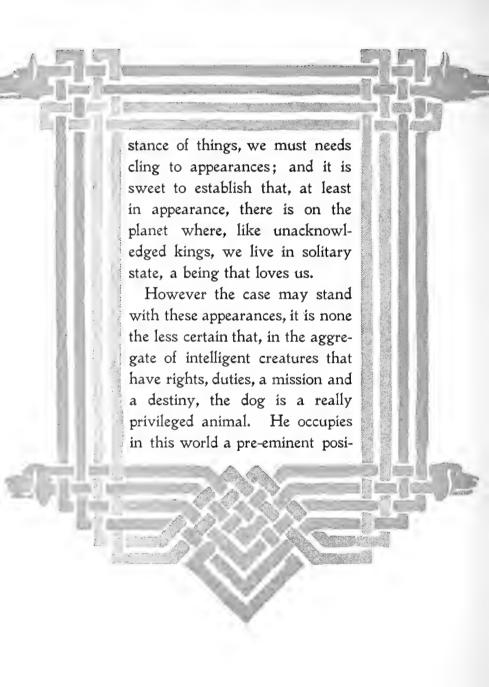




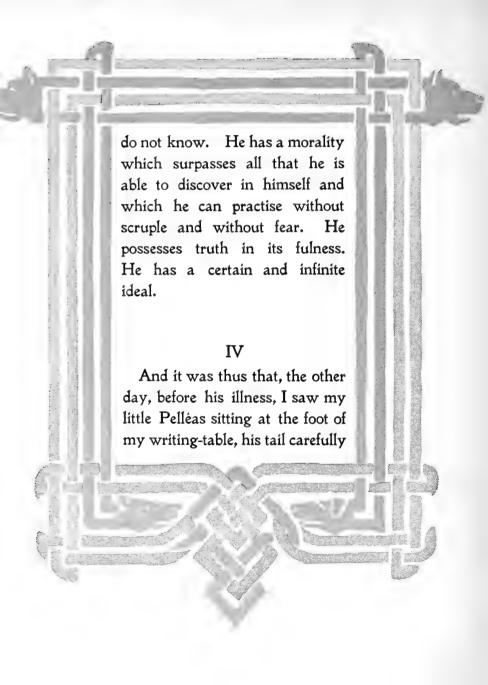
that ever gave a thought to the presence of man.

It will, perhaps, be said that we have been able to transform almost as profoundly some of our domestic animals: our hens, our pigeons, our ducks, our cats, our horses, our rabbits, for instance. Yes, perhaps; although such transformations are not comparable with those undergone by the dog and although the kind of service which these animals render us remains, so to speak, invariable. In any case, whether this impres-

sion be purely imaginary or correspond with a reality, it does not appear that we feel in these transformations the same unfailing and preventing good will, the same sagacious and exclusive love. For the rest, it is quite possible that the dog, or rather the inaccessible genius of his race, troubles scarcely at all about us and that we have merely known how to make use of various aptitudes offered by the abundant chances of life. It matters not: as we know nothing of the sub-



tion enviable among all. He is the only living being that has found and recognizes an indubitable, tangible, unexceptionable and definite god. He knows to what to devote the best part of himself. He knows to whom above him to give himself. He has not to seek for a perfect, superior and infinite power in the darkness, amid successive lies, hypotheses and dreams. That power is there, before him, and he moves in its light. He knows the supreme duties which we all



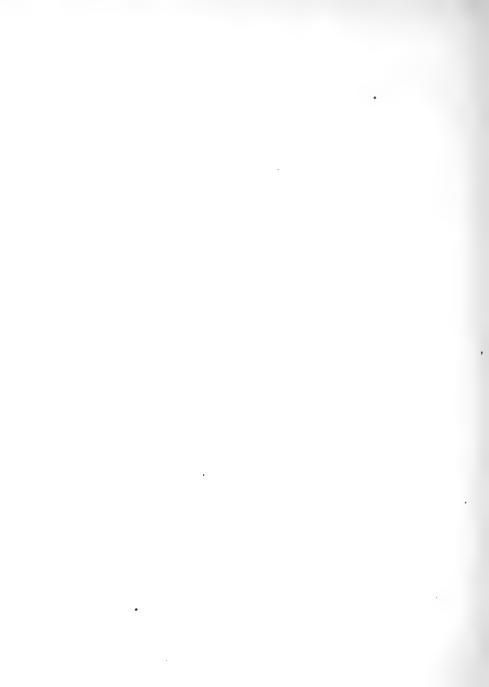




folded under his paws, his head a little on one side, the better to question me, at once attentive and tranquil, as a saint should be in the presence of God. He was happy with the happiness which we, perhaps, shall never know, since it sprang from the smile and the approval of a life incomparably higher than his own. He was there, studying, drinking in all my looks; and he replied to them gravely, as from equal to equal, to inform me, no doubt, that, at least through the eyes

the most immaterial organ that transformed into affectionate intelligence the light which we enjoyed, he knew that he was saying to me all that love should And, when I saw him thus, young, ardent and believing, bringing me, in some wise, from the depths of unwearied nature, quite fresh news of life and trusting and wonderstruck, as though he had been the first of his race that came to inaugurate the earth and as though we were still in the first days of the world's exist-

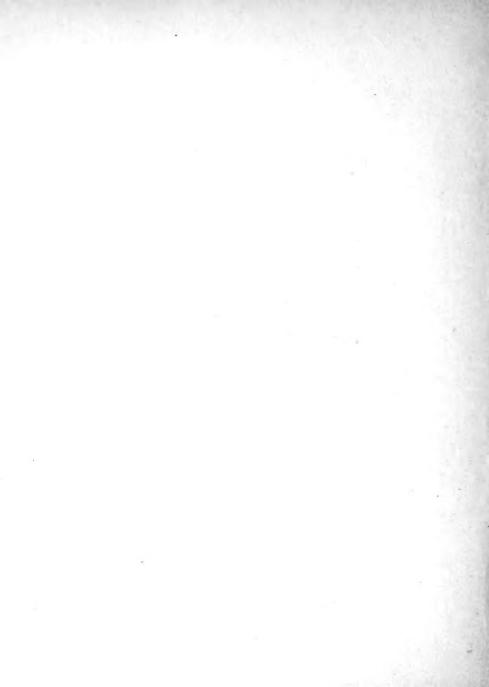












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