

Noel! Noel! Noel!

E. Armand

1900-1935

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Noel!

From the four corners of the earth arise,
Deafening clamors, noises of war
And echoes of bloody battles....
The border is the abyss between peoples.
We hate each other..
Satan watches for his victim..
Pity, take pity on us, God of peace!
Hallelujah! A Savior is born to us.
The Anointed of the Lord, the Redeemer, the Son is given to us! Shout it to the highest
heavens! Glory be to God!
Let peace be in all hearts! The Savior is born to us.
O peace, it is you who to this world
Announced the divine chorus
When, in the deep night,
The Redeemer first appeared.
Let there be Love, Peace among your men
For he was born our Savior,
And everywhere, we are brothers
When He reigns in our hearts!
Let there be peace on this battlefield
That is every heart without salvation!
May no human being fall! Jesus lives to aid us!
Sinner, it is He who forgives. He sets the soul free.
He rejects no one. He loves humanity!¹

¹ E. A., "Noël!" *L'Universel* 2 no. 8 (Décembre 1900): 4.

Christmas Scenes

I.

A church or a temple. Light, many lights. Candles that illuminate vast crucifixes, or a Christmas tree laden with toys, a fir tree whose evergreen branches evoke the image of eternity. Organs whose sonic flights seem an echo of celestial hymns. Carols that remind us of those with which our mothers rocked us to sleep... Handsome gentlemen in frock coats, tight at the waist, with eight shining gleams; polished, pomaded, combed, varnished, tied. Beautiful, elegant, fragrant ladies, studded with jewels, real or fake, whose slightly raised skirts reveal an expensively shod foot at the end of a finely arched ankle... Good, honest families in their Sunday best, made respectable, troops of children whose happy faces the symbolic tree illuminates... Ease, comfort, joy!... all that is good.

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A barely furnished room in a more or less respectable hotel. A mattress lying on the ground on which lie three small children. A woman harnessed to a sewing machine. A little girl who gradually passes her those nineteen- and twenty-nine-sou bodices with which the novelty shops are crammed. On the table, a fragment of stale bread and scraps of charcuterie... The woman, pale and thin, sews, sews, sews relentlessly. And the little girl, pale and thin, is already preparing and picking up the bodices... Tomorrow evening the deadline given by the landlord expires and, unless you spend the night, there can be no question of paying the week's rent late. Suddenly the silence is disturbed by a song that rises from a nearby church and we distinctly hear rising towards the sky.

Midnight, Christians, is the solemn hour.

The woman raises her head. "Some lucky buggers, they are!" she says sadly. And she goes back to sewing.

II.

A New Year's Eve banquet. A room with red wall coverings. A Republican chandelier draped in red. Red flags. Bouquets of wild roses on the table... A politico-socialist banquet. It's time for the toasts..... A red man, too, has climbed onto a chair and sings, I imagine, the "Internationale" (but I am not one of them, of course), with the conviction of a radical socialist voting for the allowances allocated to our Chinese missionaries. Glass in hand, the guests take up the chorus and while, waiting to be "the human race tomorrow," knock back the vintages renowned today; it's less ideal and more positive... Enthusiastic bravos greet each verse, as if bravos prepared the revolution.

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A man with a gaunt appearance, with grubby, tattered clothes, with an uncertain gait. He keeps close to the houses, so as not to be seen by passers-by. He staggers and occasionally puts his hand to his chest. It is not, however, that he is drunk. His calloused hands reveal no idleness and when, at a bend in the street, a gaslight or an electric lamp shines light on his emaciated face, his features indicate his suffering... He staggers from hunger and cold, the wretch.

But here he is in the vicinity of the restaurant where perhaps a few of his elected representatives are banqueting. The accents of the revolutionary song revive his failing energy. He crosses the street at a run and presses his face to the windows of the establishment, but as if this effort had exhausted him, he stumbles and falls on the icy ground, an inanimate body that will be picked up tomorrow as a corpse, the corpse of the sovereign dead-by-hunger.

III.

A family in London. A family of respectable workers... On the table the Christmas goose, all fat, all steaming. At the piano a young and pretty miss, with azure eyes, with long golden braids, whose harmonious voice modulates a carol with a soft and touching refrain, whose words transport us back twenty centuries:

Peace on earth, good will towards men.

The dinner bell rings, and father, mother, rebellious little girls and mischievous little boys line up around the table. A chair is empty: it is the place of the eldest son who is in the Transvaal where he guards the railway, like a hundred and fifty thousand of his comrades. The father does not forget him in the prayer that begins the meal and at the mention of his name, a tear runs down the cheeks of the mother...

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In South Africa.... A concentration camp... One of those unspeakable prisons where you roast during the day, where you freeze during the night... where the invaders, powerless to overcome the invaded by force, tortures by hunger the loved ones of their enemies: mothers, wives, lovers, children... In a bunker in this penal colony, unimagined by Dante, a woman cries and shakes her fist at an invisible adversary, she cries for her three children carried away by the Angel of Death in September, with 1961 of their companions in innocence. She is crying and in her reddened eyes I see the ocean of tears that for centuries and centuries have been shed by mothers from whom wars have taken their beloved children, the ocean that will eventually overwhelm armies, barracks, and murderous machines...

IV.

Palestine. A barn. A child. You have recognized him, my soul. It is He. He was born, the sublime Proletarian, the Son of the God of Love. He was born "in a manger, because there was no room in the inn." You have not deceived us, O Christ, a manger at your birth, a cross at your death; the insults, the spitting, the abandonment of your followers for reward, for salary. For scepter, a crown of thorns. Hail, O Redeemer! We have heard your call—Follow me—and we follow you, O Master; we follow you, knowing that there was no disillusionment in you and that you have completed your program to the end; we follow you, O Brother, because you have shared our miseries, our struggles, our sufferings and because, through the flesh, you come among us. We

follow you, O Risen One, because with our eyes fixed on the future, we feel your Spirit at work, your spirit of love and sacrifice—your Spirit at work to save man and humanity from selfishness, to establish the reign of eternal Justice.¹

¹ E. Armand, “Scènes de Noël,” *L’Ère nouvelle* 1 no. 8 (Décembre 1901): 4.

Noel

Here it is Christmas and the churches, dazzling with light and incense, will fill up once again, but it will not be the people who will crowd under their illuminated naves, — this people of proletarians, oppressed, sufferers of all kinds from whom primitive Christianity was nevertheless recruited. What would the people do, moreover, in the churches? Meet those who exploit them, rub shoulders with the representatives of a party whose interest is to delay the inevitable evolution of moral and social life, perhaps undergo contact with the unconscious who betray them!

In our French-speaking countries, it is true, the acuteness of the social problems, anticlerical propaganda, the efforts of free thought, attendance at secular schools — all this has distanced the working masses from cathedrals and chapels. They find in socialism the indispensable religion that promises them a better future, “the song that lulls human complaints.”

And this state of affairs is not unique to our race. In a very well-documented volume that has just been published (we will translate a few pages for the *Ere Nouvelle*), Richard Heath proves, with statistics to support it, that in Protestant England — the land of a thousand and one sects — the percentage of manual workers who visit places of worship falls to a tiny figure. The same situation in Germany, in Holland, tomorrow or the day after in the United States, where, in order to obtain an audience, churches of all denominations must already resort to festivals and distractions that are less and less austere.

This fact acknowledged, — and it is indisputable — it follows that the great ladies all frilly, who go to the Madeleine to place their pink lips on some ivory crucifix, — it follows that the public of the churches understands what Christmas meant. I have great fear that this is not the case, any more than it is grasped by the many free thinkers or ex-exegesis critics who go on to attribute, both to the miserable Jews and to the slaves of the first century, theological or metaphysical knowledge that they did not possess, that they could not possess.

The touching story of the child Jesus who was born in a manger — the mother of the savior of the world who can find no other refuge than a stable to accomplish his delivery there — this family of carpenters or plowmen in the bosom of which the liberator of the human race grows up — these stories, naive, if you will, but of an undeniable freshness, nevertheless take their roots in the sufferings of this part of humanity eternally disinherited, oppressed, despised. The supreme science of the time — the conception and knowledge of God — remained the prerogative of a few privileged aristocracies. A new event revolutionizes the world: God became man and, to “incarnate himself,” his choice fell on a manual worker, a homeless person who has “no place to lay his head.” And this man of the people, embodying the Messiah, symbolizes the moral revenge of the laity, the poor, the masses held in systematic ignorance and chronic misery on the holders of the “divine secrets” and the wealth of this world.

The entire subsequent history of Jesus must be brought back to this origin. It saturates the exaggerations of the legends of early Christianity, it oozes the marvelous that veils, disfigures, divinizes the life of the martyr that Free Thought, Disinterested Devotion and Conscious Frater-

nity rightly acclaim as their own. No one who has ever so slightly probed the popular soul will ever believe that the proletariat of the first century, superstitious as one imagines it to be, would have fallen in love with a religion that would have exhorted it exclusively to resignation, to humility, to a paradise, to an ascetic and narrow morality. But no! Christmas recalls a great era in the history of humanity, that during which the oppressed, the slaves, the outlaws of the Roman world, gave birth to God in their ranks — God, that is to say, the highest Absolute that could be conceived of Love, of liberating Power and of egalitarian Justice!

The majority of those who will hear, on the night of December 24-25, the organ modulate the old hymn where in its medieval rusticity, the same thought is found, the old hymn that tells so naively that “he was born the divine child” and that “a stable is his bed,” these continue to present their so-called “Christianity” as the bulwark of selfish reaction, as the guardian of the past, as the policeman of individual emancipation. So the man of the people passes in front of the church without crossing its threshold and, in this, he remains faithful to the current of ideas from which springs primitive Christianity, the first great moral revolution of the West.¹

¹ E. Armand, “Noël,” *L'Ère nouvelle* 3 no. 32 (Novembre-Décembre 1904): 357-367.

Here Is Christmas!... Boom! Boom! Boom!

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying: Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men...
(Gospel According to Luke, II, 13.)

For the second time Christmas is celebrated in the midst of the tumult of arms. To the hymns and sermons which from one end of Europe to the other proclaim that a Redeemer has appeared, one day, on our poor earth, acclaimed by angels announcing peace and good will among men — to the hymns and sermons there responds, from the North Sea to the Adriatic, from the Baltic to the Black Sea and even on the shores of the Aegean Sea, the deep voice of the heavy artillery: Boom! boom! boom! thunder the colossal pieces, while crowded into the churches, the faithful, gathered and fretting, punctuate with a heartfelt Amen the prayers that the representatives of the Divinity raise to the Master of the earth and the heavens.

And while priests, pastors or popes retell, embellishing it, the story of the birth of the Son of Man, while they sometimes move and delight their audiences by telling them how the Omnipotent Himself consented, in order to redeem the sins of His own creatures, to take the form of one of them and to see the light of day in a manger, — those in mourning for a beloved being think, to themselves, that this act of supreme renunciation could not, — whatever the preacher may say, — pay the bill, since every day, to amortize the debt of original sin, beings are cut down in the flower of their youth. Perhaps they even deduce that, not having been able to be satisfied with the blood of his Only Son, — with His own blood, — God must be a demanding Creditor, a pitiless Creditor!

Boom! boom! boom!

At the four cardinal points the cannons roar, dominating the noise of the elements on land and sea. You were then only a legend, O tale that soothed human impotence for so many centuries. You did not descend from the celestial dwellings, O Nazarene. Did you even exist? Did you really set foot on the soil of Judea? Or are you only a myth, a theological thesis, an instrument of resignation that for twenty centuries the profiteers have known how to use admirably? What was your role among us, alleged Man-God whose arrival in the bosom of the human race is universally celebrated on this day? A Jew revolting against the hypocrisy of the spiritual leaders of his people? A mystical anarchist? A visionary? A thaumaturge? A miracle worker? A religious reformer? A sincere one, a misunderstood one — who knows, an impostor? Historical reality or religious lie, you belong to the past, son of the carpenter of Nazareth, because the churches have seized you and it is in your name that they justify the worst pains and shameless exploitations. And you will not come down from the firmament to chase away or reduce to dust those who abuse your name, first because the firmament has ceased to be the solid vault that you imagined; then because your ashes must have long since mixed with the earth or been scattered in the wind.

Boom! Boom! Boom! There is no Redeemer, this is what the great voices of steel or bronze are

proclaiming. No one has redeemed humanity, for it did not need one. Sin does not exist and the Churches lie. Domination is vested in Force and not in Right. The World belongs to the Conquerors. Justice, Fraternity, Equality, Civilization, Culture, Universal Love, all that is praised or proclaimed from the pulpit, the rostrums or the platforms — words, words, more words! Boom! Boom! Boom!

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I laugh at you, naive souls, who reproached the churches for not having intervened in the conflict that pits the whole of Europe against each other. As if the history of the churches did not indicate that they were always hostile to peace! Not only because they are bloody in their essence, because at the base of all religious doctrine we find human sacrifice; but also because they exist and persist only through and for Domination.

To reign, that is the goal of all the churches. Do you not see the commentary in letters of blood and fire throughout the phases of their development? To reign or perish, that is their watchword. And to reign, one must wage war. To reign by crushing the adversary, by annihilating the competitor, by terrorizing the rebel! Who will tell us what you have suffered at the hands of the Catholic Church, — Albigenians, Waldensians, Camisards, Protestants of every denomination. And you, Catholics and evangelical dissidents, — at the hands of the Protestant Churches? And you, Slav sectarians — at the hands of the Orthodox Churches? And you, pagans, atheists, unbelievers, heretics, schismatics, unbelievers, freethinkers, Jews, — because of all the Churches and all the priests who claim to come from the Palestinian who commanded us, they say, to love one another?

Even today, you who, deep in your village, in the factory, in the workshop — and elsewhere, alas — affirm a thought refractory to religious practice, are you not subject to persecution by church people; do they not seek to reach you in the sensitive spot, if you are disinherited from the goods of this world — your livelihood?

To reign by bluff, by intimidation, by violence, sometimes by cajoling, sometimes by threatening, — sometimes by buying the docile, sometimes by ruining the recalcitrant, — what history of the Churches does not provide proof of this? To exert influence on politics, on mores, on education, on individual conduct — the annals of the Churches are filled with attempts to conquer, retain or reconquer Power, to maintain control of the Kingdom of this World. Whoever says church postulates war — war always and everywhere against anyone who rebels against ecclesiastical hegemony; all-out war until the opponent is put out of action, out of harm's way, incapable of protest and out of hearing.

And you, candid minds, accused the Churches of bankruptcy! Error of judgment, error of vision, error of understanding, — O thinkers, blinded by the dust of your libraries. They have never been more in their role. There is no better school for training warriors than the Church militant. Ask this crop of Christian journalists who are more determined than the rest of men to talk about the extermination and reduction to nothing of the enemy, go to the disciples of the One whom legend tells us commanded his own, when they came to apprehend him, to put their swords back in their sheaths, and inquire whether, in order to kill each other, they yield the palm to others. *Boom! Boom! Boom!*

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There is no Redeemer. That is true. There is no need for one. Humanity has not committed an original sin: it simply follows its path. The first humans did not listen complacently to the cajoling accents of a Tempter in delicate terms with his Sovereign. They lived, reproduced, transmitted

their vital characteristics to their offspring. They conformed to their nature, to Nature, quite simply. Their descendants follow in their footsteps, having stored up a large stock of practical knowledge; having above all at their disposal an immense stock of words, ready-made expressions, an inexhaustible supply of commonplaces. And this is doubtless what differentiates them above all from their ancestors.

And life has perpetuated itself, perpetuates itself, will perpetuate itself, in spite of and sometimes because of famines, epidemics, wars, until the day when meteorological conditions make it impossible for man to exist on earth. What madness to seek anything else, beyond or below!

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And it is because there is no Redeemer that we seek salvation in ourselves, we who flatter ourselves that we resist the currents that carry the vulgar along. We cannot despair, even in the darkest days, since we do not expect any extra or supra-terrestrial consolation. No doctrine can disillusion us, since we are our own God, our faith and our philosophy.

Come then what may! The essential thing for us is not only to go through this short passage that is existence, by multiplying and renewing the experiences of our daily life, but also to be aware — because we do not delude ourselves — that we do not play the role of a follower, or of a followed, or of one who fears, or of a dupe. The accents of the hymns and the thunder of the cannons leave us to ourselves, loving the joy of living and hating the infamy of servitude. If we have not yet reached this point of individual development, let us hasten, because for each of us, whatever our age, the day is fading and we no longer believe in the pleasures and the redress of the beyond.¹

¹ E. Armand, “Voici Noël !... Boum ! Boum ! Boum !,” *Pendant la Mêlée* 1 no. 3 (25 Décembre 1915): 1.

Here is Christmas

Here is Christmas and the crowds throng to the churches, the richly decorated, magnificently lit cathedrals, whose vast naves are filled with marvelous music. Here is Christmas and everything speaks to the senses in the huge buildings where incense, lights and sounds combine to pour a little intoxication into those who crowd under their vaults. Here is Christmas and the story that is told, each time this holiday is repeated, does not, at first sight, fail to be touching. It goes straight to sensitive hearts.

A young woman in the final stages of her pregnancy crawls along a dusty road in the ancient Orient. She is aware that the hour of her deliverance is approaching, but she is sent from inn to inn. All are full and not a single traveler is willing to give place to the wanderer. She is pregnant, it's true; her position is really pitiful, but the housed guard their housing: let her give birth elsewhere! The night descends, deepens; the pains of childbirth seize, torture the unfortunate. All the doors are closed at this hour: will Mary have to deliver her first born on the side of the road? All the doors... not all of them: there remains an open stable and the animals that occupy it show themselves to be less hard-hearted than their superior brothers. They will let the exhausted mother give birth to her son; they will let her put the newborn in the manger.

But the story does not end there. In the manger, the child doubtless cries, while, exhausted, the mother probably rests on the litter of the stable. What is she thinking, Mary? Of the harshness of men, of the future reserved for his offspring? What dreams does she hollow out in her brain, still shaken by the shocks of childbirth? But now we hear voices, calls; torches illuminate the night. What are these processions heading towards the humble hovel? Dread has replaced the dream. It's because Mary is a mother now. Are they bandits? The country abounds with them. Are they enemies? No. Friends. Friends—but she doesn't know anyone around. Yes, friends, and more. Magi, chiefs, kings who come to adore the newborn and lay treasures at his feet.

For the little being who lies in the dark manger is the Son of God. O revenge! which excites the people. He who did not find a place to come into the world a moment ago, now sees the great ones of the earth prostrate themselves before him. Who knows what though has germinated for nineteen centuries, is still germinating in the depths of the intelligence of the believing masses? Isn't Christmas the symbol of the day when the rich and the powerful will have to bow before the beggar, the destitute who has become superior to them by the effects of a mysterious power that is beyond them?

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Here is Christmas, the feast of the birth of the Son of God, who, according to Christian Orthodox dogma, was brought into the world by a virgin. And what has he come to do on earth? To make amends, to redeem by his sufferings the faults, the deviations, the sins of Humanity, whose crimes have turned it against the Heavenly Father. That is to say that he is called to undergo, for a lifetime, all kinds of snubs, humiliations, persecutions and tortures, in his mind and in his flesh, until he dies nailed to a cross. This sacrifice could be understood, if it were this Son had anything

to do with human guilt. But it is a whim of the Father; this old Despot needs nothing less than the sobs, the heartbreaks and the blood of his only Child to appease his cruel vindictiveness.

His vindictiveness? But what do men owe him, men he has drawn from nothingness without consulting them? What is this Creator: powerless to save his creatures from going down the wrong path: or, from the peak of his Omnipotence, treacherously leaving them to struggle and splash about in the pool of temptations and lusts? What sadism in this action of creating sentient beings without endowing them with the strength needed to overcome evil! What a refinement of malignity, to remedy this, to knowingly send towards the pain of misunderstandings, denials and betrayals a Being that does not know to escape his cruelty.

Here is Christmas! Child Jesus, you are not the symbol of the homeless ones, to whom one day the Leaders of the human herds will come to pay homage. You are the image of the living instruments they use to accomplish their purposes. You will walk under the whip of the will of your tyrant Father; you will fulfill his goal, not yours, without asking yourself if you find the slightest personal advantage in accomplishing his aims; you will follow, obedient, the rut that it traces for you, without recoiling, without formulating a protest, without the beginnings of a regret; without murmuring any other words than an acquiescence to the annihilation of your will, of your feelings. You will refuse the means of escaping the grip of the paternal executioner. You will reject the liberating Temptation; until the end, you will restrain the momentum of your desires.

Child Jesus, you are only the symbol of resignation.¹

¹ E. Armand, "Voici Noël," *L'En dehors* 1 no. 4 (fin Décembre 1922): 1.

A Christmas Tale

It must have been extremely cold outside, judging by the wind's gusts under the doors; as for me, sitting near a Godin stove that radiated a heat that was not at all exaggerated, I was thinking. I was alone in this rather large room, the walls lined with books for most of their surface and the center cluttered with tables more or less picturesquely covered with all sorts of objects appropriate to the use of the room, among which were still other books. I was thinking, dreaming, my eyes wide open, as it should be, without being able to take my eyes off four volumes stacked on the lid of a typewriter: *View of the Promised Land*, by Duhamel; *Babel*, by Margueritte; *Memoirs of Another Life*, by Carco; *Before the Great Silence*, by Maeterlinck. I still don't understand today how it happened that these four volumes separating, went to stick themselves against the four walls of the room, lengthening, widening, stretching so well that they ended up covering the entire surface; nor can I explain how the stove turned into a bundle of logs that burned without giving off smoke, nor how I recognized myself sitting, cross-legged, my bottom on my heels, on the ground, on the right side of an immense yellow tent.

I was no longer alone in this tent. Near the hearth I just mentioned, also sitting cross-legged, an old man had taken his place, wearing a sort of turban. Of whose face I could see only a long and wide white beard. In front of me were men dressed in garish striped burnouses, on the left women decked out like the Palestinian women in Protestant engravings. On the other side, piled up, pressed together, domestic animals, among which I could make out a donkey, an ox, a camel. I had to open my eyes wide; the ambient light was so confused that I could not manage to distinguish the features of the occupants of the tent, people and animals. However, I immediately identified the old man with the big beard, who was none other than my great-grandfather and the head of the family.

The women were crying in their corner, the men remained silent, the old man was grumbling something or other while hitting what I believe to be a piece of wood with a flint axe or a similar instrument. The animals were sleeping.

Suddenly I remembered why I was relegated, apart, in a corner. A few weeks ago, I had returned to the camp with one kid less, a kid that I had given as a present to a young and gentle creature, amiable, perfumed, made up, in short, in love, who usually stood at the crossroads of the tracks closest to our camp. It was understood that in a few years I would marry a young girl of our tribe, a marriage that would be the subject of a negotiation between her parents and mine, but in the meantime, the creature in question did not demand seven years before... crowning my flame; moreover, this crowning of the flame obtained, it did not imply that I had to cohabit with her; finally, her manners were freer than those of the young people of the tribe, who had to be approached only with great precautions and consideration. In short, my theft having been discovered, the old man had become angry, had traced on a large stone erected in the center of the camp, with a flint point, incomprehensible signs. Then he had not spoken to me again. — I was to learn later that, in this anger and its aftermath, there was much more staging than feeling. All the young men in the camp did as I did and from time to time paid a visit to a creature of the

same kind who stood at a crossroads; they all brought her, in exchange for her pleasant ways, a young one from the herds they guarded. It was thanks to the goodwill of these women that we could wait years — sometimes 7 years, sometimes 14 — before uniting with the wife our parents and grandparents intended for us. And the heads of our families knew it well, they had done as we did in their time. Only, the customs of the camp demanded that the company of these pleasant girls was tainted with disapproval and as for the herd animal intended to pay them for their complacency, no one was to be suspected of its disappearance. It was permitted on condition that we did not get caught.

Suddenly, the old man turned to me and, breaking a silence of several weeks:

“They will always be the same fools. No matter how much we disabuse them of it each time it happens, they fear that by dint of diminishing, the day will cease altogether to make way for eternal night. When will you stop moaning, o women? Do you not know that on the 25th day of the tenth month, the days begin to grow again? And it will be like this until the end of time. Let us therefore no longer lament! Let us celebrate by the sacrifice of the fattest of our beasts the rebirth of the Sun and the imminent return of spring.”

The old man stopped speaking to me and I saw him get up, also dressed all in yellow, and pour the contents of a container resembling a bowl onto the pile of logs. Then, in a loud voice:

“A time will come when the Sun, the beneficent star, the dispenser of light, of heat, the author of planetary life, will be worshiped by men in a human form. They will make him born the day after the shortest day of the year. Of the twelve months that his annual course lasts, they will make twelve apostles; the seventy years that the average existence of a man lasts, they will transform into seventy disciples. From the incidents of the journey that you accomplish, O Sun, in space to return to your starting point, they will make the life of a god. O Sun, they will make you emerge from a cave, grow; the light and the heat that you spread will be transformed into teachings and parables; they will tell that, in human form, you were unknown to those who cannot be if you were not; persecuted, rejected, tortured, buried in a tomb, from which you will escape, resurrecting and rising into the heavens. O Sun, they will make of you a being in their own image and because of this imaginary being, where they will no longer recognize you, they will slaughter each other, they will show themselves to be intolerant, fanatic, merciless.”

The tent emptied as if by magic; there were no more old people, men, women and animals, nor hearth. In the middle was a long, very narrow table, in the center of which had taken a seat, seated on a bench, a man resembling the Christ of the religious object stores of the Saint-Sulpice district and dressed in a long yellow tunic. This man seemed to be addressing an invisible audience and rays escaped from his head. I listened and managed to catch a few words of his speech, which seemed to be spoken in the distance: “In the same way,” he said, “that I do not refuse myself to anyone on earth, from stone to man, do not refuse anyone who asks for you, do not refuse yourself to anyone who offers himself to you. I enlighten everyone without distinction of person or condition. I heat the mineral as well as the vegetable, the animal as well as the man. I let myself be consumed in all sorts of forms. I let myself be used for all sorts of purposes. And this is my flesh and blood. I do not give them only to those who understand that from me they derive life and being; I also give them to those who do not understand it. Be perfect as I am, I whose perfection consists in not disregarding anyone or anything.”

I had grabbed some tablets to write down these few words of the speaker, when I noticed his disappearance. There remained under the tent only the long table I have just spoken of. On this table now swung a large, fully illuminated sphere and twelve small balls resembling billiard balls

made of yellow metal. I observed that the table was divided into 70 divisions of the same width. I was going to try to reproduce this curious spectacle on my tablets when, looking up, I found myself in my chair. The room had not undergone any alteration, the walls had returned to their original position, the books had returned to their place and the four volumes mentioned at the beginning of my story were still piled on the lid of the typewriter. Only, the fire was out.¹

¹ E. Armand, "Conte de Noël" *L'en dehors* 14 no. 277 (mi-Décembre 1934): 201-202

Noel! Noel! Noel!

While in pomp and ostentation,
in the brilliance of illuminations,
to the sound of opera music,
the churches celebrate the birth of Jesus,
the hypothetical and legendary Newborn,
pretext and illusion, symbol and decoration, soporific and screen,
me, I will tell you of another Noel:
that of the little unlucky one who lets out his first cry
in the cold and icy attic
of the maid impregnated by her master
— or by her master's son. —
The Noel of the little unlucky guy who comes into the world
on a December night
in the poorly lit little room of a little worker
whose lover, an unfortunate employee like her,
considered her, not as an equal companion of pleasure,
but as an outlet,
just as her boss would have done, moreover,
because the proletarian and the bourgeois are similar in this respect:
they do not worry about the precautions to be taken!
If you do not perish suffocated or strangled
or asphyxiated at the bottom of a cesspool
by the hands of your distraught mother,
you are destined to cry more than once in the solitude of your heart,
to bear until the end a heavy and ignominious cross...
You will not have the good fortune to be a legitimate child abandoned by his father:
all of society would see in you a victim worthy of its hypocritical pity,
people of order would pity your mother
and the just laws would work in your favor.
But you,
you will hide as much as possible your irregular birth,
because it will not have taken you long to learn
that your mother has not been forgiven
for having given herself entirely and without reserve
without worrying about the sanction of the mayor or the blessing of the priest
— or rather for not having shown herself sober enough to prevent you from seeing the light of

day.
Let the bells ring to announce your coming,
divine child, child of an unknown father!
let the incense smoke,
let the organs roar,
let the stars of the subsidized make their golden voices heard
under the vaults of the immense cathedrals,
in your honor,
let the wise men of the East place at your feet the treasures and the perfumes!...
Noel!... Noel!.. Noel!...

And that will only be justice
because from the first hour of your life
your Passion began...
O unwanted newborn,
bastard, natural child, illegitimate product,
conceived outside the rules, born on the margins of morality,
fruit of instinctive and free and nonconformist love,
glory to you in the highest heavens
and may peace be upon you
from now on and forever!
Noel!... Noel!.. Noel!...

December 1935.¹

Notes:

¹ E. Armand, "Noël! Noël! Noël!" *L'en dehors* 16 no. 289 (mi-Décembre 1935): 77.

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E. Armand
Noel! Noel! Noel!
1900-1935

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