

ON LIFE AND LETTERS  
BY ANATOLE FRANCE









THE WORKS OF ANATOLE FRANCE  
IN AN ENGLISH TRANSLATION  
EDITED BY J. LEWIS MAY AND  
BERNARD MIALL    ~    ~    ~

ON LIFE & LETTERS



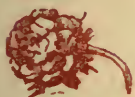
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BY ANATOLE FRANCE

A TRANSLATION BY

D. B. STEWART



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## PREFACE



FERDINAND BRUNETIÈRE,<sup>1</sup> of whom I am very fond, is extremely angry with me. He charges me with misunderstanding the very laws of criticism, of having no standard by which to judge the things of the mind, of floating according to my instincts among contradictions, of not emerging from myself, and of being enclosed in my own subjectivity, as in a dark prison.

Far from complaining of being thus attacked, I rejoice in this honourable dispute, which is entirely flattering to myself when one considers the merit of my adversary, the severity of a censure which conceals much indulgence, the greatness of the interests concerned, for according to M. Brunetière it is a matter of no less than the intellectual future of our country, and, to conclude, the choice of my accomplices, M. Jules Lemaître and M. Paul Desjardins being denounced along with me as guilty of subjective and personal criticism, and as corrupters of youth. I have an old and ever fresh affection for the wit of M. Lemaître, for his quick intelligence, his winged poetry, and his delightful lucidity. M. Paul Desjardins interests me by reason of the tremulous

\* See the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 1st January, 1891, *La Critique impersonnelle*, by M. Ferdinand Brunetière.

gleams of his delicate imagination. If I were in the slightest degree cunning, I should be careful to refrain from separating my cause from theirs.

But truth compels me to declare that I do not see in what way my crimes are their crimes, or my iniquities their iniquities. M. Lemaitre divides himself with a marvellous agility; he sees the for and against; he places himself successively at the most opposite points of view; he displays by turns the refinements of an ingenious mind, and the goodwill of an ingenuous soul. He engages in dialogue with himself, and makes the most diverse individuals speak in turn. He has widely exercised the faculty of understanding. He is a modern, and a humanist. He respects the traditions and loves novelty. He has an open mind, with a taste for beliefs. His criticism, indulgent as it is, even when he is employing irony, is, if correctly assessed, objective enough. And if, when he has said all there is to say, he adds, "What do I know?" is not that a gentle philosophy? I cannot quite understand what it is that annoys M. Brunetière in his manner, unless it is, perhaps, a certain restless gaiety, as of a young fawn.

As for M. Paul Desjardins, with whatever he may be reproached, it certainly cannot be with a too frolicsome gaiety. I do not think I shall displease him by saying that he poses rather as an apostle than as a critic. His is a distinguished mind, but above all it is that of a prophet. He is severe, and does not like people to write. For him, literature is the Beast of the Apocalypse. A well-turned phrase strikes him as a public danger. He reminds me of the dismal Tertullian, who stated that the Holy Virgin could not have been beautiful, other-

wise she would have been desired, which is unimaginable. According to M. Paul Desjardins, style is evil. Yet M. Paul Desjardins himself has style, so true it is that the human soul is full of contradictions. His humour being what it is, his advice must not be asked on subjects so frivolous and profane as literature. He does not criticize; he anathematizes without hatred. Pale and melancholy, he goes his way scattering compassionate maledictions. By what turn of Fortune's wheel does he find himself burdened with a share of the charges that are heaped upon me, precisely when he declares, in his articles, and his lectures, that I am the barren fig-tree of Holy Writ? With what shuddering horror must he appeal to the man who brackets us: *Judica me, et discerne causam meam de gente non sancta?*

It is therefore only right that I should defend myself singly. I shall attempt so to do, but not without first doing homage to the courage of my adversary. M. Brunetière is a warrior critic of rare intrepidity. In polemics, he is of the school of Napoleon and the great captains who know that one can defend oneself victoriously only by taking the offensive, and that to await attack is to be already half defeated. He has come to attack me in my little wood, beside my limpid stream. He is a tough customer. He sets to with teeth and nails, to say nothing of feints and tricks. I understand thereby that he has many methods in polemics, and that when the deductive fails he does not despise the intuitive. I never muddied his stream. But he is tetchy, and even rather quarrelsome. It is a defect of the brave. I much like him thus. Was it not Nicolas, his master and mine, who said: "Achilles would displease were he less heated and less quick"

If it is absolutely necessary for me to fight M. Brunetière, I suffer under many disadvantages. I will not point out the too evident inequalities. I will merely indicate one, which is of a private nature; it is that, whilst he finds my criticism annoying, I find his excellent. I am thereby reduced to that defensive position, which, as we said but now, is considered bad by tacticians. I hold M. Brunetière's strong constructive criticism in high regard. I admire the strength of the materials, and the grandeur of the plan. I have just read this clever professor's lectures at the École Normale, on the subject of the evolution of criticism from the Renaissance down to our own time, and I experience no displeasure in stating, for all to hear, that the ideas therein are developed with much method, and placed in a pleasing, imposing and novel order. Their heavy but certain advance recalls the famous manœuvre of the legionaries marching shoulder to shoulder, protected by their shields, to the assault of a town. It was called the Tortoise, and it was a formidable device. There is, perhaps, some surprise mingled with my admiration, when I see whither this army of ideas leads. M. Ferdinand Brunetière proposes to apply the theory of evolution to criticism. And while the enterprise in itself appears interesting and praiseworthy, we have not forgotten the energy recently employed by the critic of the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, in subordinating science to morality, and invalidating the authority of all doctrine founded on the natural sciences. It was employed in connection with the *Disciple*, and we know whether M. Brunetière was then niggardly of his remonstrances against those who presumed to introduce

theories of transformation into the province of psychology or sociology. He repelled the Darwinian ideas in the name of unchangeable morality.

He expressly states, "These ideas must be false, since they are dangerous."

And now he founds the new criticism on the hypothesis of evolution. "Our proposal," he says, "is none other than to borrow from Darwin and Haeckel the assistance which M. Taine obtained from Geoffroy St. Hilaire, and Cuvier." I am well aware that it is one thing to profess, as does M. Sixte, the irresponsibility of criminals, and absolute indifference in the matter of morality, and quite another matter to apply to literary questions the laws which preside over the evolution of animal and vegetable species. I do not for one moment affirm that M. Brunetière belies and contradicts himself. I note a peculiarity of his nature, a twist of character, which is, notwithstanding his appreciation of logical sequence, voluntarily to deviate into the unexpected and unforeseen. It was once said that he was paradoxical, and it seemed very much like irony, so strongly established was his reputation as a sound logician. But after reflection one sees that his manner is really somewhat paradoxical. He is extraordinarily clever at demonstration; he must always be demonstrating, and he dearly loves stoutly to maintain extraordinary and even staggering opinions.

By what unhappy chance was I compelled to love and admire a critic who so little returns my affection? There are for M. Brunetière only two sorts of criticism, the subjective, which is bad, and the objective, which is good. According to him, M. Jules Lemaître, M. Paul Desjardins and I are all tainted by subjectivity, the worst of evils;

for from subjectivity one sinks into illusion, sensuality and concupiscence, and one judges human work by the pleasure received therefrom, which is an abomination; because one must not derive pleasure from any intellectual work without knowing whether one is right to be pleased; because man, being a reasoning animal, must first of all reason; for it is necessary to be right, and not necessary to find gratification; because it is man's business to seek instruction by means of dialectic, which is infallible; because one must always put a truth at the end of a chain of reasoning, like a knot at the end of a thread, since otherwise the reasoning would not hold, and it is necessary that it should, because one attaches thereto several further reasons so as to form an indestructible system which lasts ten years or so. And that is why objective criticism is the only criticism worth having. M. Ferdinand Brunetière holds the other method to be fallacious and full of deception. He gives several reasons. But I must first reproduce the text of the incriminated passage. It occurs in the *Vie littéraire* and reads as follows:

There exists no objective criticism, any more than there is objective art, and all those who flatter themselves that they put anything else but themselves into their books are the dupes of the most fallacious philosophy. The truth is that one never emerges from oneself. It is one of our greatest misfortunes. What would we not give to contemplate, just for one moment, the earth and sky with the faceted eye of the fly, or understand Nature with the simple, elementary mind of an Ourang-Outang? But that is forbidden us. We are restricted to our personalities, as to a perpetual prison. It appears that the best thing we can do is to recognize this horrible situation gracefully, and to admit that we are speaking of ourselves whenever we have not the strength to keep silence. (*On Life and Letters*, 1st series, Preface.)

Quoting the above, M. Brunetière remarks "that it is impossible to state with greater assurance that nothing is assured."

I might perhaps reply that there is no contradiction and no novelty in stating that we are condemned to know things only by the impression they make on us. This truth is capable of establishment by observation, and so obvious that it strikes every one. It is a commonplace of natural philosophy. One must not pay too much attention to it, and one must perceive therein a doctrinal Pyrrhonism. I admit that I have more than once glanced in the direction of absolute scepticism. But I never entered; I feared to place my foot on a basis which engulfs all that steps thereon. I have feared those two words, full of a formidable sterility, "I doubt." So powerful are they that the mouth that has once pronounced them truly is for ever sealed, and can never reopen. If one doubts, one must keep silent; for, whatever one may discourse about, to speak is to affirm. Since I had not the courage for silence and renunciation, I willed to believe and did so. I at least believed in the relativity of things, and the succession of phenomena.

As a matter of fact, appearance and reality are the same thing. In order to love and suffer in this world, images suffice; there is no need for their objectivity to be demonstrated. In whatever manner one conceives Life, even as the dream of a dream, one lives. Naught else is required for the foundation of art, science, morality, and impressionist criticism, and, if you will, of objective criticism.

M. Brunetière is of opinion that we can emerge

from ourselves by our own volition like the old Nuremberg professor, whose amazing adventure has been related to us by M. Joséphin Péladan, a magian. This professor, who was much absorbed in æsthetics, used by night to exchange his visible body for an astral one, in order to compare the legs of beautiful sleepers with those of the Venus of Praxiteles.

“The fraud,” states M. Brunetière, “if there must be a fraud, is to believe and to teach that we cannot emerge from ourselves, while, on the contrary, Life does nothing else. And the reason, doubtless, will appear sufficiently good, if we realize that otherwise there would be neither society, language, literature nor art.” And he adds, “We are men . . . and we are supremely so because of the power enabling us to come out of ourselves, in order that we may seek, find, and recognize ourselves in others.”

To come out of ourselves : that is to say a great deal. We are in a cavern, and we see the phantoms in the cavern. Without that, Life would be too sad. It has neither charm nor value, save in the shadows passing along the surface of the walls within which we are enclosed, shadows which resemble us, which we strive to know in passing, and sometimes to love.

In reality, we know the world only through our senses, which alter and colour it at their will ; M. Brunetière does not contest it. On the contrary, he relies on these conditions of knowledge to find a basis for his objective criticism. Considering that the senses convey practically similar impressions of nature to all men, so that what is round for one man would not be square for another, and that the functions of understanding operate in the same



manner, if not in the same degree, in all minds, which is the origin of common sense, he bases his criticism on universal consent. But he himself sees that it has an uneasy seat. For this consent, although sufficient to form and maintain society, is not sufficient if it is a question of establishing the superiority of one poet over another. It is beyond doubt that men resemble each other sufficiently for them all to find the requirements of their existence in the markets and bazaars of a great town ; but nothing is less probable than that two men in the same country have an absolutely similar impression of a particular line of Virgil.

There is in mathematics a sort of higher truth, which we all accept, every one of us, for the very reason that it is not obvious to the senses. But physicists are obliged to reckon with what is called, in the sciences of observation, the personal equation. Two observers never perceive a phenomenon in absolutely the same manner.

It is impossible for M. Brunetière to conceal from himself that the personal equation enters more freely than anywhere into the illusive domains of art and literature.

In that province there is never unanimous consent, nor stable opinion. To this he agrees, or begins by agreeing to it : " To say nothing of our contemporaries, whom it is admitted we do not see from a great enough distance, nor from a sufficiently lofty standpoint, how many varying judgments have been passed, during the last three or four hundred years, on Corneille, Shakespeare, Cervantes, Rabelais, Raphael, and Michelangelo ! There is no opinion, however extravagant and absurd, that has not been upheld by some

philosopher ; no scandal or outrageous attack on genius that has not had the authority of some critic behind it." And to prove that great men never obtain justice from their peers, he shows us Rabelais insulted by Ronsard, and Corneille publicly preferring Boursault to Racine. He should also have shown us Lamartine despising La Fontaine. He could also have exhibited Victor Hugo contemptuous of all our classics, except Boileau, for whom, as he grew old, he nourished a certain affection.

In short, M. Brunetière recognizes the fact that in the republic of letters there are many warring opinions. It is in vain that he immediately corrects himself, and declares with assurance that "it is not true that there is so much diversity of opinion, or such deep divisions." It is in vain that he fortifies himself with an opinion of M. Jules Lemaître in order to affirm that it is admitted by all literary authorities that certain writers exist, in spite of their defects, whilst others do not exist. For instance, that the tragic Voltaire exists, and that Campistron, the Abbé Leblanc, and M. de Jouy do not exist. It is a first point which he wishes us to grant, but we shall not do so, for if it came to drawing up the two lists there would hardly be any agreement.

The second point upon which he insists is that there are degrees which are properly the grades conferred on genius in the faculties of grammarians, and the universities of rhetoricians. It is conceivable that such diplomas might be of advantage in the ordering and regulation of fame. Unfortunately human contradictions cause them to lose much of their value ; and these doctors'

degrees, these diplomas, which M. Brunetière regards as universally recognized have little authority save for those who confer them.

In pure theory one can conceive a system of criticism which, proceeding from science, partakes of its certainty. It is possible that our opinion on M. Maurice Barrès' æsthetics and M. Jean Moréas' prosody depends on our ideas of the cosmic forces and the heavenly mechanism. The universe is interlinked throughout. But in reality the links are here and there so involved that the devil himself would be unable to disentangle them, logician though he be. Further, we must admit with a good grace that, unlike Petit Jean, what Humanity knows least about is its beginning. We lack principles in everything, particularly in knowledge of the creations of the mind. Whatever anyone may say, it is impossible to-day to foresee the time when criticism will have the rigidity of an exact science, and one may reasonably believe that that time will never come. For all that, the great philosophers of antiquity crowned their world system with poetry, and they acted wisely. It is better to speak with an uncertain voice of beautiful thoughts and forms than for ever to hold one's peace. Few objects in this world are so absolutely subject to science as to admit of their being produced or predicted thereby. It is a certainty that neither a poem nor a poet will ever be thus subject. The things which touch us most, which appear the most beautiful and most desirable, are precisely those which appear vague, and in some degree mysterious. Beauty, virtue, and genius will for ever keep their secrets. Neither the charm of Cleopatra, the sweetness of St. Francis of Assisi, nor the poetry of Racine

can be reduced to formulæ, and if these things spring from science, it is from some science mingled with art, intuitive, restless, and always incomplete. This science, or rather this art, exists : it is philosophy, morality, history, criticism ; in short, the whole beautiful romance of Humanity.

All works of art or poetry have for all time been the subject of dispute, and it is one of the great attractions of beautiful things to remain thus doubtful, for it is impossible to deny that they are so. M. Brunetière is unwilling altogether to admit this fatal and universal uncertainty. It is too repugnant to his authoritative and methodical mind, which always wishes to judge and classify everything. As he is judicially minded, let him sit in the seat of judgment ! And as he is a warlike critic, let him advance his close-packed arguments in tortoise formation !

But can he not forgive a simple soul for concerning himself less severely with art matters, and for displaying fewer reasons, and particularly fewer arguments ?—for restricting criticism to the familiar style of conversation, and the idle pace of the saunter ; for stopping where he chooses, and indulging in an occasional confidence ; for following his tastes, fancies, and even caprices, on condition of being always honest, sincere, and benevolent ; for not being all-knowing, and not explaining everything ; for believing in the irremediable diversity of opinions and ideas, and for speaking more unconstrainedly of what one should admire ?

A. F.

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ON LIFE & LETTERS





# ON LIFE & LETTERS

## WHY ARE WE SAD?\*



PIERRE LOTI has given us the diary of the last weeks he passed in Japan ; they are exquisite pages, infinitely melancholy. Whether he shows us Kioto, the holy city, with its temples full of age-old monsters, or the good society of Yeddo disguised in European clothes, and dancing our quadrilles, or whether he conjures up the Empress Harou-ko in her strange hieratic grace, Loti diffuses a vague, subtle and penetrating melancholy which enwraps one like a mist, whose bitter taste and acrid perfume dwell in one's heart.

Why is he grieved, and wherefore does he make us grieve ? What causes him thus to feel the burden of life ? Is it the endless monotony of forms and colours displayed by this droll people, through whose midst he passed, gazing ? Is it the eternal laughter of those pretty little creatures with narrow eyes, of those mousmés so much alike with the long pins in their head-dress, and big bows on their sashes ? Is it the inexpressible odour of the yellow race, the indefinable something which repels us in the

\* Pierre Loti, *Japoneries d'automne*, 1 vol. Guy de Maupassant, *La main gauche*, 1 vol.

Japanese soul? Is he sad because he feels himself alone, amid thousands, or because he is only a sojourner, about to leave for ever all that he sees, to die to all these things? Doubtless all this perturbs him, depresses him. It makes him uneasy to see people who are men, and yet not akin to him. A cruel, charming weariness overcomes him in the midst of these alien signs whose meaning, for him, is eternally hidden.

Contemplating, in the temple of the Eight Flags, the bird-embroidered robe worn eighteen centuries ago by Gziné-you-koyo, the warrior queen, he suffers from the longing to capture the heroic charm of that intangible shade; it saddens him that he cannot embrace the marvellous phantom. These no doubt are unusual woes, but he experiences them, and the little Japanese, the mousmés, leave him unconsolated. One knows that he demanded of Madame Chrysanthème dreams that she could not give him. Moreover, the love of a white man for these little yellow creatures, half women and half vases, is not of a nature to bestow a peaceful happiness upon the heart. They are unhallowed unions. The crime of the angels who united themselves with the daughters of men cannot be committed with impunity.

The antipathy of the white race for the yellow is so natural that it is almost an offence against nature to overcome it. Yet we have such a need of sympathy, we have such a faculty for taking root, that we can leave nothing without a wrench, and every departure without expectation of return leaves a bitter taste behind it. As this emotion is subconscious, and fleeting, it is one of those that Loti has felt most truly; his mobile soul, little

capable of durable impressions, is continually stirred by little thrills. This continuous succession of abrupt, fleeting sensations, like the small, stubborn waves dreaded by seamen, is another cause of melancholy.

With what delicacy he feels and expresses the sadness of departure, the unmeasured sadness contained in the few words : " I shall never see that again ! "

On a dark, cold night, on his way back to his ship, he was compelled to stop for an hour in a village, where there was nothing to do. Finding a little house at the end of a path, he entered ; he was received by a pretty mousmé, who hospitably offered him rice and cigarettes. And behold, he falls a-musing :

My dinner is horrible ! Miserable embers in the stove smoke and throw out no heat. My fingers are so frozen that I cannot use my chopsticks. All about us beyond the thin paper screen is the sadness of this sleeping silent land, which I know to be so dark and chill. But there is the mousmé who serves me with the courtesy of a marquise of the days of Louis XV, with smiles which wrinkle her long-lashed, cat-like eyes, which give yet a further tilt to her already *retroussé* nose. She is an exquisite sight.

Because of her youth and beauty, above all because she is extraordinarily fresh and wholesome, and because something unaccountable attracts me, a sudden charm is cast over the miserable inn in which she dwells ; I am almost fain to linger, for I feel no longer exiled and alone ; I am overcome by a sense of languor, which will be forgotten in an hour, but which is much akin, alas, to those things we call love, tenderness, affection, and which we should like to try to believe are great and noble.

And he carries away the regrets of an hour. How should he not be mortally sad ? With an exquisitely delicate skin, he feels nothing deeply ; while all the pleasures and sorrows of the world leap around him like dancing girls before a Rajah,

his soul remains empty, and depressed, indolent and unoccupied. Nothing has entered it. This is an excellent disposition for the writing of pages which perturb the reader. Without his perpetual boredom Chateaubriand would never have written *René*.

While Pierre Loti was publishing *Japoneries d'automne*, M. Guy de Maupassant was publishing a collection of stories called *La main gauche*. The title is self-explanatory. These stories differ widely in tone and complexion. They are not all of the same value, but all bear the mark of the master; firmness, conciseness of expression, and that powerful sobriety which is the outstanding feature of M. Maupassant's talent.

This collection also, which one greedily devours, leaves an impression of sadness. M. de Maupassant does not, like the author of the *Mariage de Loti*, represent the melancholy of things, and does not appear to be impressed by the disproportion of our powers, our hopes, and reality. He is not uneasy, yet he is not bright. The sadness that he expresses is simple, crude, and clear. He exposes the brutality, hideousness, beastliness, and savage cunning of the human animal, and it comes home to us. His characters are generally rather stupid, common, and terribly true to life. His women are dominated by instinct, naturally perverse, and untrustworthy: hence the tragedy. What they do is done by instinct; they surrender to the obscure suggestions of flesh and heredity. Whether they be refined Parisians like Madame Haggan (*Le rendez-vous*), or savage creatures like Allouma (the first story of the collection), they are all playthings of nature, and they themselves are ignorant

of the forces which actuate them. Why does Madame Haggan change her lover? Because it is spring-time. Why did Allouma go off with a shepherd from the South? Because the South wind blew.

That was enough—a gust of wind! Do they mostly know, even the cleverest and most complicated of them, why they act? No more than a weathercock in the wind. A hardly perceptible breeze makes the iron or copper vane revolve, just as an imperceptible impression stirs and urges to decision a woman's changing heart, whether she live in town or country, in the suburbs or the desert.

If they reflect and understand, they can say later why they have done one thing rather than another. But at the moment they do not know, for they are the playthings of their feelings, the thoughtless slaves of events, surroundings, emotions, meetings, and all the hazards which thrill their souls and bodies (page 62).

That is the opinion of one of M. de Maupassant's characters, and it appears to be that of M. de Maupassant himself. It is nothing new, and our ancestors recognized female fragility. But they told merry tales about it. Something must have suffered a change, since we mourn what made them laugh. We are more refined, more delicate, more skilled at tormenting ourselves, better adapted to suffering. By developing our pleasures we have accentuated our sorrows. And that is why M. de Maupassant does not tell merry tales in verse; why his stories are cruelly melancholy.

Do not let us flatter ourselves that we have invented any of our woes. It is long since the priest spoke at the altar: "Why are you sad, O my soul, and why are you troubled?" Since the birth of the world there has been a veiled woman in the way: her name is Melancholy. Still, we must be just. We have certainly added

something to the mourning of the soul, and brought our share to the universal treasury of moral evil.

I have already referred to my old illustrated Bible, and to the terrestrial paradise which I admired in my wise and tender childhood, at night, seated at the family table, under the soft light of a lamp.\* That paradise was a Dutch landscape, and the hills were surmounted by oaks twisted by the wind from the sea. The fields, beautifully drained, were divided by lines of old willows. The tree of knowledge was a mossy apple-tree.

This delighted me. But I could not understand why God had forbidden the good Flemish Eve to taste the fruit of the tree which gave understanding. I know now, and I am near believing that the God of my old Bible was right. That good old man, fond of gardens, doubtless said to himself : “ knowledge does not bring happiness, and when men know a lot of history and geography they will become sad.” He was right. If by any chance he is still alive, he must congratulate himself on his prescience. We have eaten of the fruits of the tree of knowledge, and the taste of ashes is left in our mouths. We have explored the earth ; we have mixed with the black, red, and yellow races ; we have become fearfully aware that humanity is more diverse than we thought, and we are brought face to face with strange brothers whose souls are no more like ours than those of animals. And we have wondered : what then is this Humanity, which, under the influence of climate, thus changes its countenance, its soul, and its gods ? When all that we knew of the earth was the fields

\* See *La vie littéraire*, t. II, page 319.

that nourished us, it seemed enormous; now we have discovered its place in the universe, and it seems small. We have discovered that it is but a drop of mud, and are humiliated thereby. We have been led to believe that the forms of life and intelligence are infinitely more numerous than we suspected, and that there are thinking beings in all the planets, in all the worlds, and we understand that our intelligence is miserably limited. Life, in itself, is neither long nor short, and plain men, who measure it by its average duration, rightly say that to die white-haired is to have lived long enough. What have we done? We have tried to estimate the immemorial age of the earth, even the age of the sun, and we now reckon human life by comparison with geological periods and cosmic ages; and by this standard it is ridiculously short. Drowned in the ocean of time and space, we have realized that we are nothing, and this has depressed us. In our pride we have sought to keep silence, but we have blenched. The greatest evil—and undoubtedly the old gardener with the long white beard in my Bible had foreseen it—is that faith has disappeared with our happy ignorance.

We have no longer any hopes, and we no longer believe in the things that used to console our forefathers. This is the most painful thing of all. It was pleasant to believe, even in hell.

Finally, to crown our miseries, the conditions of material life have become more difficult than formerly. The new form of society, in authorizing all sorts of hopes, excites all the energies. The struggle for life is more desperate than ever, the victory more overwhelming, and defeat more pitiless. Together with faith and hope we have

lost charity; the three virtues which, like three vessels bearing at the prow the image of a celestial virgin, carrying poor souls across the world's ocean, have foundered in the same storm. Who will bring us a new Faith, Hope, and Charity?



## HROTSWITHA AND THE MARIONETTES



**I**HAVE already acknowledged it ; I love marionettes, and those of M. Signoret please me particularly. They are shaped by artists ; they are displayed by poets. They have a simple grace, a divine awkwardness, as of statues which condescend to behave as dolls ; and it is delightful to watch these little figures acting in comedy. Consider further that they were made for what they do, that their nature conforms to their destiny, and that they are perfect without effort.

One night, at a certain theatre, I saw a very talented and perfectly respectable lady, who, dressed as a queen, and reciting verses, was trying to pass herself off as the sister of Helen and the Heavenly Twins. But she had a flat nose, and for that reason I instantly realized that she was not the daughter of Leda. And so, whatever she might say or do, I could not believe her.

All my pleasure was spoilt. With marionettes one runs no risk of any such discomfort. They are made in the image of the daughters of dreams. And they are possessed of a thousand other qualities besides, which I cannot express, but which I savour with delight.

Now, what I am going to say is almost unintelligible, but I shall say it all the same, because it responds to a true sensation. These marionettes are like the Egyptian hieroglyphics, that is, they have a certain pure and mysterious quality, and when they perform a drama of Shakespeare or Aristophanes I seem to watch the poet's thought unfolded in sacred characters along the temple's wall.

In short, I venerate their divine innocence, and I am very sure that if old Æschylus, who was highly mystical, had returned to earth and visited France on the occasion of our Universal Exhibition, he would have had his tragedies played by M. Signoret's company.

I wanted to say these things, because, without flattering myself, I do not believe that anyone else would say them, and I strongly suspect my folly to be unique. The marionettes respond exactly to my idea of the theatre, and I confess that this idea is singular. I should like a dramatic representation to recall, in some degree, so that it may truly remain a game, a box of Nuremberg toys, a Noah's ark, or a set of clockwork figures. But I should further desire these artless images to be symbols; I should like these simple forms to be animated by magic; I want them to be enchanted toys. This may seem a curious taste; still, it must be remembered that Shakespeare and Sophocles satisfy it well enough.

The marionettes have lately given us a comedy written in the time of the Emperor Otho, in a Saxon convent, at Gandersheim, by a young sister called Hrotswitha, which means White Rose, or rather Clear Voice, for the learned are not quite

sure, and the old Saxon is not very easily legible, which really grieves me.

In those days the face of Europe was shaggy and misty. Everything was dark, and souls were rugged. The men, dressed in steel corselets, and wearing pointed caps, which gave them the appearance of great pike, all went to war, and Christendom resounded with the clash of lance and sword. They built dark churches, decorated with terrible, touching figures, such as children make when they try to reproduce men and animals. The old stonecutters of the time of the Emperor Otho and King Louis d'Outre-mer had, like children, all the joys and surprises of ignorance. On the capitals of the columns they placed angels whose hands were bigger than their bodies, because it is difficult to put five fingers in a small space, and these hands were nothing less than marvellous. Those good sculptors must have been greatly gratified, when they contemplated their work, for it was like nothing in the world, and made one think of everything.

The great birds, dragons, and monstrous little men of the Romanesque sculptors were, with the ferocious illuminations of manuscripts, which were full of devils, all that Hrotswitha could have known of the beauty of art. But she read Terence and Virgil in her cell, and possessed a pure, sweet, and cheerful heart. She composed poems which to some extent recall the angels whose hands are bigger than their bodies, but which somehow touch one by their candid, happy, innocence.

Acting comedies was a great amusement for women shut up in convents. In those where the cultivated daughters of the nobility lived, dramatic

performances frequently took place. There were neither decorations nor costumes; merely false beards to represent men. Hrotswitha wrote comedies which she doubtless played with her sisters; and these pieces, written in rather quaint dog-Latin, are indeed the most charming curiosities with which a mind open to the breath and perfumes of the past could amuse itself.

Hrotswitha was a simple creature; restricted by her surroundings, and conceiving nothing more beautiful than the religious life, she had no other object in writing her comedies than the praise of Chastity. But she was not unaware of the dangers run by her favourite virtue in this world, and her plays show us the purity of virgins exposed to all possible affronts. The pious legends which served her for a theme were a source of rich material. We know what assaults had to be resisted by Agnes, Barbara, Catherine, and all these brides of Jesus Christ who placed the red rose of martyrdom on the white robe of their virginity.

Pious Hrotswitha was not afraid to unveil the fury of sensual man. Sometimes, with a charming awkwardness, she poked fun at him. For instance, she shows us the pagan Dulcinius ready to throw himself like a devouring lion on three virgins of whom he is indiscriminately enamoured. Fortunately he rushes into a kitchen, thinking it to be the room in which they have taken refuge. His mind wanders, and in his aberration he caresses the kitchen utensils. One of the girls watches him through the cracks in the door, and describes the scene to her companions.

“Sometimes,” she says, “he tenderly presses the cooking-pots to his bosom; sometimes he embraces

the cauldrons and the frying-pans and covers them with amorous kisses. His hands, face, and clothes are already so black that he looks like an Ethiopian."

This was, no doubt, a representation of the passions such as the nuns of Gandersheim could behold without danger. But sometimes Hrotswitha gave desire a more tragic complexion. Her drama *Callimachus* is, in its Gothic dryness, full of the disorder of a love stronger than Death. The hero, Callimachus, is violently enamoured of Drusiana, the loveliest and most virtuous lady in Ephesus. Drusiana is a Christian; ready to yield, she implores salvation of Christ. God grants her prayer by allowing her to die.

Callimachus learns of her death only after her burial. He goes by night to the cemetery, opens the coffin, tears away the shroud, and says:

"How dearly I loved you! And you always repulsed me! You always opposed yourself to my will!"

Then, tearing the dead woman from her rest, he presses her in his arms, emitting a horrible cry of triumph.

"Now she is in my power!"

Callimachus afterwards became a great saint, and loved only God. Nevertheless, he afforded the nuns of Gandersheim a horrible example of the delirium of the senses and the disorders of the soul. The nuns of the time of Otho the Great did not shelter their purity beneath a veil of ignorance: two of Sister Hrotswitha's pious comedies carry them in imagination into the domains of vice. I refer to *Panuphtius* and *Abraham*, of which the marionettes of the Rue Vivienne have given us two performances. One sees, in each of these dramas

drawn from Oriental hagiology, a holy man who has not feared to visit a courtesan in order to lead her back to the Higher Life.

This was the not uncommon custom of the good Egyptian and Syrian monks, who thus anticipated by several centuries the preachings of the blessed Robert d'Arbrissel. The Panuphtius of the Saxon poetess was a worthy Copt of the name of Panuphti, well known to M. Amélineau, to whom we shall refer later. As for St. Abraham, he was a Syrian anchorite whose life was written by St. Ephraim.

When old, he lived alone in a little cabin, when his brother died, leaving a daughter of great beauty, named Mary. Abraham, being assured that the life he led would be an excellent one for his niece, caused a little hut to be built for her alongside his own, from which he instructed her through a little window which he had made.

He took care that she fasted, watched, and sang psalms. But a monk, whom one must believe was a false one, coming to Mary whilst the holy Abraham was meditating the Holy Scriptures, led the young girl into sin ; whereupon she said :

“ It is better, since I am now dead to God, that I should go into a country where I am unknown.”

Leaving her cell, she went to a town which is believed to have been Edessa, a place of cool fountains and delicious gardens, which is still the most charming town in Syria.

Meanwhile, the holy Abraham was plunged in profound meditation. His niece had been absent some days, when he opened the window, and asked :

“ Mary, why do you no longer sing the psalm that you used to sing so well ? ”

Receiving no answer, he suspected the truth, and cried :

“ A cruel wolf has carried off my lamb.”

He dwelt in affliction for the space of two years ; after which he learnt that his niece was leading a life of evil. Acting with prudence, he begged of one of his friends to go to the town, there to discover the exact position of affairs.

The friend's report was that Mary was indeed leading a very evil life. On hearing this the holy man begged his friend to lend him the clothes of a knight, and a horse. In order to avoid recognition he wore a great hat which concealed his face, and went to the hostelry at which it was stated his niece lodged. He looked about him, seeking a glimpse of her, but, as she was not visible, he feigned to smile, and said to the host :

“ Sir, I hear that there is a very pretty girl here ; could I see her ? ”

The host, an obliging man, sent for her, and Mary appeared in a costume which, according to St. Ephraim's own expression, was a sufficient indication of her mode of life.

The man of God was overcome by grief. However, he affected gaiety, and ordered a good meal. Mary was that day in a dark humour, and the sight of this old man, whom she did not recognize, as he had not taken off his hat, failed to divert her to a joyful mood. The host blamed her for such a sulky attitude, so contrary to the duties of her profession ; but she sighed and said :

“ Would to God I had died three years ago.”

Holy St. Abraham compelled himself to adopt the language of a knight, as he wore the clothes of one.

“ My girl,” he said, “ I did not come here to bewail your sins, but to share your love.”

But when the host had left him alone with Mary he ceased feigning ; removing his hat, he said with tears :

“ My daughter Mary, do you not recognize me ? Am I not Abraham who stands in the place of your father ? ”

He touched her hand, and exhorted her all night to penitence and repentance. Fearing above all things to render her desperate, he repeated unceasingly :

“ My daughter, God alone is without sin.”

Mary had a naturally sweet soul. She consented to return with him. She wished to take her clothes and jewels. But Abraham made her understand that it would be more correct to abandon them. He took her on his horse, and brought her back to the cells, where they resumed their former existence.

This time, however, the holy man took care that Mary could only communicate with the outer world by passing through his room, by reason of which, and the grace of God, he preserved his lamb. The discreet Tillemont not only records these facts in his history, but also establishes the exact chronology. Mary sinned with the false monk, and entered the inn at Edessa, in A.D. 358. She was brought back to her cell in A.D. 360, and made a holy end, after a life full of merit, in A.D. 370. These are the exact dates. The Greeks celebrate the 29th October as the feast day of St. Mary the Recluse. In the Roman Martyrology this feast is dated the 16th March.

With the object of demonstrating the final



triumph of Chastity, the White Rose of Ganderheim wrote a comedy on the subject, full of artlessness and audacity, barbarism and subtlety, which could only be performed by the Saxon nuns of the time of Otho the Great, or the marionettes of the Rue Vivienne.



## CHARLES BAUDELAIRE



BAUDELAIRE has been recently treated with really excessive harshness, by a critic whose authority is great, because it is founded upon mental integrity. In the author of *Fleurs du Mal*, M. Brunetière saw nothing but an extravagant madman. He stated as much with his customary frankness. On that day he unwittingly offended the Muses, for Baudelaire is a poet. He had, I admit, obvious tricks; in his bad moments he grimaced like an old monkey. He affected a sort of dandyism in his person, which nowadays seems ridiculous. He took pleasure in displeasing, and prided himself on appearing odious. That is a pity, and the legends created by friends and admirers abound in bad taste.

“Have you ever tasted little children’s brains?” he one day asked a simple-minded official. “Try them; they are like green walnuts, and very good.”

On another occasion, in the dining-room of a restaurant much frequented by people from the provinces, he began a story with the following words, speaking in a loud voice:

“After having murdered my poor father . . .”

While admitting, what is probable, that these stories may not actually be true, they are in his style, they smack of Baudelaire, and I can imagine

nothing more irritating. All this must be admitted, but we must also admit that Baudelaire was a poet.

I will add that he was a very Christian poet. His reputation has been charged with many offences. New immoralities and a curious depravity have been found in his poems. That is to flatter him and his period. So far as vice is concerned, there had been nothing left to discover since the age of the cave-dwellers, and the human animal, without a great deal of imagination, had imagined everything. After close examination, Baudelaire is not the poet of vice, but of sin, a very different thing. His morality differs little from that of the theologians. His very best verses appear to be inspired by the old prose of the Church, and the hymns of the breviary.

He was like the old monks in one thing: The shapes beheld in his dreams had a terrible fascination for him. Like a monk, he cried every morning:

*Cedant tenebræ lumini  
Et nox diurno sideri  
Ut culpa quam nox intulit  
Lucis labescat munere.*

He is profoundly impressed by the impurity of the flesh, and I would go so far as to say that the doctrine of original sin has found its ultimate expression in the *Fleurs du Mal*. Baudelaire contemplates the troubles of the senses with the minute severity of a casuist and the gravity of a doctor. These things are, for him, of importance; they are sins, and there is something monstrous in any sin, however small. The most miserable creatures encountered by night in the darkness of a disreputable side-street are clothed for him in a

tragic grandeur; they are possessed of seven demons, and the whole mystical heaven watches the sinner whose soul is in danger. He tells himself that the vilest kisses will reverberate through all Eternity, and into the encounter of an hour he pours eighteen centuries of devilry.

I am not wrong, therefore, in saying that he is a Christian. But one must add that Baudelaire, like M. Barbey d'Aurévilly, is a very bad Christian. He loves sin, and delightedly enjoys the voluptuousness of falling. He knows that he is damning himself, and in that he pays a homage to divine wisdom, which will be accounted to him for righteousness, but he has the vertigo of damnation, and no taste for women, beyond that sufficient surely to lose his soul. He is never a lover, and he would not even be a debauchee if debauchery were not superlatively impious. He is much less attached to the form than to the spirit, which he regards as diabolical. He would leave women completely alone, were it not that he hopes thereby to offend God, and make the angels weep.

Such ideas are doubtless perverse enough, and I see that they distinguished Baudelaire from those old monks who sincerely dreaded the phantoms of the night. Pride was what had thus depraved Baudelaire. In his arrogance he wished that everything he did, even his most trivial impurities, should be important; he was glad that they were sins, because they would attract the attention of heaven and hell. Fundamentally, he was never more than half a believer. His temperament alone was wholly Christian. His heart and intellect remained empty. It is said that one day a friend, a naval officer, showed him a *ju-ju* which he had brought

back from Africa, a monstrous little head carved in wood by a negro.

“Well, it’s very ugly,” said the sailor, and he threw it contemptuously aside.

“Take care,” said Baudelaire uneasily. “Suppose it were really a god !”

They were the most profane words he had ever spoken. He believed in the unknown gods, especially for the pleasure of blaspheming.

To sum up, I do not think that Baudelaire ever had a perfectly clear idea of the state of soul which I have tried to define. But it seems to me that one finds, amid incredible puerilities and ridiculous affectations, a truly sincere testimony in his work.

One of the results of this Christian frame of mind, if I may so describe it, is the constant association of Love and Death. But here again Baudelaire is a bad Christian, and all the imagery of corruption which the preacher collects to disgust us with the flesh becomes a savoury dish for this vampire ; he inhales the perfume of corpses like an aphrodisiacal perfume. The worst of it is that he is a poet, and a great one. One of the strangest tales of *The Arabian Nights’ Entertainments* tells of a woman, beautiful as the day, about whose appearance there is nothing strange except her manner of eating rice ; she lifts it to her mouth a grain at a time. The fire of her eyes and the freshness of her mouth give promise of ineffable pleasures ; but at night she visits the cemeteries to devour the flesh of corpses. Such is the poetry of Baudelaire. It may annoy us that it is beautiful, but so it is.

Deduct all that inspired the artist with the mania to astonish, the straining after the singular

and the strange, the grains of rice eaten one by one, and there will yet remain a beautiful restless figure, like the woman in *The Arabian Nights*.

What, for instance, is there more beautiful in the whole range of contemporary poetry than the following strophe, a complete picture of voluptuous lassitude?

De ses yeux amortis les paresseuses larmes,  
L'air brisé, la stupeur, la morne volupté,  
Ses bras vaincus, jetés comme de vaines armes,  
Tout servait, tout paraît sa fragile beauté.\*

What is there more magnificent, even in Alfred de Vigny, than this malediction, steeped in pity, which the poet flings to the "femmes damnées"?

Descendez, descendez, lamentables victimes,  
Descendez le chemin de l'enfer éternel !  
Plongez en plus profond du gouffre, où tous les crimes,  
Flagellés par un vent qui ne vient pas du ciel,

Bouillonnent pêle-mêle avec un bruit d'orage.  
Ombres folles ! Courez au but de vos désirs ;  
Jamais vous ne pourrez assouvir votre rage,  
Et votre châtement naîtra de vos plaisirs.

Loin des peuples vivants, errantes, condamnées,  
A travers les déserts, courez comme les loups ;  
Faites votre destin, âmes désordonnées,  
Et fuyez l'infini que vous portez en vous.†

\* The languid tears in her tender eyes,  
The jaded air, the stupor, the dejected voluptuousness,  
Her vanquished arms thrown down like useless weapons,  
All served and adorned her fragile beauty.

† Down, down, miserable victims,  
Descend the road to eternal Hell !  
Plunge into the deepest of the gulf where all crimes,  
Scourged by a wind that comes not from Heaven,

I have certainly never attempted to extenuate the poet's faults. I think I have exhibited him as sufficiently perverse and unhealthy. It is only just to add that there are many parts of his work which are quite free from contamination.

In his early youth Baudelaire travelled through the Indian seas, visited Mauritius, Madagascar, and the flowering island of Bourbon, where Parny could see nothing but *Eléonore*, and of which M. Leon Dierx has given us such charming landscapes. Well, in Baudelaire's poetry there are some enchanting recollections of these lands of light, which he had seen with the eyes of youth, in their resplendent radiance.

Here for example, are some exquisite verses "à une Malabaraise":

Aux pays chauds et bleus où ton Dieu t'a fait naître,  
 Ta tâche est d'allumer la pipe de ton maître,  
 De pourvoir les flacons d'eaux fraîches, et d'odeurs,  
 De chasser loin du lit les moustiques rôdeurs,  
 Et, dès que le matin fait chanter les platanes,  
 D'acheter au bazar ananas et bananes.  
 Tout le jour, où tu veux, tu mènes tes pieds nus  
 Et fredonnes tout bas de vieux airs inconnus ;  
 Et quand descend le soir au manteau d'écarlate,  
 Tu poses doucement ton corps sur une natte,

Seethe together with the roaring of a tempest.  
 Mad shades ! rush to the goal of your desires ;  
 Never will ye be able to slake your rage,  
 And your punishment shall be born of your pleasures.

Far from the living peoples, wandering and condemned,  
 Across the deserts you rush like wolves ;  
 Fulfil your destiny, disordered souls,  
 And flee the infinite ye bear within yourselves.

Où tes rêves flottants sont pleins de colibris  
Et toujours, comme toi, gracieux et fleuris.\*

Have we not here already something of Fatou-Gaye, and a predecessor of Loti in the appreciation of exotic beauty?

This is not all. A love of the plastic arts and veneration for the great painters inspired Baudelaire with some superb lines of the greatest purity. Finally, in the more mixed and doubtful part of his work the poet extolled the labours of the lowly in proud and lofty accents. He felt the soul of toiling Paris, the poetry of the slums; he appreciated the greatness of humble people, and showed that there is something noble even in a drunken rag-picker:

Souvent, à la clarté d'un rouge réverbère  
Dont le vent bat la flamme et tourmente le verre,  
Au cœur d'un vieux faubourg, labyrinthe fangeux  
Où l'humanité grouille en ferments orageux,

On voit un chiffonnier qui vient, hochant la tête,  
Buttant et se cognant aux murs comme un poète,  
Et, sans prendre souci des mouchards, ses sujets,  
Épanche tout son cœur en glorieux projets.

\* In the countries, warm and blue, where your God caused you  
to be born,

Your task is to light your master's pipe,  
To bring flagons of fresh water and scents,  
And to chase from his bed the wandering mosquito;  
And as soon as morning makes the plane-trees sing,  
To buy pine-apples and plantains in the bazaar.  
The whole day, where you will, you wander barefooted,  
And hum low some old forgotten tune;  
And when evening descends in her scarlet mantle  
You softly lay your body on a mat,  
Where your fleeting dreams are full of humming-birds,  
And always, like yourself, sweet and flowery.



Il prête des serments, dicte des lois sublimes,  
Terrasse les méchants, relève les victimes,  
Et sous le firmament comme un dais suspendu,  
S'enivre des splendeurs de sa propre vertu.

Oui, ces gens harcelés de chagrins de ménage,  
Moulus par le travail et tourmentés par l'âge,  
Éreintés et pliant sous un tas de débris,  
Vomissement confus de l'énorme Paris

Reviennent, parfumés d'une odeur de futailles,  
Suivis de compagnons, blanchis dans les batailles,  
Dont la moustache pend comme de vieux drapeaux.  
—Les bannières, les fleurs, et les arcs triomphaux

Se dressent devant eux, solennelle magie !  
Et dans l'étourdissante et lumineuse orgie  
Des clairons, du soleil, des cris et du tambour  
Ils apportent la gloire au peuple ivre d'amour.\*

\* Oft in the light of a red street lamp,  
Whose flame the wind flutters, rattling its glass,  
In the heart of an ancient suburb, a miry labyrinth,  
Where humanity swarms in a stormy ferment,

One sees a rag-picker approach, nodding his head,  
Stumbling and bumping the walls like a poet ;  
And, taking no heed of the police spies, his subjects,  
He pours out his soul in glorious imaginings.

He takes great oaths, dictates sublime laws,  
Overwhelms the wicked, and uplifts the oppressed,  
And beneath the firmament suspended like a canopy,  
Becomes intoxicated with the splendours of his own virtue.

Yes, these people harassed by domestic trouble,  
Bruised by toil, and tortured by old age,  
Exhausted, and bowed beneath a heap of rubbish,  
The chaotic vomit of monstrous Paris

Is not that great and magnificent, and could one better detach poetry from the gross reality? And note, too, how classic, how traditional, how ample are Baudelaire's lines. For myself, no one will ever persuade me to regard this poet as the author of all the ills from which literature is suffering to-day. Baudelaire had great intellectual vices and moral perversities, which disfigure the greater part of his work. I agree that the Baudelairean spirit is hateful, but the *Fleurs du Mal* are and will remain a delight to all those who are capable of feeling the influence of a luminous imagery borne upon the wings of verse.

As a man, I agree that he is detestable. But he is a poet and therefore divine.

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Return, perfumed by an odour of wine-casks,  
Followed by companions, hoary with battle,  
Whose moustache hangs like old flags  
—The banners, flowers and triumphal arches

Rise before them, a solemn enchantment!  
And in the bewildering and luminous orgy  
Of trumpets and sunlight, of shouts and drums,  
They bring glory to a people drunk with love.

## RABELAIS \*



AS it ever been your lot to visit some old and splendid monument in company with a scholar, who was, by chance, a man of wit and taste, capable of thought, sight, feeling, and imagination? Have you, for instance, ever wandered through the great ruins of the Château de Coucy with M. Anatole de Montaiglon, who makes songs out of archæology, and archæology out of songs, knowing all the while that all is vanity?

Have you ever listened to the friends of M. Cherbuliez, whilst they maintained a learned and familiar conversation round one of Phidias' horses, or some statue in the Cathedral of Chartres? If you have partaken of these pleasures, you will find a reflection of them when you read M. Paul Stapfer's new book, which is really a saunter round Rabelais, a pleasant, scholarly, and charming saunter. The work of Rabelais is a cathedral, placed under the patronage of the Humanities, free thought and tolerance; but built in a flamboyant style, lacking neither the gargoyles, the monsters nor the grotesque scenes so dear to the sculptors of the Middle Ages; where one runs a risk

\* *Rabelais, sa personne, son génie, son œuvre*, by Paul Stapfer, professor in the faculty of Letters at Bordeaux, 1 vol.

of losing oneself in a maze of steeples and turrets, in the jumble of pinnacles which shelter a medley of fools and sages, men, animals, and monks.

And, to make confusion worse confounded, this Gothic church is, like that of St. Eustache, adorned with masks, shells, and little figures in the charming manner of the Renaissance. One certainly runs every risk of getting lost, and few, as a matter of fact, have attempted it. But with a guide like M. Stapfer, after an infinity of amusing wanderings, one always finds oneself again.

M. Paul Stapfer knows his Rabelais. This, alone, would not be enough: he loves him, and that is the great point. His is no bigoted affection. He admits that his dim cathedral is built without order or plan, and that it is impossible to see clearly through half the arches. But he loves it as it is, and he is quite right to do so. "My delightful Rabelais!" he cries, just as Dante used to sigh: "My beautiful St. John!"

In the same city where M. Stapfer lectures upon literature, side by side with the exquisite poet and Latinist, M. Frédéric Plessis, in rich and laughing Bordeaux, I visited last year the crypt of Saint-Seurin. The sacristan who accompanied me thither made me see how touching it was in its antiquity, and how its barbarism spoke to the heart. He added, "Sir, a great danger is threatening; it is richly endowed, and they are about to embellish it!"

That sacristan belongs to the school of M. Paul Stapfer, who is unwilling that Rabelais should be embellished by wonderful illustrations and fantastic commentaries. Naturally M. Stapfer, who had studied his author deeply, did not find therein all that was discovered by those who have scarcely

read him. For instance, he never saw that Rabelais had predicted the French Revolution. I shall not examine his book in detail, and I shall refrain from criticizing his criticism. To be truthful, I should find it rather awkward, as I have investigated Rabelais a great deal less than he has. God be thanked, I have pantagruelized like the rest of the world. Frère Jean is no stranger to me, and I owe him some happy hours. But M. Stapfer has lived for two years in the greatest intimacy with him, and it savours of impertinence to argue unprepared with such a complete Rabelaisian.

I acknowledge, however, that what strikes him most in Rabelais has never been very obvious to me. The author appears to him, above all, extremely light-hearted. He judges him as his contemporaries did, and it is probable that he is not mistaken. But I must confess that the incongruities of Pantagruel make me smile no more than do the gargoyles of the fourteenth century. Doubtless I am wrong, but it is better to confess it. I will be completely frank. What bores me in the curé of Meudon is that he always remained a monk, and a churchman ; his jests are too innocent ; they offend against sensuality, and this is their greatest fault.

As for morality, I acquit him ; his books are those of an honest man, and I, with M. Stapfer, find therein a breezy robustness of humanity and benevolence. Yes, Rabelais was good ; he had a natural detestation of "les hypocrites, les traîtres qui regardent par un pertuys, les cagots, escargots, matagots, hypocrites, caffars, empantouflés, papelards, chattemites, pattes pelues, et autres telles sectes de gens qui se sont desguisés comme masques pour tromper le monde."

“Flee from them,” he said, “abhor and hate them as I do.”

His free, laughing, open temperament held fanaticism and violence in abhorrence. Herein again he was an excellent man. Like the King's sister, the good Marguerite of Navarre, he never took the part of the executioners, while he avoided that of the martyrs. He maintained his opinions, but not up to the burning point, reckoning in advance of and with Montaigne, that to die for an idea is to put a very high value on one's opinions. Far from blaming him, I praise him. Martyrdom must be left to those who, not knowing how to doubt, have in their very simplicity the excuse for their pig-headedness. It seems presumptuous to get burnt for an opinion. Like the Serenus of M. Jules Lemaître, one is shocked that men should be so positive about things, when one has sought so long without finding, and when in the end one remains in doubt. Martyrs are lacking in irony; it is an unpardonable fault, for without irony the world would be like a forest without birds; irony is the gaiety of meditation and the joy of wisdom. What further? I charge the martyrs with fanaticism: I suspect a kind of natural kinship between them and their executioners, and I fancy that, were they the stronger, they would take the place of the executioners. Doubtless I am wrong. Still, I am supported by history. It shows me Calvin between the faggots prepared for him, and those that he kindles; it shows me Henry Estienne, who was at great pains to escape the executioners of the Sorbonne, denouncing Rabelais as deserving the whole range of torments.

And why should Rabelais have surrendered

himself to "the gowned devils"? He had no faith to which to testify in the flames. He was no more Protestant than Catholic, and if he had been burnt at Paris or Geneva it would only have been due to an unfortunate misunderstanding. Fundamentally, and M. Stapfer explains this very clearly, Rabelais was neither a theologian nor a philosopher; he was unaware of any of the beautiful ideas since discovered in his works. He had a sublime zeal for science, and so long as he was left undisturbed to study science, botany, cosmography, Greek, and Hebrew, he was perfectly satisfied, praised God, and hated no one, except the gowned devils. At that time the zeal for knowledge inflamed the most noble minds. The treasures of ancient literature, exhumed from the dust of the cloisters, were brought into the light of day, explained by scholarly editors, and multiplied by the presses of Venice, Basle, and Lyons. Rabelais' share was the publication of some Greek manuscripts. Like his contemporaries, he admired all the work of the ancients indifferently. His head was a barn in which were stored Virgil, Lucian, Theophrastus, and Dioscorides, the high classics and the low. But he was principally a doctor, a wandering doctor, and a maker of almanacs. Gargantua and Pantagruel held no more place in his life than did Don Quixote in that of Cervantes; Rabelais constructed his masterpiece unknowingly, which is the usual means by which masterpieces come into being. Genius alone is required; forethought is entirely superfluous. In these days, when there exists a literature and literary canons, we live to write, when we do not write to live. We take great pains, and while we are trying to

do well our intuitive grace evaporates. The best chance one has of creating a masterpiece is—and I admit it is small—to make no previous preparation, to be entirely lacking in literary vanity, and to write for the muses and oneself. Rabelais unconsciously wrote one of the world's greatest books.

It afforded him much amusement. He started off without any sort of plan or idea. His original intention was to write the continuation of a popular story which amused the servant-maids and footmen. He failed completely, and what he had prepared for the vulgar was food for the finest intellects. This is very puzzling to human sagacity, which, however, is continually being puzzled.

Rabelais was, unknown to himself, the miracle of his age. In a century of refinement, coarseness and pedantry, he was incomparably exquisite, coarse and pedantic. His genius is very disturbing to those who search him for faults: as he has them all, it is very reasonably doubted whether he has any. He is wise and foolish, natural and affected, refined and trivial; he gets muddled and confused, and contradicts himself unceasingly. But he makes everything clear and lovable. His style is that of a prodigy, and although he often falls into the strangest aberrations no writer is his superior in the art of choosing and marshalling words. He loves and adores words. His trick of stringing them together is marvellous. He simply cannot check himself. This exhibitor of giants is immoderate in all things. He has an immense litany of nouns and adjectives. For instance, when the bakers have an argument with the shepherds, the latter will be described as: "Trop diteux, breschedens,



plaisans rousseaux, galliers, chienlicts, averlans, limes sourdes, faitnéans, friandeaux, bustarins, traîne-gaines, gentilz floquets, copieux, landores, malotrus, dendins, beugars, tezés, gaubregeux, gogelus, claquedens . . . et autres telz épithètes diffamatoires.”

Please note that I have left out some of these epithets. Sometimes it is the mere sound of the words that amuses and excites him, like a mule that runs to the sound of bells.

He revels in puerile alliterations ; “ Au son de ma musette mesuray les musarderies des musards.”

So great a craftsman in his mother tongue, whose speech smacks of his native soil, he will sometimes break out into Greek and Latin, like the Limousin scholar whom he had laughed at while perhaps admiring him in secret, for it was one of this great jester’s characteristics to love what he jeered at. He described a bitch on heat as a *lycisque orgoose*, and a one-eyed mare as an *esgue orbe*. So far as I know, our symbolists, M. de Régnier, and M. Jean Moréas himself, have not imagined rarer terms. But Rabelais impregnates them with such humour, and uses them in such a way that one is bound to laugh with him. In his happy moments, he has the most magnificent and charming style. Where will you find a more pleasant phrase than the following, taken at random from Book III, which refers to the policy that should be pursued with recently conquered peoples ?

“ Comme enfant nouvellement né, les fault alaicter, bercer, esjouir. Comme arbre nouvellement planté, les fault appuyer, asseurer, défendre de toutes vimères, injures et calamités. Comme personne sauvée de longue et forte maladie et venant à convalescence, les fault choyer, espargner, restaurer.”

Is not that a simple sentence? Just like Perrette in a short skirt. There is nothing more sprightly than the lamentations of Gargantua bewailing the death of his wife Badbec. Rabelais is like Nature. Death does not affect his immense joy.

“Ma femme est morte. Eh bien! par Dieu, je ne la ressusciteray pas par mes pleurs; elle est bien, elle est en paradis pour le moins, si mieulx n'est; elle prie Dieu pour nous; elle est bien heureuse; elle ne se soucie plus de nos misères et calamités; autant nous en pend à l'œil. Dieu gard le demourant! Il me fault penser d'en trouver une autre.”

To conclude, here is the adventure which closed the life of the priest Tappecu. It will never be surpassed in the art of story-telling.

“La poultre, tout effrayée, se mit au trot, à petz, à bondz et au gualop; à ruades, fressurades, doubles pédales et pétarrades; tant qu'elle rua bas Tappecoue, quoy qu'il se tint à l'aube du bast de toutes ses forces. Ses estrivières estoient de cordes; du cousté hors le montonoir son soulier fenestré estoit si fort entortillé qu'il ne le put oncques tirer. Ainsi estoit traîné à escorchecul par la poultre, toutjours multipliante en ruades contre luy, et fourvoyante de peur par les hayes, buissons et fossés. De mode qu'elle luy cobbit toute la teste, si que la cervelle en tomba près la croix Osanière, puis les bras en pièces, l'un ça, l'autre là, les jambes de mesmes; puis des boyaux fit un long carnage, en sorte que la poultre au couvent arrivante, de luy ne pertoit que le pied droit et soulier entortillé” (IV, 13).

How well that is described, and what a vast joy is suffused over this scene of carnage; the very exaggeration destroys its horror. Let us then, with M. Stapfer, love the “learned and gentle Rabelais,” let us forgive his parson's jokes, and agree that, taken all in all, he was a kindly, worthy man.

## BARBEY D'AURÉVILLY



IT would, indeed, be difficult for me to form an unprejudiced judgment of Barbey d'Aurévilly. I cannot remember the time when I did not know him by sight. He is one of my most youthful recollections, like the statues on the Pont d'Iéna, at whose feet I used to play with my hoop; and the time when one used still to gather mullein, clover, and cowslips on the wild and flowery slopes of the Trocadéro. I had no special opinion concerning those statues; I saw vaguely that they were men controlling stone horses with reins. I had no idea whether they were beautiful or ugly, but I felt their enchantment, like that of the light of heaven, in which I delightedly bathed myself, of the fresh air which I joyfully breathed, of the trees on the deserted quays, of the smiling waters of the Seine, and of the whole world. Yes, I felt all these things; but I never guessed that the enchantment lay within myself, that it was my little self that filled the vast world with radiant happiness. I should explain that when I was nine years old the subjectivity of impressions meant nothing to me. I tasted the world's charm without an effort. There is a great truth in the myth of the Terrestrial Paradise, and I am not surprised

that it has deeply penetrated the mind of the peoples. It is perfectly true that, each in our turn, we go through the adventures of Adam, that we wake to life in the Terrestrial Paradise, and that our childhood flows away in the delights of a fresh Eden. During those blessed hours I saw thistles growing on heaps of stones, in sunny lanes, where the birds sang, and I tell you truly, it was Paradise. It was situated not between the four rivers of the Scriptures, but on the hills of Chaillot and the banks of the Seine. Believe me, it makes no difference. The children's Paradise is full of stones hewed by man ; it is none the less full of pleasures and mystery.

My first meetings with M. d'Aurévilly date from the Paradise period. My grandmother, who knew him slightly, and whom he greatly astonished, used to point him out to me in our walks, as a curiosity. This gentleman, wearing over his ear a hat with crimson velvet edges, with his figure encased in an overcoat with puffed skirts, tapping the gold stripe on his tight trousers with a whip as he walked, inspired no reflections in my mind, for I had no natural tendency to seek out the cause of things. I used to look at him, and no thought troubled the limpidity of my stare. I was simply pleased that there should be anyone so easy to recognize. M. d'Aurévilly was certainly that. I instinctively felt a sort of affection for him. I related him, in my sympathies, with a pensioner who walked with sticks on two wooden legs, and used to bid me good morning, his nose all snuffy ; with an old mathematical professor, red-faced and one-armed, whose bearded visage smiled at my nurse like a satyr's, and with a very old man who

had always worn bed-ticking since the tragic death of his son. For me these four individuals possessed, apart from others, the advantage of being perfectly distinct, and it gave me pleasure to distinguish them. Even to-day I cannot quite disentangle M. d'Aurévilly from the memory of the professor, the invalid and the madman, whom he has gone to rejoin in the land of shades. They formed, for me, all four, part of the monuments of Paris, like the stone horses on the Pont d'Iéna. There was this difference, that they moved, and the statues did not. Apart from that I gave the matter no thought. I knew not of what Life consisted, and after long reflection I admit that I am now scarcely further advanced.

Twelve years having quietly flowed past, one winter's night I accidentally met M. d'Aurévilly in the Rue du Bac walking with Théophile Sylvestre. I was with a friend who introduced me—Sylvestre was holding forth on St. Augustine and swearing like the devil. He struck the ferrule of his stick against the edge of the pavement. Barbey did the same, making the sparks fly, and said :

“ We are the Cyclops of the pavement ! ”

He said this in his beautiful grave, deep voice. Having lost my early artlessness, I was at great pains to understand ; I sought the meaning of the words without success, and experienced a positive uneasiness.

It has been granted me to see M. d'Aurévilly for a moment at several periods of my life. I had the honour to visit him in his little room in the Rue Rousselet, where he lived for thirty years in noble poverty, and where he died encompassed by the ministrations of an angelic woman.

Rue Rousselet, narrow, dirty and bordered with gardens, is full of recollections dear to the heart of the true Parisian. It was there that Madame de la Sablière came to live when, renouncing the world, she vowed herself to the service of the sick. This charming woman, who had loved many things in this world, brought to God, in her repentance, only the ruins of her heart and beauty; she had lost her youth and her lover; her breast was already attacked by the cancer which was later to devour her.

At twenty paces from the room where La Fare's lover, two hundred years ago, wept over the still smouldering ruins of her burnt life, I have spoken many words full of the freshness and hope of youth, at a window opening into the gardens of the brothers of Saint-Jean-de-Dieu. It was there that my friend Adolphe Racot lived, then full of dreams and schemes, cheery and vigorous, who was killed by journalism and long novels. He died recently, felled like a bullock. But in those days infinity lay before us. From that window we could see the house where François Coppée wrote in a little garden, true simple verse, as charming as himself. Paul Bourget was a constant visitor. He would leave College with the face, under his youthful locks, shadowed by metaphysics. Coppée and Bourget used to visit D'Aurévilly, and bring him that delicious thing, the admiration of youth. The scent of the flowers hanging over the old walls; Youth, Poetry, Art! Delightful images of Life! O Rue Rousselet!

Barbey d'Aurévilly, clothed in red in his bare, faded room, would rise splendid and majestic. He was worth hearing when he delivered a pathetic falsehood:

“ I have sent my furniture and my tapestries into the country ! ”

His conversation was full of imagery and unique in style.

“ Vous savez, cet homme qui se met en espalier, sur son mur, au soleil. . . . Je tisonne dans vos souvenirs pour les ranimer . . . Vous regardez la lune, mademoiselle : c'est l'astre des polissons. . . . Vous l'avez vu, terrible, la bouche ébréchée comme la gueule d'un vieux canon. . . . Il est heureux pour Notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ qu'il soit un dieu ; comme homme il eût manqué de caractère : il n'était pas râblé comme Annibal. . . . Je me suis enrôlé en écoutant cette dame. . . . J'ai aimé deux mortes dans ma vie. . . . ”\*

All this was said in a serious voice, in a vaguely and alarmingly Satanic tone, and an adorable childishness.

He was an old gentleman of the best style, very polite and with fine manners. That is all I can tell you ; he is too much mixed up with my recollections, his death is too recent, and I am too astonished by the idea that I shall see him no more to attempt anything in the way of a portrait.

He was, no doubt, extraordinary ; but like Henry IV, on the Pont Neuf, or the Samaritan's palm-tree, he was no longer a source of wonder.

\* “ You know, that man who spreads himself out against his wall like a fruit-tree in the sun. . . . I am poking your memories to rekindle them . . . you are looking at the moon, mademoiselle : it is the planet of blackguards . . . you have seen him, terrible, his jagged mouth like the mouth of an old gun. . . . It is a good thing for Our Lord Jesus Christ that he was a god ; as a man he would have been lacking in character ; he was not broad-backed, like Hannibal. . . . I grew hoarse listening to that lady. . . . I have loved two dead women in my life.”

His Limousin cloaks, lined with red velvet, struck one, not exactly as ordinary, but as necessary.

What made him really lovable was that he never sought to amuse or astonish anyone but himself. It was purely on his own account that he wore lace cravats, and cuffs *à la mousquetaire*. He never, like Baudelaire, felt the horrible temptation to surprise, contradict, and displease. His eccentricities were never malicious. He had a natural gift for eccentricity.

There are some obscure passages in his life; it is said that he was for a time the partner of a dealer in religious articles in the St. Sulpice district. I do not know if it is true, but I would it were so. It amuses me to think of this Knight Templar selling chasubles. It would, indeed, be the triumph of reality over convention.

One night about fifteen years ago I saw an old tragedian at the Odéon, wearing a royal fillet, holding a sceptre in his hand, and playing the part of Agamemnon. I experienced an unnatural pleasure in reflecting that the King of Kings had married an attendant of the theatre. There would be a still more exquisite pleasure in picturing to oneself Barbey d'Aurévilly receiving orders for ecclesiastical linen.

When one comes to think of it, the most extraordinary thing is, not that M. d'Aurévilly should have sold surplices, but that he was ever a critic. One day Baudelaire, whom he had dealt with as a criminal and a great poet, sought him out, masking his satisfaction, and said :

“ Sir, you have attacked my character; were I to demand satisfaction, you would be in a difficult position, as, being a Catholic, you may not fight.”



“Sir,” replied Barbey, “I have always placed my prejudices above my convictions. I am at your service.”

He rather prided himself on his prejudices. But one must do him the justice to say that he never hesitated to place his fancies above reason. His critical work, in twelve volumes, is full of the most extravagant inspirations of caprice. It is wild and unbalanced, full of insults, imprecations, execrations, and excommunications. It fulminates incessantly. None the less he was the most harmless creature in the world.

There again, M. d'Aurévilly is saved by his good genius, his charming childishness. He writes like an angel, and also like a devil, but he does not know what he says.

As for his novels, they may be counted among the most curious works of the period, and there are two which may be reckoned masterpieces in their own class: *L'Ensorcelée*, and *Chevalier Destouches*.

*Chevalier Destouches* contains an account of several episodes of the Chouan rising in Normandy. I happened to read it by chance on a dismal winter's night in the little town of Valognes, which is described in the novel. It made a very strong impression on me. I seemed to see this dead, shrunken town return to life again. I seemed to see once more the faces of the rough, heroic squires, refilling the dark, silent hotels, with their sagging roofs, slowly being destroyed by dry-rot. In the whistling of the wind I could almost hear the hum of bullets. The book made me shudder.

There is something in Barbey d'Aurévilly's style which has always astonished me. There is a mixture of violence and delicacy, of brutality and


refinement. Saint-Victor compared him to those witches' potions which were compounded of flowers and serpents, tiger's blood, and honey—a hellish mixture, but at least not mawkish.

So far as philosophy was concerned, the standpoint of Barbey, the least philosophic of men, was much that of Joseph Le Maistre. He added thereto little but blasphemy. He affirmed his faith on every occasion, but by preference he expressed it through the medium of blasphemy. He appeared to regard impiety as a necessary condiment of faith. He, like Baudelaire, adored sin. He knew nothing of the passions except the pretence and the pose. He made up for it by sacrilege, and never did a believer take so much trouble to insult God. You need not shudder. This great blasphemer will certainly be saved. Under the audacious impiety of a drum-major and a romantic he retained a divine innocence, a holy artlessness, which will gain him grace before the throne of Eternal Wisdom. When St. Peter sees him he will say :

“Here is M. Barbey d'Aurévilly. He longed to possess all the vices, but failed ; for that is very difficult, and requires a peculiar temperament. He would have liked to wallow in crime, for crime is picturesque ; but he remained the kindest person in the world, and his life was almost monastic. He has often said bad things, it is true ; but as he never believed them or made anyone else do so, they remained nothing but literature, and his error may be pardoned.

“Chateaubriand, who was also on our side, jeered at us much more seriously during his lifetime.”

## PAUL ARÈNE\*

“ CAME into the world at the foot of a fig-tree, one day when the cicadæ were singing.” It is thus that Jean de Figues, whose ingenuous history is related by M. Paul Arène, tells the story of his birth.

Some day, when M. Paul Arène also has his legend, it will be related that he himself was born thus, to the sound of the cicadæ, while the fig-blossoms, opening to the sun, dropped their honey on his lips. It will be added, if the truth is to be told, that he, like Jean de Figues, had a subtle hand and a proud soul; and a cicada will be graven on his tombstone, which will be almost in the classic style to indicate that he was born a poet and loved the sun.

He loves the sun, and everything it bathes in its light. His clear, warm style, in its graceful severity, has that flinty flavour imparted by the sun to the wines which it lovingly matures. M. Paul Arène must be placed beside M. Guy de Maupassant, and these two princes of story-telling should have, for their emblems, the first an olive, the second an apple. The soil of our dear country offers here the pure outlines of blue horizons, and here lurk

\* *La chèvre d'or*, 1 vol. (Bibliothèque de *l'Illustré moderne*).

meadows under a soft, moist sky ; and art reproduces this charming diversity by subtle shades of language and of style. The mountains, the seashore, the forest, and the heath have also their poets, painters, and story-tellers. The literary geography of France would form an interesting study.\*

Provence has her poets, her *félibres*, who sing in Provençal. I do not disparage them ; one must not expect all birds to sing in the same way. I have a tremendous admiration for Mistral, and if I regret that that fragrant poem *Mireille* was not written in the dialect of the Ile de France, it is only because I should understand and appreciate it better if it were. That is merely egoism. Patriotism is no enemy of dialects, and the unity of France is not threatened by the songs of the *félibres*.

But as M. Paul Arène speaks French, and the very best French, I profit by the fact to understand and enjoy him. For that matter, M. Paul Arène is a very Parisian Provençal. He is much oftener to be met under the plane-trees of the Luxembourg garden than in the fields of the Camargue, where the Saracen horsemen swept by of old. He has an immoderate affection for the old flag-stones of the Place de l'Odéon, and were he to be reproached for it he would doubtless answer that he never so clearly sees the slender leaves of the almond-trees standing out against the azure blue of his native sky as in Paris, in the winter, of a misty evening, through the smoke of his pipe. That would be very true. It is only when

\* We have already a charming book by M. Charles Fuster, *Les poètes du clocher*.

one is removed from what one loves that one can describe it; the poet's whole art consists of marshalling recollections and evoking phantoms. Moreover, a certain melancholy attaches to all that we write. I refer, of course, only to what is felt. The rest is naught but empty sound. And that is why M. Paul Arène, who so well describes his delightful province, "la gueuse parfumée," as he calls her, lives in the Quartier Latin, where everybody knows him by sight. He walks stiffly, with short steps; he has bright eyes in an immobile face. One cannot help reflecting that this quiet, stiff little man must have looked smart enough in 1870, in his uniform as a Captain of Mobiles. He is a reserved Southerner, who produces an astonishing first impression.

No one has ever seen a single muscle of his face move. Even while speaking his wide face with its pointed beard remains immobile. He gives one the impression of his own statue, modelled and coloured by a master. He combines therewith a bright, quick, polished style of conversation, and that sovereign art, which he always displays in his books, of pulling himself up at the right point, and overdoing nothing. In short, a quite original figure.

The last time I met M. Paul Arène he was going on a pilgrimage to the tomb of Florian; he was going by train, alone of all his set, less in order to conform to the custom of the Provençal poets exiled among us, than to enjoy a breath of country air. The sun was shining; the sky was bright and gay; such a sky as one sees only above the hills about Paris; and the woods of Sceaux must have been delightful that day. Florian is a saint whom one honours only in the spring, when one hums

*Plaisirs d'amour*. M. Paul Arène is devoted to him. He loves him because he recalls many gallant recollections of bygone days. His memory is transparent, and through it one sees pairs of turtle-doves fluttering past, and shepherdesses winding flower-garlands round their crooks. That the ladies of long ago, so charming in their powder and flowered skirts, should have loved in the glades, and should afterwards have died, is only natural, yet it sets the poets dreaming, and has inspired the author of *Jean de Figues* with some pages whose melancholy grace and voluptuous grief are the qualities I most appreciate.

One of the story-teller's peculiar qualities is his attachment to the past, and his sweet affection for the dead. He mingles them with the living, and this is one of his story's charms.

In *La chèvre d'or*, for instance, the shades of their ancestors float like clouds over the actors of the drama. I have just been reading this delightful book, with its dainty rural pages, full of simple scenes, written in a style of unusual purity, and I still feel myself surrounded by its idyllic, thyme-scented imagery. Few but the Greek poets can produce an impression of this kind. Let there be no mistake: the gracious familiarity, the elegant precision, the noble rusticity; in short, the whole manner of the story is nearer than the reader will suppose to the beauty of antiquity. I find a great deal of good sense, too, in this story of a scholar, nearing his fortieth year, who, being studious without ambition, a poet without pride, and a dreamer without worries, searches for the remains of the Saracens who built a little village on the coast of Provence. He rummages in an old loft full of

illegible parchments, and falls in love with a beautiful young girl. Farewell, the Arabs! Emirs and *magés* of the East, good-bye! He sees nothing but the young profile, and pure, graceful lines of Norette. Profoundly yet unconsciously influenced by her, he gradually falls in love with her. In order to reconcile science and love, he longs that Norette might be of Saracen origin. It is quite possible. But according to his description, to anyone devoid of ethnographic prejudices she would appear endowed with the slender grace of a Tanagra statuette.

It is Norette's goat, the golden goat with a silver bell covered with mysterious signs, that should reveal the position of the hidden treasure. But in the end all that remains of the treasure are the red lips, black eyes, and swelling bosom of Norette.

What are science and wealth compared with the smile of a lovely child? The story ends with the marriage of Norette. It is a delightful story, and finishes so happily! Provided that, after the honeymoon, Norette's husband does not resume his treasure-seeking! He would lose his light-heartedness and his peace of mind. Since he cannot remain for ever in a sweet amazement at Norette's beauty, it were better that he should once more rummage among the parchments of the loft and search for old names and old dates. He had better write the history of Puget-Maure under the Arab dominion. It is a fine subject, well fitted to occupy the long peace of the evenings. An old scholiast, I cannot remember where, once made this weighty remark: "One tires of everything except the pursuit of knowledge." The

fact is that anything is better than thinking of oneself and one's circumstances. That is why there are worthy folk who study the weights and measures of the Assyrians, or civil procedure in Egypt under the Lagides, which is a startling proof of the melancholy of living. Happily, Life also contains such joys as *La chèvre d'or*.

I will detach only one page ; it is so beautiful and so noble in style that I cannot recall its superior in any writer of fiction. It is the story, told by the curé of Puget, of *the two who were dead*.

“ Vers l'année 1500, deux cousins, l'un Gazan, l'autre Galfar, se trouvèrent en rivalité pour épouser une cousine. Non qu'ils l'aimassent. Elle était, il est vrai, admirablement belle ; mais, aussi pauvres l'un que l'autre, s'étant ruinés, l'aîné à faire des caravanes sur mer, l'autre dans les tripots d'Avignon, sous prétexte d'étudier la médecine, c'est surtout le secret du trésor qu'ils désiraient d'elle.

Aucun ne voulait céder. Ils se querellèrent, et le cadet souffleta l'aîné.

Puis sans que personne les vit, un soir, tous deux Cain, tous deux Abel, ils allèrent dans la montagne du côté de la chapelle que déjà un ermite gardait.

Au milieu de la nuit, l'ermite crut rêver que quelqu'un frappait de grands coups à sa porte, et, s'éveillant, il entendait crier, ‘ Au secours ! j'ai tué mon frère ! ’ Alors, étant sorti, il vit à la clarté des étoiles, dans l'herbe du cimetière, un jeune homme étendu, dont un cavalier plus âgé, mais lui ressemblant singulièrement, soutenait la tête.

Comme le jeune homme se mourait, l'ermite le confessa. Et quand le jeune homme fut mort, le cavalier, qui se tenait debout appuyé au mur, dit : ‘ Mon père, il est grand temps que vous me confessiez aussi ! ’ Alors l'ermite, se retournant, vit sur son pourpoint ensanglanté le manche d'un long poignard qu'il s'était planté dans la poitrine. Et quand il fut confessé, la cavalier retira la lame et se coucha dans l'herbe à côté de l'autre, dont il baisait, en pleurant, les cheveux et les yeux.

Le matin, au moment de les ensevelir, on les trouva enlacés si



étroitement que, pour séparer leurs cadavres, il aurait fallu briser les os des bras. On les mit ensemble, sans cercueil, dans la même fosse, et une messe fut fondée pour l'âme des deux qui sont morts." \*

I have already said, and repeat it : that I have never read any modern book which gave me so great an impression of classic beauty and of Greek poetry in the fresh flower of its youthful novelty as *La chèvre d'or*. I was not alone in this, for one

\* ["About the year 1500, two cousins, one of whom was Gazan and the other Galfar, were rivals for the hand of a girl cousin. Not that either loved her. She was, it is true, marvellously beautiful. But what they wanted of her above all was the secret of the treasure ; for both were equally poor. The elder had been ruined by unfortunate ventures at sea, and the younger in the gambling hells of Avignon, where he was supposed to be studying medicine.

Neither would give way. They quarrelled, and the younger struck his brother in the face.

Then, one night, unseen by any, each a Cain and each an Abel, they went up the mountain, passing the chapel watched over by a hermit.

In the middle of the night the hermit thought he was dreaming that some one was knocking heavily upon his door ; and on waking he heard a cry : ' Help ! I have killed my brother ! ' Then, going out, he saw, by the starlight, a young man lying stretched on the grass of the graveyard, with his head supported by an older man who greatly resembled him.

As the young man was dying, the hermit confessed him. And when he was dead, the other, who was standing, leaning against a wall, said : ' Father, it is high time that you confessed me too ! ' Then the hermit, turning round, saw against his blood-stained doublet the hilt of a dagger which he had thrust into his bosom. And when the hermit had confessed him the gallant withdrew the blade, and lay down on the grass beside the other, weeping and covering his hair and eyes with kisses.

The following day, when they went to bury them, it was found that they were so tightly interlaced that to separate them it would have been necessary to break the bones of their arms. They were buried together, without a coffin, in the same grave, and a mass was founded for the soul of the two who were dead." ]

of my friends to whom I had lent the book returned it to me with the following epigram of Meleager, written on the last page:

“ Drunk with drops of dew, you sing, O cicada, a rustic song which charms the solitude; and on the leaves where you rest, with your serrated shanks, on your shining skin, you imitate the harmonies of the lyre. Oh, I beseech you, sing to the nymphs of the forest some song worthy of Pan, so that, having escaped from love, I may here enjoy a sweet repose, lying in the shade of this beautiful plane-tree.”

## SCIENCE AND MORALS

M. PAUL BOURGET \*

### I



PAUL BOURGET possesses a quality of mind extremely rare in writers who devote themselves to works of imagination. He has the philosophic mind. He knows how to link ideas together, and keep his thoughts in abstract channels. The quality is noticeable not only in his critical studies, but also in his novels and lyrics. By his method and general bent of mind he belongs to the school of M. Taine, for whom he professes a legitimate admiration, and he is not without intellectual affinity with M. Sully Prudhomme, his senior as a poet.

But he is very far from despising the world of appearances, like the poet of *Bonheur*. On the contrary, he has given proof of curiosity concerning all the forms and changing colours which life assumes in the eyes of the spectator. So embedded in his nature is this taste for combining the concrete and the abstract that it could be detected in his conversation before he revealed it in his books.

There are five or six of us who still retain, amid the recollections of our youth, those evening talks under the great trees in the Avenue de l'Observatoire, those long conversations in the Luxembourg,

\* *Le disciple*, 1 vol. in 18.

to which Paul Bourget, still almost a boy, used to bring his acute analyses and his refined curiosities. Already divided between the study of metaphysics and the love of worldly elegance, he would pass easily in his conversation from the theory of the freedom of the will to the charm of women's dress, foreshadowing the novels which he has since produced. He was the best philosopher of us all, and he usually had the advantage in the tremendous arguments which we frequently prolonged far into the night.

How often we reconstructed the world in the silence of the deserted avenues, under the assembled stars! And now these same stars hear the arguments of a new generation, which is reconstructing the universe in its turn. Through the ages the succeeding generations renew the same sublime and barren dreams. I have already said in these pages that eighteen years ago we were enthusiastic determinists.

Among us were one or two neo-Catholics. But they felt very uneasy. The fatalists, on the other hand, displayed a serene confidence, which, alas, they have not retained. To-day we know well that this romance of the universe is as full of disappointments as the rest, but in those days Darwin's books were our Bible; the magnificent praise with which Lucretius extolled the divine Epicurus appeared to us inadequate to glorify the English naturalist. With burning faith we used to say: "A man has come who has freed mankind from vain terrors." I cannot resist once more recalling the fertile visits which we used to pay, with Darwin under our arms, to the old Jardin des Plantes, where M. Paul Bourget complaisantly parades the hero of his

new novel, *Adrien Sixte*. Personally I used to enter the halls of the Museum as a sanctuary: halls filled with every species of organic form, from the fossil crinoids and the long jaws of the great primitive saurians to the wrinkled skin of the elephant and the gorilla's hand. In the middle of the farthest hall there stood a marble Venus, placed there as a symbol of the sweet invincible power by which all animate races are multiplied. Who will restore to me the artless and sublime emotion which I felt before this delicious type of human beauty? I used to contemplate it with that intellectual satisfaction which we experience on encountering something that we have foreseen. I had been led unconsciously by the whole gamut of organic forms toward her, who is their flower. I imagined that I understood love and life, and sincerely believed that I had hit upon the divine scheme of things!

M. Paul Bourget in his precocious maturity suffered from none of these illusions. He was all for Spinoza. If I allow myself to return to the charm of these recollections, to boast of the splendours of that life, impecunious but free, and turn back along the steep slope of eighteen years, you must forgive me, for there I see already the germs and the seed of the ideas which, ripening slowly, form M. Paul Bourget's new work.

M. Adrien Sixte's peaceful existence, described in the first chapter, recalls in more ways than one the life of Spinoza related by Jean Colerus, from whose pages M. Bourget, in days gone by, used to love to quote:

"He hired a room from the *Sieur Henri Van de Spyck*, in the *Pavilioengroet*. He furnished it himself with the necessary articles,

and lived, as pleased him, in a very quiet way. It is almost unbelievable how sober and thrifty he was in those days . . . he was careful to balance his accounts quarterly, in order that he should spend neither more nor less than his yearly income.

“His conversation was placid and agreeable. He was perfectly able to control his passions. No one ever saw him very sad or very joyful. He could restrain himself when angered, and if displeased he never allowed himself to show it : at least, if it were necessary to display his displeasure by words or gesture he would immediately withdraw, in order not to offend against decorum. He was, moreover, very affable and good company, often talking with his hostess, particularly during her periods of confinement. While lodging there, he never disturbed anyone : the greater part of his time he passed quietly in his room. He amused himself occasionally with a pipe of tobacco. When he required longer relaxation he would search for spiders, which he set to fight one another.”

These are interesting traits, for they show the simplicity of a great man. M. Paul Bourget draws us M. Adrien Sixte as a French Spinoza of our own time :

“Fourteen years before, at the close of the war, M. Sixte had established himself in a house in the Rue Guy-de-la-Brosse. He lived in an apartment on the fourth floor, at a rent of seven hundred francs per annum. When he arrived he simply asked the concierge for a woman to clean his rooms, and for a restaurant whence he could order his meals. . . . Summer and winter, M. Sixte sat down to work at 6.30 a.m. At ten o'clock he had breakfast, a rapid operation which enabled him to cross the threshold of the Jardin des Plantes at 10.30 a.m. . . . One of his favourite pleasures consisted of protracted visits to the monkeys' cage and the elephant's stable” (*Le Disciple*, pp. 7, 11, 16, etc.).

This worthy soul was one of the great thinkers of the century. He demonstrated the doctrine of determinism with a power of logic and wealth of argument unattained even by Taine and Ribot.

M. Bourget gives us a list of the works in which he develops his system. They are : *The Anatomy of*

*the Will, The Theory of the Passions, and The Psychology of God.* It must be understood that the last title, in its almost ironic conciseness, means "Studies of the various conditions of the Mind, in which the idea of God has been elaborated."

M. Sixte does not for one moment assume the objective reality of God. The absolute appears to him nonsense, and he does not even admit it to the category of the unknowable. This is one of the characteristics of his philosophy. His strongest claim to be a psychologist "consists in a perfectly new and ingenious explanation of the animal origin of human sensibility." This leads us back to the halls of comparative zoology, to which I conducted you a little while back, as to a temple, to Venus, the supreme metamorphosis of the innumerable series of the forces of love. M. Sixte subjects us to Necessity with inexorable severity. He regards free will as a pure illusion. "Every act," he says, "is merely an addition. To say that we are free is to say that the total is greater than the elements added together to make it. This is as absurd in psychology as in arithmetic."

Further on :

"If we knew correctly the relative position of all the phenomena which constitute the actual universe, we could now calculate, with a certainty equal to that of the astronomers, the minute when England, for instance, would evacuate India, or when Europe would have burnt its last morsel of coal, or when the criminal as yet unborn would murder his father, or when some poem not yet thought of should be composed. The future is contained in the present, just as the properties of a triangle are involved in its definition."

It is impossible for such a philosophy to admit the existence of good and evil, of merit and demerit.

"All minds," says Adrien Sixte, "should be regarded by the scientist as experiments carried out by Nature. Among those experiments, some prove useful to Society; the word virtue is then applied to them. Others prove hurtful; the appropriate word is then vice or crime. The latter are the more momentous, and an essential element would be lacking to the science of the mind if, say, Nero, or some Italian tyrant of the fifteenth century, had never existed."

He regards thinking humanity merely as an appropriate subject for psychologic experiment. He thus expresses himself in *The Anatomy of the Will*:

"Spinoza prided himself on studying human ideas as the mathematician studies his geometrical figures; the modern psychologist should study them as chemical combinations in a retort, with the regret that this retort is not so transparent nor so easily handled as that of the laboratory."

To such a degree of inhumanity has a sublime and monstrous zeal for science pushed this simple-minded, disinterested and honest man, this solitary soul who, for the purity of his life, deserves, like Littré, to be called a lay saint.

Unfortunately he has a disciple, young Robert Greslou, who puts the great man's theories into practice. Highly intelligent, highly educated, actuated by a cruel sensuality and an implacable pride, affected by an hereditary neurosis, this latter-day Julien Sorel, a tutor in a noble Auvergne family, coldly and methodically seduces his pupil's sister, the generous and romantic Charlotte de



Jussat, who yields to him on the express condition that they die together. He obtains his desire only after swearing to poison himself with her: when she has yielded he refuses to kill either her or himself. Dishonoured, exasperated, and desperate, knowing too late the infamous rogue for whom she has made the greatest sacrifice of which she is capable, the proud creature at least remains loyal to her own promise, and poisons herself. Robert Greslou and Charlotte de Jussat recall to mind two names which have enjoyed only too much publicity owing to a recent lawsuit. So great was the likeness that M. Paul Bourget took the precaution to inform the public that the plan of his novel was drawn up before the Constantine affair occurred.

It is impossible to doubt this statement of M. Bourget's. His sincerity cannot be contested when he says:

“I wish that in real life there had never been any individuals in any way resembling the unfortunate Disciple after whom this book is named.”

Besides, I have shown that these ideas had been fermenting in his mind for a very long time. It is only important to note that M. Paul Bourget's hero, who spared his victim's life, as well as his own, committed, by seducing a young girl, rather a very bad action than a crime, properly so-called. I need not add that, accused of poisoning, and acquitted by the jury, he was shot with a pistol by the victim's brother, a man of action; no psychologist at all, but a soldier.

M. Paul Bourget's book presents the problem: are certain philosophical doctrines, such as determinism and scientific fatalism, intrinsically dangerous and baneful? Is the master who denies the

existence of good and evil responsible for the misdeeds of his pupil? We cannot deny that this is a weighty question.

Certain philosophies which involve the negation of all morality can enter the order of facts only in the shape of crime. When they are translated into action they come under the jurisdiction of the law.

I, however, persist in believing that thought, in its own proper sphere, has imprescriptible rights, and that any system of philosophy may legitimately be developed.

It is the right, it is even the duty of every scientist who conceives an idea of the universe to express this idea, whatever it may be. Whoever believes that he holds the Truth must express it. The honour of the human intellect is at stake. Alas, our views concerning Nature are fundamentally neither very numerous nor greatly varied; ever since man has been capable of thought he has revolved within the same circle of concepts. Determinism, which frightens us to-day, existed under other names in ancient Greece. There have always been and always will be disputes as to man's moral liberty. The rights of thought are superior to all else. It is man's glory to dare all possible ideas. As regards the conduct of life, that should not be dependent upon the transcendent doctrines of philosophers.

It should be based on the simplest morality. It was not determinism but pride which destroyed Robert Greslou. When Spinoza was living with Henri van der Spyck at the Hague his hostess asked him one day if he thought she could be saved in the religion which she professed. The great man replied:

“ Yours is a good religion ; you have no need to seek for any other, nor to doubt of your salvation, provided that, while devoting yourself to religion, you lead at the same time a quiet and unoffending life.”

## 2

In that fine novel *Le disciple*, to which we have already referred, M. Paul Bourget, with an unusual mental agility, raises high moral questions which he does not solve. How should he? Is the conclusion of a poem or a story ever a solution? It is sufficient for his glory, and our benefit, that he has appealed keenly to all reflective minds. M. Paul Bourget has shown us the young pupil of a great philosopher committing an odious crime under the influence of deterministic doctrines; and he has led us to ask ourselves in what degree was the master responsible for his pupil's condition?

M. Adrien Sixte, the master, feels deeply moved. Far from washing his hands of the shame and blood which bespatter even him, he bows his head, humbles himself, and weeps. Even more, he prays. He is not a determinist at heart. What does that mean? It means that the heart is never completely a philosopher, that it is ready promptly to reject the truths to which our minds obstinately adhere. M. Sixte, as a man, was troubled in the flesh. This is all the meaning that I can extract from this part of the story. But is M. Sixte himself to be held responsible for his disciple's crime?

Did he himself commit a crime, in teaching the illusion of free will and the subjective nature of good and evil? M. Bourget has not said so; he could not and ought not to do so. M. Sixte's

moral trouble teaches us at least that the understanding alone is not enough to comprehend the universe, and that reason cannot with impunity refuse to acknowledge the arguments of the heart. This idea shines forth like a soft, pure light by which the whole book is illuminated.

M. Brunetière was much struck by the moral character of such an idea, and he has praised M. Paul Bourget in an article whose rigorous argumentation it would be impossible to over-praise, but which, by its doctrine and tendencies, grievously offends against that intellectual liberty and freedom of the mind which one would think M. Brunetière would be one of the first to defend, as he is one of the first to utilize it.

M. Brunetière begins his article by asking whether or no ideas react on morals. It must be granted him that ideas do react on morals, and he takes advantage of this admission to subordinate all philosophic systems to morality. "Morality," he says, "is the judge of metaphysics." Note well, that in thus deciding he does not subject metaphysics, that is, the different theories of ideas, to any particular theory of duty or abstract morality. No, he places thought at the mercy of practical morality, in other words, of the customs of the peoples, their prejudices and habits; in short, to what we call principles. He will appreciate doctrines only so long as they are based on principles. He states this expressly :

"Whenever a doctrine, in the course of its logical consequences, ends by bringing into question the principles on which Society rests, it must be false, and the measure of the error will be seen in the amount of evil which it is capable of inflicting upon

Society." A little further on, speaking of the determinists, he says : " Their ideas must be false, since they are dangerous." But it never occurs to him that social principles are even more variable than the ideas of philosophers, and that, far from offering a solid basis to the mind, they crumble as soon as they are touched.

Nor does he reflect whether a doctrine which is to-day disastrous in its first results may not to-morrow be widely beneficial. All the ideas on which Society rests to-day were considered subversive before they became established, and it was in the name of the social interests invoked by M. Brunière that all maxims of tolerance and humanity were long resisted.

I am no more sure than you yourself of the value of such a system, and like you I see that it is in opposition to the morality of to-day, but who will guarantee me the goodness of this morality ? Who will say that this system, unfitted to our present morality, may not some day be in harmony with a higher morality ?

Our morality suits us very well ; and should do so. Still, it is too humiliating to the human mind to tie it down to customs which never existed yesterday, and will cease to do so to-morrow. Marriage, for example, belongs to the moral order. It is a doubly respectable institution by reason of the interest therein of both Church and State. It should not be deprived of one jot of its power and majesty ; but were it the custom in France to-day, as formerly in Malabar, to burn socially important widows on their husband's funeral pyres, assuredly any philosophy which by its logical consequences tended to the abolition of

this custom would place a social principle in danger ; would it therefore be false and detestable ? What philosophy has not been at first condemned when judged by morality ? Were not those who believed, at the dawn of Christianity, in a crucified God regarded for that very reason as enemies of the Empire ?

There could not be for pure thought a worse standard than that of morality. Metaphysics was for long submissive to religion : *Philosophia ancilla theologiæ*. She had in those days at least an established mistress, constant in her commands. I am well aware that for the moment only scientific fanaticism, Darwinian determinism, is in question. Whether this doctrine be true or not from a scientific point of view, it is absolutely condemned by M. Brunetière in the name of morality.

“ Were you assured,” he says, “ that the struggle for existence is the law of man’s development, as it is for other animals ; that Nature, careless of the individual, thinks only of the species ; that there is only one right or reason in the world, that of the strongest, you ought not to say these things, for there is not a soul to-day who does not see that the result of following these ‘ truths ’ to their logical conclusions would be to lead humanity back to its primeval barbarism.”

You fear that the Darwinian system will lead you back to Nature, by suppressing the social ideas which alone divide us from her.

When one considers them, these fears are vain indeed. I am in ignorance of the future destiny of scientific Darwinianism, but I cannot believe that it will some day lead us back to primitive barbarism ! Just consider that, if it were as baleful

as some believe, it would long since have destroyed humanity. For essentially it is as old as man himself ; the primitive myths, the ancient fable of Œdipus, attest that the idea of the fatal chain of causation occupied the minds of the infant peoples in their heroic cradle.

M. Brunetière places only a very moderate confidence in scientific truths. In this he shows a judicious mind. These truths are transitory and precarious. The philosophy of Nature is always in process of reconstruction. It is rather bitter to reflect that we have only uncertain gleams of light on any subject. I willingly admit that science is only a source of worry and uneasiness, while ignorance, on the other hand, has immeasurable consolations. Who was the disciple of Jean-Jacques who said : " Nature gave us ignorance to serve as eyelids to the soul ? " There exists in the *Chaumière indienne* a delightful eulogy of blessed ignorance.

" Ignorance," said Bernardin, " considered by itself and apart from Truth, with which it is in such delightful harmony, is the repose of our intelligence ; it causes us to forget past evils, and hides the present ones ; in short, it is a blessing, since we derive it from Nature."

Yes, from certain points of view it is a blessing, I admit, without any fear that M. Brunetière will find fault with me for such an avowal. For he will shortly see by what road I shall lead him back to this anti-social philosophy, this sentimental worship of Nature, these doctrines of Jean-Jacques which to him appear the most criminal paths which the human mind can pursue.

He is afraid that this pure and beneficent

ignorance, if allowed to run its course, would drag us back to primitive brutality and cannibalism. It would be more likely to lead us back to the Stone Age, the rough manners of the cave-dwellers, and the barbarous policies of the lake towns, than all the doctrines of the determinists.

Let us beware of speaking too unkindly of Science. Above all let us beware of mistrusting thought. Far from subordinating it to morality, we must subordinate everything else thereto. Thought is the whole man: Pascal said: "Our whole dignity consists in Thought. Let us therefore seek to think well. That is the principle of Morality."

We must allow all doctrines to expand freely; we must never incite against them the little domestic gods that guard our hearths. Let us never charge abstract Thought with impiety; nor with immorality, for it is superior to all moralities. Let us above all refrain from condemning whatever unknown thing it may bring. The metaphysician is the architect of the moral world. He draws up vast plans on which perhaps some day buildings may be erected. Why should his plans agree with the type of our present habitations, whether they be palaces or hovels? Is it really necessary that, like the architects of the temple of Vesta, we should go on copying, even in a marble sanctuary, the wooden huts of our forefathers?

It is thought that leads the world. The ideas of yesterday make the customs of to-morrow. The Greeks knew it well when they showed us towns built to the sound of the lyre. To subordinate philosophy to morality is to will the very death of thought, the ruin of all intellectual speculation, and the eternal silence of the spirit. It means the



simultaneous arrest of moral progress, and of the upward flight of civilization.

## 3

With reference to *Le disciple*, M. Brunetière endeavoured to demonstrate, in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, that scholars and philosophers are responsible, before the tribunal of morality, for the consequences of their doctrines, and that all physics and metaphysics cease to be innocuous when they are no longer in harmony with the social order. The *Revue Rose* took fright, and reasonably so, in my opinion, at a doctrine which subordinates thought to custom, and tends to consecrate ancient prejudices. I do not take it upon myself to defend any particular scientific or philosophic theory, but only the rights of the human mind, whose greatness consists in daring to say and to think everything. I was always persuaded, and am so still, that the noblest and most legitimate use to which man can put his mind is to make himself an image of the universe, and that these ideas, the sole realities to which we can attain, give life all its value and beauty. But, says M. Brunetière, it is first necessary to live, and for that rules are essential. Any doctrine in conflict with these rules is condemned.

It is easy to answer him that any philosophy, however dull and depressing it may first appear, however dark on the surface, changes in character and appearance directly it enters into the sphere of action. Directly it gains possession of the empire of the soul, and is queen, it issues moral laws in conformity with the aspirations and necessities

of its subjects. This is the price of its sovereignty. For it is true that we must first of all live, and morality is nothing but a means thereto. Follow the history of ideas and morals throughout the world. What ideals are there under which man has not existed? He has adored ferocious gods. He has professed, and still professes, atheistic religions. Here he nourishes hopes of eternity; elsewhere he has a creed of death, despair, and annihilation. Yet everywhere and at all times he is a moral being. At least, in some degree, after some fashion. For without any sort of morality it would be impossible for him to exist.

It is just because morality is necessary that all the theories in the world will not prevail against it. Moloch did not prevent the Phœnician mothers from feeding their babies. What then is this new Moloch prepared in the laboratories of psychophysiology, which MM. Ch. Richet, Théodule Ribot and Paulhan are arming for the destruction of the human race?

Determinism appears in the shadows as a terrifying spectre. Were it to spread through the mind of a whole people it would lose this dismal aspect, and assume a pleasant appearance. It would then be a religion, and all religions are full of consolation, even those that raise terrible imaginings round death-beds; even those that whisper in the ears of the just the promise of absolute annihilation; even that which would say to us, "Suffer, think, and then vanish, ye sensitive shades; the Universe consents. Each in his turn must be the centre of the Universe. Man, like your brother the insect, for an hour you shall have been God. What more do you ask?" There would be an

adorable sanctity in such maxims. What matters it what man believes, so long as he believes something! What matters it what he hopes, so long as he does hope!

All that he discovers, all that he contemplates, all that he worships in the universe will never be anything more than the reflection of his own mind, his own joys, sorrows, and sublime anxiety. M. Brunetière describes this as an inhuman philosophy. What nonsense! Philosophy can be nothing but human. Spiritualism, materialism, deism, pantheism, determinism—these are ourselves and nothing else. They are merely the mirages which testify to the reality of our outlook. But what would be the desert of Life without the magnificent mirages of our imaginings?

Nevertheless, says M. Brunetière, these are disastrous doctrines, and without *Le vicaire savoyard* we should never have had Robespierre. This is not the opinion of the shrewd and ingenious Valbert, who has lately defended his compatriot with such persuasive grace. But let us drop Jean-Jacques and Robespierre, and recognize the fact that pure thought has more than once armed a criminal hand.

What does this mean? Is life ever completely innocent? Can the very best of men flatter himself on his death-bed that he never did any harm? Can we tell what the words that we utter to-day may later cost some unknown individual in grief and mourning?

Can we, as the winged arrow is sped on its journey, say what it may encounter in its fatal flight? Did not He who came to establish the Kingdom of God here on earth say: "I bring not peace, but a sword?"

Yet He taught neither the struggle for life nor the illusion of human liberty. What prophet after Him can answer for it that the peace which he announces will not be steeped in blood? No, no, life is by no means innocent. We live only by devouring life, and thought, which is an action, shares in the cruelty attached to all action. There is no such thing as an absolutely harmless thought. Any system of philosophy destined to prevail is full of abuses, violence, and iniquity. I had no difficulty in showing, in my first reply, that the idea, so dear to M. Brunetière, of subordinating science to morality, is mischievous in its application. It is as old as the world, and in its long rule over the human mind has resulted in lamentable disasters. Judging by the vehemence of his answer, this demonstration has made an impression upon him. He would have me, at least, overlook the fact that the opposite idea, the absolute independence of science, presents certain dangers; for in that case he would triumph over my simplicity. I cannot afford him this pleasure. I see the real perils, which he has greatly magnified. They are those of Liberty. But man would not be man unless his thoughts were free. I range myself on the side where I find the least evil associated with the greatest good. Science and the philosophy emanating therefrom do not make the happiness of mankind; but they confer on him a modicum of power and honour. This is sufficient to enfranchise them. In spite of their apparent lack of sensibility, they lend their aid to the softening of manners; little by little they render life richer, easier, and more varied. They recommend kindness; they are tolerant and indulgent. Leave them alone.

They are obscurely elaborating a morality which is not made for us, but which some day, perhaps, will seem a happier and more intelligent one than our own.

To return once more to M. Bourget's interesting novel: do not let us compel good M. Sixte to burn his books because a scoundrel found therein incitements to his natural perversity. Do not let us be in a hurry to condemn this brave man as a corrupter of youth. That, as we know, is a verdict not always confirmed by posterity. Let us refrain from stigmatizing too indignantly the immorality of his doctrines. Nothing seems more immoral than the morality to come. We are not judges of the future.

I recently met by chance in the Champs-Élysées one of the most illustrious leaders of the psychophysiological School, which so grievously offends M. Brunetière's unexpected piety. He was walking quietly beneath the chestnuts which were green with their autumn sap, and were putting forth young leaves already withered by the cold nights, which would never be able to develop their fanlike form. I doubt whether this sight contributed to inspire him with an absolute confidence in the bounty of Nature and universal Providence. Besides, he took no notice of them: he was reading the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. Directly he saw me he naturally argued against M. Brunetière. He spoke in almost the following terms. His language may, perhaps, strike one as rather severe, but it must be remembered that he is a very great psycho-physiologist.

"Old Sixte, whose doctrines have been very clearly indicated by M. Paul Bourget, explains, like Spinoza, the illusion of Free Will by ignorance

of the motives which make us act, and the hidden causes which determine our action. For him, as for M. Ribot, the Will is (I try to quote exactly) a state of final consciousness which results from the co-ordination, more or less complex, of a group of conscious, subconscious or unconscious states, which in combination translate themselves by an action, or an inhibition; a state of consciousness which causes nothing; which establishes a situation, but does not constitute it. In agreement with M. Charles Richet, he is of opinion that 'The Will, or the attention, which is the clearest form of the Will, seems to be the consciousness of effort, and the consciousness of the direction of ideas. Effort and direction are imposed by an image, or a group of predominant images, by temptations and emotions stronger than others.' That is M. Sixte's teaching. Should we be right in concluding that Greslou's crime is the natural product of these theories, that on this count a full responsibility lies upon the theorists, and that, in future, as suggested by M. Brunetière, we ought prudently to suspend our psycho-physiological analyses, and our approximate synthesis of the life of the mind?

"Finally, should this science, or if you prefer it, this study of certain problems, which has reached incomplete results, I admit, but certainly worthy of attention, be hastily abandoned? Ought we to keep silence regarding that which is already acquired, or which seems to be so, and renounce the still uncertain conquest of some truth dangerous to know? Since M. Brunetière puts the question on the grounds of social interest, we agree to follow him thither, and will not absolutely deny the possible danger of certain ill-digested theories,

Yes, I concede that Greslou, disorganized and profoundly affected as he was by 'psychologic poverty,' was able to find in his master's work certain ideas generating states of consciousness which, in co-ordination with 'groups of anterior, conscious, subconscious and unconscious states' (this co-ordination having for its principal factor the character, which is only the psychic expression of an individual organism), translated themselves into action—criminal action—and an inhibition of honest impulses; but that is all that I can admit.

"That the master can be held in any degree responsible for the divagations of the disciple is, in my opinion, as unreasonable as to charge Montgolfier with the death of Croce-Spinelli. I foresee M. Brunetière's answer. He will say that aerostation is on the whole an advantageous discovery, worthy of purchase at the cost of several victims, but that psycho-physiology is an illusion, and Society is well worth the sacrifice of an illusion. If M. Brunetière spoke thus, and I believe this to be his view, we should disagree profoundly, but the question would be better defined. We should investigate whether science and observation do not already offer a solid basis for our attempts at psycho-physiology. And then, little as M. Brunetière would hesitate to treat our labours and researches as ciphers, he would not further dare to condemn their publication. I am not willing to believe that he has entirely fallen out with intellectual liberty and the independence of the human mind. When a fruit falls from the tree of Science it is because it is ripe. Nothing can prevent its falling."

Having concluded his discourse, the illustrious psycho-physiologist left me. And I wondered

whether man's greatest virtue was not curiosity. We long to know; it is true that we shall never know anything. But we shall at least have opposed to the universal mystery which envelops us a stubborn thought and a brave front: for happily none of the logicians' reasons will cure us of that great uneasiness which stirs us in the presence of the unknown.



## CHINESE TALES \*



ADMIT that I am little versed in Chinese literature. I was slightly acquainted with M. Guillaume Pauthier during his lifetime, when I was very young. He knew Chinese better than French. He had somehow acquired the small slanting eyes and the moustache of a Tartar. I have heard him state that Confucius was a greater philosopher than Plato; but I never believed it. Confucius never related moral tales, nor composed metaphysical romances.

That old yellow man lacked imagination, the starting-point of philosophy. On the other hand, he was eminently reasonable. His disciple, Ki-Lou, having one day inquired how he could best serve the Spirits and the Genii, the master replied :

“When Man is unfit to serve Humanity, how shall he be able to serve the Spirits and the Genii?”

“Permit me,” said the disciple, “to inquire the nature of death.”

And Confucius replied :

“How can we know the nature of Death, when we do not understand the nature of Life?”

That is all I have retained of Confucius from the conversations of M. Guillaume Pauthier, who, at the period when I knew him, was making a special

\* *Contes chinois*, by General Tcheng-ki-Tong, 1 vol. in 18.

study of the Chinese agriculturists, who are, as we know, the best in the world. Following their precepts, M. Guillaume Pauthier sowed pine-apples in the Department of Seine-et-Oise. They did not come up. So much for philosophy. As for romance, I, like the rest of the world, had read the short stories translated at various times by Abel Rémusat, Guillard d'Arcy, Stanislas Julien, and other scholars whose names I do not recollect. May they forgive me, if scholars are capable of forgiving anything. There remained in my head, after reading these stories, a mixture of prose and verse, the impression of a people abominably ferocious, but extremely polite.

The Chinese tales recently published by General Tcheng-ki-Tong appear to me to be much more artless than any previous translations of this nature : they are little tales analogous to our stories of Old Mother Goose, full of dragons, vampires, little foxes, women like flowers, and porcelain gods. Here we have the popular style, and may learn the tales told by nurses in the lamplight to the little yellow children of the Celestial Empire.

These stories, doubtless of very diverse age and origin, are sometimes charming, like our pious legends, sometimes full of marvels, like our fairy tales, and sometimes altogether horrible.

Among the horrible, I will cite the adventure of the literary Pang, who took home a little lady whom he met in the street. She had all the appearance of a very nice girl, and the following day Pang congratulated himself on his luck.

He left the little lady at home, and, as was his custom, went out. On returning, he felt impelled by curiosity to look into the room through a crack

in the partition. He then saw a skeleton with a green face and sharp teeth, busily occupied in painting a woman's skin with white and rose, in which it dressed itself. Being thus apparelled, the skeleton looked charming. But the literary Pang trembled with fear, and not without reason. The Vampire, for such it was, threw itself upon him, and tore out his heart. Owing to the art of a priest, versed in warding off abominations, Pang regained his heart, and recovered. This ending often occurs. The Chinese, who do not believe in the immortality of the soul, are all the more inclined to resuscitate the dead. I made a note of this tale of Pang and the Vampire, because it struck me as very old and very popular. I especially draw the attention of amateurs in folk-lore to a bunch of feathers hung over the house door to ward off phantoms. Unless I am greatly mistaken, this bunch of feathers may be found elsewhere, and is a witness to the profound antiquity of the tale.

Some of the stories in the same collection make an agreeable contrast with that of the Vampire. There are some charming ones of women flowers, whose destiny is attached to the plant of which they are the emanation, who disappear mysteriously if the plant be moved, and who fade away when it dies. It is easy to conceive the germination of such ideas in a people of florists who make the whole of China, from the plain to the tops of their trimmed and terraced mountains, one great marvellous garden, and colour the whole Celestial Empire with chrysanthemums and peonies until it is like a water-colour painting. See, for instance, the two peonies of the temple of Lo-Chan, one red and the other white, which looked like two mounds of

flowers. The soul and genius of either plant was a woman of exquisite beauty. The scholar who loved them both in turn was fated to be changed into a plant himself, and to taste the vegetable life beside the objects of his affection.

Are the Chinese not those exquisite gardeners and charming colourists bound to confuse women with flowers?—those women clad in green, pink, and blue, like flowering plants, living without movement in the shade and perfume of flowers! One might well connect these enchanted peonies with the acacia of the Egyptian tales in which a young man encloses his heart.

The twenty-five tales collected and translated by General Tcheng-ki-Tong suffice to show that the Chinese have no hopes beyond this world, and have no conception of a divine ideal. Their moral ideas, like their paintings, are lacking in perspective and horizon. In certain stories which seem fairly modern, such as that of the licentiate Lien, whom the translator, if I understand him correctly, places in the fifteenth century, one certainly gets a glimpse of a hell and torments. The punishments therein are indeed frightful; the imagination of the yellow race may pride itself on its wealth in this direction. On leaving the body the souls, with their hands bound behind their backs, are led by two ghosts—the word is in the text—to a distant town, and taken into the palace before a horribly ugly judge. He is the judge of hell. The great Book of the Dead lies open before him. The servants of hell, who carry out the judge's sentences, seize the sinner's soul, and plunge it into a pot seven feet high entirely surrounded by flames: they then conduct it to the mountain of knives,

where it is torn in pieces, says the text, "by thick-set blades like young bamboo shoots." To finish up with, if the soul is that of a dishonest minister large spoonfuls of molten gold are poured down its throat. But this hell does not last for ever. People pass through it only, and, when it has undergone its punishment, the soul, entering the cycle of metempsychosis, assumes the form under which it will be reborn on earth. This is obviously a Hindoo fable, to which the Chinese mind has only added some ingenious cruelties. For the real Chinaman the soul of the dead is light, as light, alas, as a cloud! "It is impossible for it to converse with those it loves." The gods are merely grotesques. Those of the Taoists, which date from the sixth century B.C., are hideous, and intended to frighten simple folk. One of these infernal monsters, with two horse-tails for moustaches, is the hero of the best of the tales collected by Tchong-ki-Tong. This god had been long shut up in a Taoist temple, when a young student named Tchon invited him to supper. In doing this Tchon showed himself even more audacious than Don Juan. But the god, whose name was Louk, was of a more humane disposition than the stone Commander. He came at the appointed hour, and was good company, drinking deep and telling stories. He was well informed. He was a master of the Empire's classics, and more, which appears strange in a god, he was thoroughly in touch with literary novelties. He often returned, overflowing with benevolence and amenity. One night, after a drink, Tchon read him one of his recent compositions, and asked for an opinion. Louk considered it only middling; he

did not conceal the fact that his friend was rather heavy-witted. As he was an excellent god he improved him so far as he could. One day, in hell, coming across the brain of a dead man who in life had shown much wit, he appropriated it, and, taking the precaution to inebriate his host, he took advantage of the latter's being asleep to remove his brain and substitute the one he had brought. As the result of the operation Tchon became a scholar of great merit, and passed all his examinations with distinction. The god was indeed courageous. His occupations, unfortunately, have since then retained him in the mountain Tai-Hao ; he is unable to come and sup in town.

I referred a little while ago to some Chinese tales translated about 1827 by Abel Rémusat. One of these, called "The Lady of the Country of Soung" is justly renowned. The subject-matter contains striking analogies with a Milesian fable preserved for us by Petronius, and versified by La Fontaine. Madame Tuan—this is the name of the Lady of Soung—is, like the matron of Ephesus, an inconsolable widow, consoled by love. So far as I can remember, the Chinese version is not so happy as that contained in the *Satyricon*. It is spoilt by superfluous lumber and improbabilities, pushed to the point of tragedy, and disfigured by that grimacing atmosphere which, so far as we are concerned, makes nearly all Chinese literature unbearable. But I have a delightful recollection of an intercalated episode, that of the fan. If Madame Tuan only moderately interests us, the lady with the fan is extremely amusing. I wish that I could here transcribe this pretty little story,

which hardly takes up twenty lines in Abel Rémusat's collection. But I have not the text at hand. I must tell it from memory. I shall do so freely, filling in the gaps in my memory as best I can. It will not, perhaps, be altogether Chinese. But I apologize in advance for a few apocryphal details. Its basis is, at all events, authentic, and will be found in the third volume of Chinese tales translated by Davis, Thoms, Father d'Entrecolles, etc., and published by Abel Rémusat, at a bookseller's of the name of Montardier, who used to flourish in the Rue Git-le-Cour in the reign of Charles X. I can give no further particulars, having lent the volume to a friend, who never returned it.

Here then, without further delay, is the story of the Lady with the White Fan :

### THE STORY OF THE LADY WITH THE WHITE FAN

Tchouang-Tsen, of the country of Soung, was a scholar who pushed wisdom to the point of complete detachment from all perishable things. Good Chinaman as he was, he had no belief in eternity. There remained for the satisfaction of his soul only the consciousness of having escaped the common errors of men, who hasten to acquire useless riches and vain honours. This satisfaction must have been profound, for after his death he was proclaimed happy and worthy of envy. Now during the time which the unknown genii of the world permitted him to spend under a green sky, amid flowering shrubs, willows, and bamboos, it was the habit of Tchouang-Tsen to walk to and fro

dreaming of this countryside in which he lived, without knowing how or why. Wandering one day on the flowery slopes of the mountain Nam-Hoa he found himself unawares in the midst of a cemetery, where the dead, in accordance with the custom of the country, rest beneath little mounds of beaten earth.

“Alas,” he said, “this is the centre to which lead all Life’s roads! He who has once sojourned with the dead never returns among the living.”

There is nothing singular in this idea; it sums up well enough the philosophy of Tchouang-Tsen, and of all the Chinese. The Chinese recognize only one life, that in which one sees the peonies blooming in the sunlight. The equality of Humanity in the tomb consoles or angers them, according as their inclination be toward serenity or melancholy. Besides, for their distraction they have a number of red and green gods, who sometimes bring back the dead to life, and work amusing magic. But Tchouang-Tsen, who belonged to the proud sect of the philosophers, demanded no consolation from porcelain dragons. As he thus allowed his thoughts to stray among the tombs he suddenly encountered a young woman wearing mourning, that is, a long white garment of coarse texture, and without seams. Seated near a tomb, she was waving a fan over the still fresh earth of a funeral mound.

Curious to learn the reasons of so strange an action, Tchouang-Tsen saluted the young lady politely, and said:

“May I have the presumption, madame, to inquire who lies in this tomb, and why you trouble to fan the covering earth? I am a philosopher;



I search for causes, and here is a cause that escapes me.”

The young lady never ceased waving her fan. She blushed, bowed her head, and murmured a few words which the sage was unable to hear. In vain did he repeatedly renew his question. The young woman took no further notice of him, and it appeared as if her soul had entirely passed into the hand that moved the fan.

Tchouang-Tsen regretfully withdrew. Although he knew that all is vanity he was by nature inclined to search out the motives of human actions, and particularly those of women; this curious little creature inspired him with a malevolent, but very intense interest. He slowly resumed his walk, sometimes turning his head and still seeing the fan beating the air like a great butterfly, when suddenly an old woman whom he had not hitherto noticed made a sign that he should follow her. She drew him into the shade of a particularly lofty mound, and said :

“ I heard you ask questions of my mistress, to which she gave no answer. But I will satisfy your curiosity, partly from a natural desire to oblige, and partly in the hope that you will be good enough to give me the money to buy from the priests a magic paper which will prolong my life.”

Tchouang-Tsen drew a piece of money from his purse, and the old woman spoke as follows :

“ The lady you have seen on a tomb is Madame Lu, the widow of a literate named Tao, who died a fortnight ago, after a long illness, and the tomb is her husband's. They loved each other tenderly. But on the point of death Mr. Tao could not resolve to quit her, and the idea of leaving her in

the world in the flower of her youth and beauty was insupportable. However, he resigned himself thereto, for he had a sweet disposition, and his soul willingly submitted to necessity. Weeping at his bedside, which she had never left during his illness, Madame Lu held the gods to witness that she would never survive him, and that she would share his coffin as she had shared his couch.

“But Mr. Tao said :

“‘Madame, you must not swear that.’

“‘At least,’ she replied, ‘if I do survive you, if I am condemned by the Spirits to see the light of day when you are no more, know that I shall never consent to become the wife of another ; I shall have only one husband, as I have only one soul.’

“But Mr. Tao said :

“‘Madame, you must not swear that.’

“‘Oh, Mr. Tao, Mr. Tao, let me at least swear that I will not remarry for at least five whole years.’

“But Mr. Tao said :

“‘Madame, do not swear that. Swear only faithfully to preserve my memory, so long as the earth be not dry on my tomb.’

“Madame Tao swore a great oath. And the worthy Mr. Tao shut his eyes, never to re-open them.

“It is impossible to imagine Madame Tao’s despair. Burning tears devoured her eyes. She scratched her porcelain cheeks with her sharp nails. But everything comes to an end, and the torrent of her sorrow abated. Three days after Mr. Tao’s death, Madame Lu’s sorrow assumed more reasonable proportions. She learnt that a disciple of Mr. Tao wished to assure her of his share in her mourn-

ing. She rightly judged that she could not avoid receiving him; which she did, with sighs. The young man was handsome and elegant; he spoke a little about Mr. Tao, and a good deal about her; he told her she was charming, and that he felt a strong affection for her. She allowed him to continue speaking. He promised to return. While she awaits him, Madame Lu, seated by her husband's tomb, passes the day in drying the earth of the mound with her fan."

At the conclusion of the old woman's story the sage Tchouang-Tsen reflected:

"Youth is fleeting; the incitement of desire urges young men and maidens. After all, Madame Lu is an honest individual who does not wish to break her oath."

Here is an example for the white women of Europe.

# POPULAR SONGS OF OLD FRANCE\*

## I

### LOVE SONGS



HERE are many to-day in search of the hidden sources of tradition. The humblest memorials of poetry and of popular beliefs are carefully collected. A society founded on the initiative of M. Paul Sébillot, two special reviews, and numerous other publications, amongst which must be specified the legends of the Meuse, compiled by M. Henry de Vimal, and, quite recently, *L'histoire de la chanson populaire*, by M. Julien Tiersot, bear witness to the ingenious activity of our French searchers after tradition. This is indeed no case of wasted effort. Records of the life of our provincial ancestors are both precious and delightful. Along with their painted plates, their marriage-chests carved with doves, and the pewter dish on which was served the bride's roast,

\* *Histoire de la chanson populaire en France*, par Julien Tiersot, ouvrage couronné par l'Institut, in 8vo. Société des traditions populaires, au Musée d'ethnographie du Trocadéro. *Revue des traditions populaires* (dirigée par M. Paul Sébillot) 4<sup>e</sup> année, in 8vo—*La Tradition*, revue générale des contes, légendes, chants, usages, traditions et arts populaires, direction: MM. Émile Blémont et Henry Carnoy; 3<sup>e</sup> année, in 8vo.

they also left us their songs, and these are their sweetest legacy. Let us humbly acknowledge it: the old country-folk are the builders of the language, and our masters in poetry. They never seek rich rhyme, and are satisfied with simple assonance. The verses, not made for the eye, are full of ungrammatical elisions; but it must be borne in mind that if grammar is, as they say—and I doubt it—the art of speech, it is certainly not the art of song. Apart from that, the verse of the popular song strikes the ear as correct; it is clear and limpid, and possessed of a brevity which the most learned art seeks without acquiring; the imagery appears sharp and pure; in short, it has the light flight and morning song of the lark it so loves to glorify.

The pious antiquaries animated by the poetic folly of folk-lore—Maurice Boucher, Gabriel Vicaire, Paul Sébillot, Charles de Sivry, Henry Carnoy, Albert Meyrac, Jean-François Bladé—who wander through the country collecting the secrets of the rustic muse from the lips of the shepherds and old women busy with their distaffs, have transcribed and noted many an exquisite little poem, many a suave melody, which would have been lost without an echo in the woods and fields, for popular song is well-nigh extinct. It is a great pity; yet this omen of an approaching end implies a powerful attraction; we only care for what we fear to lose, since there is, alas, nothing poetic except the past.

These expiring songs collected in our villages to-day are doubtless old, far older than our grandmothers, but in their present form they go no further back than the seventeenth century. Several

are of the period of rococo prettiness, and have an indefinable flavour of their own.

These songs constitute a world in themselves, and a very charming one. They are found north, east, south, and west. The King's son, the captain, the noble, the gallant miller, the poor soldier, the handsome prisoner, Cathos, Marion and Madelon, the three wise girls who walk in threes, and the love-sick girls who tell their sorrow to the nightingale beside a fountain.

There are many nightingales in these little rustic poems; many flowers: roses, lilac, and particularly sweet marjoram. This pretty plant, also called organ, because it thrives on the hill-side, where it lifts its little bunches of pink flowers set in brown bracts among the bushes, appears, in these songs of the soil, thanks no doubt to its musical name, tender colour, and sweet scent, as the emblem of pleasure and desire, as the image of secret ardours, furtive loves, and hidden joys. Witness the pretty girl returning from Rennes with her sabots. The King's son saw and loved her: at which she rejoiced as follows:

Il m'a donné pour étrennes  
Avecque mes sabots,  
Dondaine.  
Un bouquet de marjolaine  
Avecque mes sabots.  
Un bouquet de marjolaine  
Avec mes sabots,  
Dondaine.  
S'il fleurit, je serai reine  
Avecque mes sabots.\*

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\* He gave me for a gift  
With my sabots,

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The nightingale, who sings so splendidly at night, is the confidant of all loves, whether glad or sorry, in our songs :

Sur la plus haute branche  
Le rossignol chantait.

Chante, rossignol, chante,  
Toi qui a le cœur gai.

Moi ce n'est pas de même,  
Mon bonheur est passé.\*

Thus sings the daughter of Morvan, and the little Bressane ingenuously says :

Rossignolet du bois,  
Rossignolet sauvage,  
Apprends-moi ton langage,

---

Dondaine.

A bunch of marjoram  
With my sabots.

A bunch of marjoram  
With my sabots,  
Dondaine.

If it flowers, I shall be Queen  
With my sabots.

\* On the highest branch  
The nightingale sang.

Sing, nightingale, sing,  
Thou whose heart is gay.

For me 'tis not the same,  
My happiness is past,

Apprends-moi z'à parler,  
 Apprends-moi la manière  
 Comment l'amour se fait.\*

The nightingale expresses the triumph of love in his song. The lark with its pure, silver voice warns lovers of the approaching day. Margot and Manon, who are not tragic lovers, do not go so far, like Shakespeare's Juliet, as to blame the song of dawn, which Romeo's lover calls a discordant noise, a horrible "hunt's up." They do not remember the popular saying that the lark changes eyes with her friend, the toad. They do not say, with the noble daughter of the Capulets :

It is the lark that sings so out of tune,  
 Straining harsh discords, and unpleasing sharps.  
 Some say the lark makes sweet division ;  
 This doth not so, for she divideth us.

Cateau, surprised at dawn with her lover, bears no ill will against the little singer, who cannot help it ; she regards him rather as a good awakener, whose warning is not to be neglected. She simply says to her sweetheart, who clasps her in his arms, unwilling to let her go :

J'entends l'alouette qui chante  
 Au point du jour.  
 Ami, si vous êtes honnête  
 Retirez-vous ;

---

\* Little nightingale of the woods,  
 Little wild nightingale,  
 Teach me your language,  
 Teach me to speak,  
 Teach me the trick  
 Of making love.



Marchez tout doux, parlez tout bas,  
 Mon doux ami,  
 Car si mon papa vous entend  
 Morte je suis.\*

The simple maidens of our songs go to the fountains all alone : there they meet with perilous encounters, and sometimes return in tears. Greuze, who, going early to Paris from Tournus, always retained the peasant's temperament must, as he sketched *La cruche cassée*, have hummed some song of his country-side, some such lines as these :

Ne pleurez pas, ma belle ;  
 Ah ! je vous le rendrai.

Ce n'est pas chos' qui se rende  
 Comm' cent écus prêtés.†

Popular song expresses with dainty simplicity the infatuation of a girl's first love. I could wish no better example than these pretty couplets, which

\* I hear the lark that sings  
 At dawn ;  
 Love, if you are honourable  
 Begone ;  
 Step very softly, speak very low,  
 My sweet friend,  
 For if my father hears you  
 I am dead.

† Weep not, Sweetheart,  
 I'll give it back to you.

It's not a thing one can return  
 Like a loan of a hundred crowns.

I have borrowed from MM. Émile Blémont's and Henry Carnoy's review :

Oh ! que l'amour est charmante !  
 Moi, si ma tante le veut bien,  
 J'y suis bien consentante ;  
 Mais si ma tante ne veut pas,  
 Dans un couvent j'y entre.\*

Ah ! que l'amour est charmante !  
 Mais si ma tante ne veut pas,  
 Dans un couvent j'y entre.  
 J'y prierai Dieu pour mes parents,  
 Mais non pas pour ma tante.†

The miller, in our little poems, is usually a lucky youth, a bit of a swell, and a regular lady-killer. He so appears in the song of Mademoiselle Marianne, known throughout the French provinces. Marianne used to go on her ass to the mill, to get the corn ground. One day the gallant miller said : "Tie up your ass, little lady," and asked her into the mill.

Pendant que le moulin tournait,  
 Avec le meunier ell' riait.  
 Le loup mangea son âne,  
 Pauvre mam'zell' Marianne,  
 Le loup mangea son âne Martin  
 À la port' du moulin.

\* O, how delightful is Love !  
 If my aunt only would allow it,  
 I'd be willing enough,  
 But if my aunt won't allow it,  
 To a convent I must go.

† How delightful is Love !  
 But if my aunt won't allow it  
 To a convent I must go.  
 To God I'll pray for my relations,  
 But not for my aunt.

Le meunier, qui la voit pleurer,  
 Ne peut s'empêcher de lui donner  
 De quoi ravoir un âne,  
 Ma petit' mam'zell' Marianne,  
 De quoi ravoir un âne Martin  
 Pour aller au moulin.

Son père, qui la voit venir,  
 Ne peut s'empêcher de lui dire :  
 —Ce n'est pas là notre âne,  
 Ma petit' mam'zell' Marianne,  
 Ce n'est pas là notre âne Martin  
 Qui allait au moulin.

Notre âne avait les quatr' pieds blancs,  
 Et les oreill's à l'avenant,  
 Et le bout du nez pâle ;  
 Ma petit' mam'zell' Marianne,  
 Oui ; le bout du nez pâle, Martin  
 Qui allait au moulin.\*

\* While the mill was turning  
 She jested with the miller,  
 And the wolf ate her ass ;  
 Poor Miss Mary Anne ;  
 The wolf ate her ass, Martin,  
 At the door of the mill.

The miller when he saw her weep  
 Could not resist presenting her  
 With the means to buy another ass,  
 Little Miss Mary Anne,  
 With the means to buy another ass,  
 To go to the mill.

Her father, when he saw her come,  
 Could not refrain from saying,  
 —That is not our old ass,  
 My little Miss Mary Anne,  
 That is not our old ass  
 That used to go to the mill.

Mademoiselle Marianne's ass, gobbled up by the wolf, is purely symbolical. The song contains a moral lesson, without more than reasonable insistence upon a fairly common accident.

Sometimes the Muse, or rather the Musette of the woods and fields, strikes a loftier tone, becoming romantic or slightly tragic, and showing us girls very sensitive on the point of honour. In Bresse and Lorraine there is the song of a girl who dies "to save her honour." And here are some neat verses about a girl disguised as a dragoon, with the idea of rejoining her seducer, who has returned to the Army:

Elle fut à Paris  
S'acheter des habits ;  
Elle s'habilla en dragon militaire,  
Rien de si beau !  
La cocarde au chapeau.\*

She serves the King for seven years without finding her unfaithful lover. At last one day she comes across him, and attacks him forthwith with drawn sword. They fight and she kills him. There you

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Our ass had four white feet  
And handsome ears,  
And the end of his nose was pale,  
Yes, Miss Mary Anne,  
The end of his nose was pale  
And he used to go to the mill.

\* She went to Paris  
To buy some clothes.  
She dressed up as a dragoon,  
The finest ever seen,  
With a cockade in her hat.

have a girl in whose heart burnt a fierce resentment. It must be added that she was also a lady of quality. The song tells us that after having killed her lover :

Ell' monte à ch'val comme un guerrier fidèle,  
 Elle monte à ch'val  
 Comme un beau général ;  
 Ell' revient au château de son père,  
 Dit : " J'ai vaincu,  
 Mon amant ne vit plus."\*

As resolute in her discourse, but gentler and purer, is the Orphan of Pougan, to whom her feudal lord offers his love and a fine pair of gloves. Like Marguerite—for whom, in fact, Goethe used the language of popular German poetry—the young Breton peasant-girl replies, more or less precisely : " I am neither a lady nor beautiful."

À moi n'appartient pas des gants,  
 Monsieur le comte,  
 Je suis simple fille des champs,  
 À moi n'appartient pas des gants.†

\* She mounts her horse like a loyal warrior,  
 She mounts her horse  
 Like a fine general.  
 She returns to her father's house,  
 And says—I've won,  
 My lover's dead.

† Gloves are not for me,  
 Monsieur le comte,  
 I'm a simple country girl  
 Gloves are not for me.

This refusal does not check the seigneur :

“Come near, my beauty, that I may kiss you ;  
it will make me want to come again.”

“*Mon Dieu*, come not again, monsieur le comte ;  
who asks you to return ? ”

The violent man seizes her, and sets her on his  
crupper. In vain she cries : he carries her away.

Mais en passant sur la chaussée,  
Dans la rivière s'est jetée.

Très sainte Vierge en cet émoi  
Je vous supplie,  
Très sainte Vierge, noyez-moi ;  
Mais mon honneur, sauvez-le-moi.\*

The peasants, when they confide a delicate  
object to your care, are accustomed to say : “Treat  
it like a young girl.” Their old songs refer to young  
girls with this praiseworthy discretion. They confer  
grace and beauty on them all ; they glide over the  
faults of youth with a mischievous smile ; they  
celebrate the ladies who avenge their honour ;  
they exalt the holy maidens who would rather die  
than sin. They shed real tears on the death of the  
betrothed.

Could anything be more touching, or go  
straighter to the heart, than the following song

\* But as they went along the road,  
She flung herself into the stream.

Most holy Virgin, in my distress,  
I cry to you,  
Most holy Virgin, let me drown,  
But save my honour.

found in Haute-Savoie, which begins with this holiday verse :

Ma mère, apportez-moi  
 Mon habit de rose soie,  
 Et mon chapeau, qu'il soit d'argent bordé ;  
 Je veux ma mie aller trouver.\*

The lover, alas, finds her on her death-bed, having received the Sacraments. As he comes, she opens her eyes.

Puis elle sortit sa main blanche du lit,  
 Pour dire adieu a son ami.†

This last touch, the touch of nature, is striking. The most polished art could do no more. The most pleasing painter, a Henner, a Prudhon, or a Correggio, never better placed the high light on a canvas bathed in transparent shade, never better chose the point to which to direct the gaze and the mind of the spectator. "Then she took her white hand from out the bed, to bid her lover farewell." No, I am right. It is one of those great touches of Nature which we call the height of Art, when Art is lucky enough to find them.

For the rest, our rustic songsters are very incredulous ; they commonly scoff at the virtue of married women, and will not willingly believe that

\* Mother, bring me  
 My rose silk coat,  
 And my hat with its silver border ;  
 I'm going to meet my sweetheart.

† Then she took her white hand from out the bed,  
 To bid her lover farewell.

anyone can die of love. The sailor of Saint-Valery en Caux sings :

Faut-il pour une belle  
Que tu t'y sois tué ?  
Y en a pus de mille à terre  
Qui t'auraient consolé.\*

The songs, like the *fabliaux*, the tales in verse, laugh at the wives' tricks, without taking an excessive interest in the fate of the husbands. In this respect the dialogue between Marion and her jealous lover is a masterpiece of grace and mischief. It has spread all over France. Versions have been collected in the Cévennes, Auvergne, Gascony, Champagne, Languedoc, Lorraine, Normandy, Morvan, and Limousin, without counting the Provençal text which Numa Roumestan considered equal to Shakespeare. The following, from the *Revue des traditions populaires*, is an excellent version, collected, in the west of France, and perhaps slightly touched up, by M. Charles de Sivry :

LE JALOUX.

Qu'allais tu faire à la fontaine,  
Corbleu, Marion ?  
Qu'allais tu faire à la fontaine ?

MARION.

J'étais allé ! quérir de l'eau,  
Mon Dieu, mon ami,  
J'étais allé ! quérir de l'eau.

\* Need you have killed  
Yourself for a girl ?  
There are a thousand left  
Who might have consoled you.



LE JALOUX.

Mais qu'est ce donc qui te parlait,  
Corbleu, Marion ?

MARION.

C'était la fille à not' voisine,  
Mon Dieu, mon ami !

LE JALOUX.

Les femmes ne portent pas d'culottes,  
Corbleu, Marion !

MARION.

C'était sa jupe entortillée,  
Mon Dieu, mon ami !

LE JALOUX.

Les femmes ne portent pas d'épée,  
Corbleu, Marion !

MARION.

C'était sa quenouill' qui pendait,  
Mon Dieu, mon ami !

LE JALOUX.

Les femmes ne portent pas d' moustaches,  
Corbleu, Marion !

MARION.

C'était des mûres qu'elle mangeait,  
Mon Dieu, mon ami !

LE JALOUX.

Le mois de mai n' porte pas d' mûres,  
Corbleu, Marion !

MARION.

C'était une branch' de l'automne,  
Mon Dieu, mon ami !

## ON LIFE AND LETTERS

LE JALOUX.

Va m'en quérir une assiettée,  
Corbleu, Marion !

MARION.

Les p'tits oiseaux ont tout mangé,  
Mon Dieu, mon ami !

LE JALOUX.

Alors, je te coup'rai la tête,  
Corbleu, Marion !

MARION.

Et puis que ferez-vous du reste,  
Mon Dieu, mon ami ? \*

\* THE JEALOUS MAN.

What were you going to the fountain for,  
Corbleu, Marion ?  
What were you going to the fountain for ?

MARION.

I went to fetch water,  
Mon Dieu, my dear !  
I went to fetch water.

THE JEALOUS MAN.

Who was talking to you  
Corbleu, Marion ?

MARION.

Our neighbour's daughter,  
Mon Dieu, my dear !

THE JEALOUS MAN.

Women do not wear breeches,  
Corbleu, Marion !

MARION.

It was her twisted skirt,  
Mon Dieu, my dear !

But I must stop, just when we have plucked only a few of the flowers from Margot's bouquet.

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THE JEALOUS MAN.

Women do not wear swords,  
Corbleu, Marion !

MARION.

It was her distaff hanging down,  
Mon Dieu, my dear !

THE JEALOUS MAN.

Women do not wear moustaches,  
Corbleu, Marion !

MARION.

She was eating mulberries,  
Mon Dieu, my dear !

THE JEALOUS MAN.

There are no mulberries in May,  
Corbleu, Marion !

MARION.

It was an autumn bough,  
Mon Dieu, my dear !

THE JEALOUS MAN.

Go fetch me a plateful,  
Corbleu, Marion !

MARION.

The little birds have eaten them all,  
Mon Dieu, my dear !

THE JEALOUS MAN.

Then I'll cut off your head,  
Corbleu, Marion !

MARION.

And what will you do with the rest,  
Mon Dieu, my dear !

## 2

## THE SOLDIER

Let us return once more to the sources of popular tradition. To-day, if it please you, we will hear the songs of Sergeant La Rose and Sergeant La Ramée. First the melodies of love, and then the soldiers' verses. We meet Margot and Catherine once more in the regiment.

In all times France has produced soldiers as La Beauce has produced grain. In the reign of Louis XIII the recruiting-sergeants had only to pick and choose in the villages. Young fellows vied with one another in begging captains to take them into their companies. It is true that in those days the King needed at the most only forty thousand men. Louis XIV, who was too fond of war—he admits it himself—needed two, three, even four hundred thousand men at a time. Recruiting then became more difficult. A drummer went through the town, followed by soldiers who bore loaves of white bread and roast partridges spitted on their bayonets to entice poor lads.

They would stop at every cross-road, and there, having beaten three ruffles, the drummer saluted, and said: "In the King's name, be it known to every man, whatever his quality or condition, over sixteen years of age, who is willing to join the —th Infantry Regiment, that he will be paid fifteen to twenty francs, according to the man he is, and will get a long leave after three years' service. Cash down on the spot! No credit asked. Those who are prompted by goodwill have only to come forward."

He would then lift up and rattle a big silk purse full of gold and silver entrusted to him by his captain. He enlisted thus a certain number of students in debt, village loafers, artisans out of work, and masterless servants. It was sometimes necessary to complete his tally at the public-house, and more than one simple-minded peasant found himself, like *Candide*, enlisted for having drunk the King's health. But, generally speaking, the draft was made up without much trickery or violence, thanks to the golden words of the recruiter, and the people's natural disposition for a military life. And further, in the King's service one received twenty-four ounces of white bread and three pounds of meat a week, and four sous a day. That was worth considering. The recruit, as in the song of *Caux*, embraced his betrothed, and went off gaily, promising to bring her back some ornament as a souvenir :

Adieu, ma belle, ah ! je m'en vas ;  
Puisque mon regiment s'en va.\*

or perhaps :

Adieu, ma mie, je m'en vas,  
Adieu, ma mie, je m'en vas.  
Je m'en vas faire un tour à Nantes  
Puisque le roi me le commande.†

\* Good-bye, my dear, I must away,  
Because my regiment is marching.

† Good-bye, my dear, I must away,  
Good-bye, my dear, I must away.  
I've got to take a turn at Nantes,  
Because the King has ordered it.

The soldier of the old regime crowed and dressed like a cock. He was splendidly attired, at his captain's expense. Under Louis XV, pomaded, curled, powdered, wearing a pigtail and a three-cornered hat with a white cockade, and a coat whose pockets and seams were trimmed with gold braid, with brightly-coloured facings and lining, his was a brilliant progress, and he sadly troubled the hearts of the servant-girls at the inns and the waitresses in the taverns.

Even to-day his hat, coat, breeches, and gaiters, which have survived the rats and moths, are the wonder of all who visit the exhibition of the Ministry of War in the Esplanade des Invalides. He proudly bore the colours of his regiment, the blue livery of the King, the red or green of the Queen, Dauphin and Princes, or the grey of the seigneurs and marshals. He looked a fine bird, and he knew it. The pretty girls told him so. He changed his name with his trade, no longer calling himself Jean, Pierre, or Colin; he described himself wonderfully as Sans-Quartier, La Violette, Sans-Souci, Tranche-Montagne, Belle-Rose, Brin-d'Amour, Jour d'Amour, La Tulipe, or some other of those surnames that delighted La Fontaine; for the worthy man, when he was very old, said in a ballad:

J'aime les sobriquets qu'un corps de garde impose ;  
Ils conviennent toujours. . . .

Once a soldier of the King, La Violette thinks no more of his sweetheart; La Tulipe has forgotten his promise. Yet she said to him:

Dedans l'Hollande si tu vas,  
Un corselet m'apporteras,  
Un corselet à l'allemande  
Que ta maîtresse te demande.

Alas, she still awaits her bodice :

Dedans l'Hollande il est allé,  
 Au corselet n'a pas songé,  
 Il n'a songé qu'à la débauche  
 Au cabaret, comme les autres.

Yet he sometimes remembers remorsefully :

—Ah ! si j'avais du papier blanc,  
 Dit il un jour en soupirant,  
 —J'en écrirais à ma maîtresse  
 Une lettre de compliments.

Pas de rivière sans poissons,  
 Pas de montagne sans vallons,  
 Pas de printemps sans violettes,  
 Ni pas d'amant sans maîtresse.\*

If La Tulipe delays too long in sending news of himself, his sweetheart will seek the ungrateful fellow, even in the enemy's country. It sometimes

\* If you go to Holland  
 Bring me a bodice,  
 A German bodice,  
 For which your mistress begs.

To Holland he went,  
 Of the bodice he never thought,  
 He thought only of carousing  
 At the tavern, like the rest.

—Oh, had I some white paper,  
 He said one say as he sighed,  
 —I'd write to my sweetheart,  
 A letter of greeting.

There's no river without fish,  
 No mountain without valleys,  
 No springtime without violets,  
 No lover without a mistress.

happens that she gets a very bad reception, as witness the following from Metz, collected by M. de Puymaigre :

Quand la bell' fut en Prusse,  
Elle vit son amant  
Qui faisait l'exercice  
Tout au milieu du rang.

—Si j'avais su, la belle,  
Que tu m'aurais trouvé,  
J'aurais passé la mer,  
La mer j'aurais passé.\*

The girl who dressed as a dragoon and wore the white cockade was wiser and more dauntless. The popular muse is very fond of girls dressed up as soldiers. This disguise is often met with in operettas; but in the songs it has a greater flavour of imagination and romance.

M. Henry Carnoy has discovered a very pretty variant of this well-known theme :

Mon père' me dit toujours,  
—Marie toi, ma fille !  
—Non, non, mon père, je ne veux plus aimer,  
Car mon amant est à l'arméé.

Elle s'est habillée  
En brave militaire.  
Ell' fit couper, friser ses blonds cheveux.  
À la façon d' son amoureux.

\* When the girl got to Prussia  
She saw her sweetheart ;  
He was drilling  
Right in the middle of the ranks.

—My lady, had I known  
That you would find me out,  
I would have crossed the sea,  
The sea I would have crossed.



Elle s'en fit loger  
 Dans une hôtellerie ;  
 —Bonjour, hôtesse, pourriez-vous me loger ?  
 J'ai de l'argent pour vous payer.  
 —Entrez, entrez, monsieur,  
 Nous en logeons bien d'autres.  
 Montez en haut : en voici l'escalier ;  
 L'on va vous servir à dîner.\*

The lady sings in her room. Her lover, lodging in the same inn, hears and recognizes his sweetheart's voice. He asks the hostess who it is that is singing. She says it is a soldier. He invites her to supper :

Quand il la vit venir,  
 Met du vin dans son verre :  
 —A ta santé, l'objet de mes amours !  
 A ta santé, c'est pour toujours !  
 —N'auriez vous pas, monsieur,  
 Une chambre secrète,

\* My father always tells me,  
 —My girl, get married !  
 —No, no, father, I cannot love again,  
 For my sweetheart's with the Army.

She dressed herself  
 Like a soldier bold.  
 She had her fair hair cut and curled  
 Like her lover's.

She went to lodge  
 In a hostelry ;  
 —Good day, hostess, can you give me a room ?  
 I've money wherewith to pay.

—Come in, sir, come in,  
 We are lodging many others.  
 Go up : see, here's the stair,  
 Then your dinner will be served.

Et un beau lit qui soit couvert de fleurs,  
Pour raconter tous nos malheurs ?

N'auriez vous pas, monsieur,  
Une plume et de l'encre ?  
Oui, j'écrirai à mes premiers parents  
Que j'ai retrouvé mon amant.\*

Does not this unexpected meeting, glass in hand, possess a delightful charm, with its hope of a flower-covered bed on which the two lovers may recount their woes ?

Manon simply masquerades as a boy, and enlists in her lover's regiment. And the song ends thus :

Une fille de dix-huit ans  
Qui a servi sept ans  
Sûrement a gagné  
Le congé de son bien-aimé.†

A long tradition bears witness to the soldier's successes with the fair. But when the song tells us of the young drummer who married the King's

\* When he saw her coming,  
He poured wine in her glass.  
—To your health, my sweetheart  
To your health, and for ever !

—Have you not, sir,  
A private room,  
And a fair bed covered with flowers  
Where we may tell all our misfortunes ?

Have you not, sir,  
A pen and ink ?  
Yes, I will write to my parents  
That I have found my lover.

† A girl of eighteen  
Who has served seven years  
Has surely earned  
Her sweetheart's leave.

daughter it is obvious that the singer is dreaming, and that such things happen only in the azure land of dreams. In those days the music of the infantry consisted solely of fifes and drums. The drummers received double pay, in virtue of an order dated 29th November, 1688 ; it is none the less marvellous that one should have married the King's daughter. The Bretons of Nantes who sang this song were great idealists :

Trois jeun' tambours	— s'en revenant de guerre,
Le plus jeune a	— dans sa bouche une rose.
La fille du roi	— était à sa fenêtre,
— Joli tambour	— donne-moi, va, ta rose.
— Fille du roi	— donne-moi, va, ton cœur.
— Joli tambour	— demand' le à mon père.
— Sire le roi	— donnez-moi votre fille.
— Joli tambour	— tu n'es pas assez riche.
— J'ai trois vaisseaux	— dessus la mer jolie ;
L'un chargé d'or .	— l'autre d'argenterie,
Et le troisièm'	— pour promener ma mie.
— Joli tambour	— tu auras donc ma fille.
— Sire le roi	— Je vous en remercie,
Dans mon pays	— y en a de plus jolies.*

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* Three young drummers	— coming from the War,
The youngest has	— a rose in his mouth.
The King's daughter	— was at her window.
— Sweet drummer	— come give me your rose.
— King's daughter	— come give me your heart.
— Sweet drummer	— ask my father.
— Sir King	— give me your daughter.
— Sweet drummer	— you are not rich enough.
— I have three ships	— on the lovely sea,
One full of gold	— the second of silver,
And the third	— is for my sweetheart to sail in.
— Sweet drummer	— you shall have my daughter.
— Sir King	— I am much beholden to you,
But in my country	— there are lovelier girls.

(From the collection of MM. Julien Tiersot and Paul Sébillot.)

This drummer-boy who owns three ships is truly a marvel. Turning over the pages of M. Julien Tiersot's excellent book, I cannot refrain from glancing at an insignificant little box on my table, from which an old soldier took snuff for many a year. As one opens it, there still rises a pungent smell. I found it last year, in a bric-à-brac shop, mixed up with medals of St. Helena, old lace, and old parchments. It is an old round walnut box, with a military scene on the lid which is explained by the wording, "Departure of the Garrison." The scene represents soldiers emptying a last bottle under a vine, at the gates of a town, and bidding a touching farewell to their lady friends. They are wearing bell-topped shakos and long capes: I think they are light infantry of the Guard. The lady friends are all in an interesting condition. One of the soldiers, with outstretched hand, swears by his love that he will forget neither mother nor child. The poor creature, however, appears far from reassured. There is in this scene a very curious admixture of mischief and sentiment. I imagine that this snuff-box was long used by some old pensioner, and that the scene on the lid reminded the old soldier of his exploits as a lover. Perhaps he carried it at Waterloo: it may have been a gift from his sweetheart: perhaps he wiped away a tear every time he took a pinch of snuff. But we have wandered a long way from the gallant drummer, who passed the King's daughter with a rose in his mouth.

But as Merlin said, "*Cuide engeigner autrui qui s'enseigne soi-même.*" The dashing soldier, on his return to his village, finds that he has not been spared the disgrace which he has inflicted upon

other husbands. He finds that his family has greatly increased in his absence.

. . . Méchante femme,  
Je ne t'avais laissé qu' deux enfants,  
En voilà quatre à présent.\*

The wife ingenuously replies :

J'ai tant reçu de fausses lettres  
Que vous étiez mort à l'armée  
Que je me suis remariée.†

Sometimes the story has a more tragic ending. There is no trifling with military justice. Even if it is true that in the regiment of Anjou men deserted with impunity :

Je suis du régiment d'Anjou.  
Si je déserte, je m'en f . . .  
Le capitaine paiera tout.‡

elsewhere the deserter was without mercy shot. In a still popular complaint a poor soldier tells his story on his way to execution, like Béranger's old

\* . . . Wicked woman !  
Two children is all I left you,  
And now there are four.

† I had received so many lying letters  
That you had died in the Army  
That I married again.

(Lines quoted by Alexis Monteil, *Histoire des Français*, t. IV p. 15 of the notes.)

‡ I belong to the Regiment of Anjou.  
I don't care if I do desert,  
The captain will pay.

sergeant. The soldier had enlisted "for love of a girl." For her he had stolen the King's money, and in his flight he met his captain and killed him. He was condemned to death, as he deserved to be. But the populace is indulgent to weaknesses inspired by sentiment, and is rightly moved by the fatality of those offences which follow one upon another like the links of a chain. Hence the touching inspiration of this complaint, which even found a place, says M. Julien Tiersot, in the repertory of Thérèse :

Ils m'ont pris, m'ont mené  
 Sur la place de Rennes,  
 Ils m'ont bandé les yeux  
 Avec un ruban bleu :  
 C'est pour m'y fair' mourir,  
 Mais sans m'y fair' languir.

Soldat de mon pays,  
 N'en dit' rien à mon père ;  
 Ecrive-lui plutôt  
 Que je sors de Bordeaux  
 Pour aller en Avignon  
 Suivre mon bataillon.\*

\* They took me, and led me  
 To the market-place at Rennes,  
 They bandaged my eyes  
 With a blue ribbon,  
 To put me to death,  
 But without delay.

Soldier from my country,  
 Don't tell my father,  
 Tell him rather  
 That I am leaving Bordeaux  
 For Avignon  
 To follow my battalion.

On the whole, the peoples do not love war, and they are right. The really popular songs of France—where, nevertheless, soldiers spring up like corn—the songs that rise from the furrow with the lark, are those of mothers. The masterpiece, the most wonderful of country songs, is that of Jean Renaud, who returns from the war, carrying his entrails in his hands :

—Bonjour, Renaud ; bonjour, mon fils,  
Ta femme est accouchée d'un fils.  
—Ni de ma femm' ni de mon fils,  
Je ne saurais mè réjouir.

Que l'on me fass' vite un lit blanc,  
Pour que je m'y couche dedans.  
Et quand ce vint sur le minuit,  
Le beau Renaud rendit l'esprit.\*

The rest of the plaint is sublime ; and M. Julien Tiersot was right in regarding this work, both words and music, as one of the finest inspirations of unpolished genius :

—Dites-moi, ma mère, ma mie,  
Qu'est-c' que j'entends pleurer ici ?  
—C'est un p'tit pag' qu'on a fouetté  
Pour un plat d'or qu'est égaré.

—Dites-moi, ma mère, ma mie,  
Qu'est-ce que j'entends cogner ici ?

—\* Good day, Renaud ; good day, my lad,  
Your wife has got a son.  
—Neither in my wife nor in my child  
Can I take any pleasure.

Let them quickly make me a white bed,  
That I may lie down in it.  
And when it struck midnight,  
The comely Renaud gave up the ghost

—Ma fille, ce sont des maçons  
Qui raccommodent la maison.

—Dites-moi, ma mère, ma mie,  
Qu'est-c' que j'entends sonner ici ?

—C'est le p'tit dauphin nouveau né  
Dont le baptême est retardé.

—Dites-moi, ma mère, ma mie,  
Qu'est-ce que j'entends chanter ici ?

—Ma fille, c' sont les processions  
Qui font la tour de la maison.

. . . . .

—Dites-moi, ma mère, ma mie,  
Irai-je à la messe aujourd'hui ?

—Ma fille, attendez à demain  
Et vous irez pour le certain.\*

\* —Tell me, my Mother, my dear,  
Whom do I hear weeping here ?  
—It's a little page, who has been whipped  
For a golden plate that has gone astray.

—Tell me, my Mother, my dear,  
What is the tapping that I hear ?  
—My child, it is the masons  
Repairing the house.

—Tell me, my Mother, my dear,  
What is the ringing that I hear ?  
—It is the newly-born Dauphin  
Whose baptism is delayed.

—Tell me, my Mother, my dear,  
What is the singing that I hear ?  
—My child, it is the processions  
Going round the house.

—Tell me, my Mother, my dear,  
Shall I go to Mass to-day ?  
—My child, wait until to-morrow  
And you shall surely go.



The whole plaint, of which many versions exist, is admirable. According to one variant found at Boulogne-sur-Mer by M. Ernest Hamy, when Jean Renaud's wife sees her husband's coffin in the church and learns that she is a widow, she turns to her mother-in-law and says :

—Tenez, ma mèr', voilà les clefs :  
Allez-vous-en au petit né,  
Vêtez-le de noir et de blanc,  
Quant à moi, je reste céans.\*

Where shall we find anything simpler, greater or more sublime? "Mother, here are the keys." Is not that one of those touches of Nature, which, as we said previously, are the height of Art, when Art is able to attain them?

I must now call a halt. My task is merely to touch the fringe of the subject. In closing, I will say what struck me most in looking through the various collections of our old soldiers' songs. They contain not a trace of any hatred of foreign nations. They fought for the King, against the King's enemies; but they knew them not, nor bore them any ill-will. The long wars of Louis XIV left not the slightest trace of bitterness in the heart of this light, gentle, charming people.

On the eve of the Revolution the people of France did not feel that it had an enemy in Europe. In all its songs there was not a bitter word for Englishmen or Germans. The King of England is only once challenged in a child-like and mysterious

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\* See, my mother, here are the keys,  
Go to my new-born child,  
Clothe him in black and white,  
But as for me, I stay here.

pastoral found in La Bresse and the Ile de France.  
It runs :

Prends ton épée en main  
Et moi ma quenouillette.

The shepherdess' distaff breaks the King's sword. Is there a trace in this fancy of some childish and tender recollection of the Maid of Orleans? Who knows what truths may be borne on the light wings of verse? Our country Muse clearly teaches us that we know not how to hate. If there remained nothing of the old French genius save the rhymeless verses which we have just been humming it might still be said with certainty: This people had two precious gifts, grace and kindness.

## 3

## SONGS OF THE PLOUGH

There is no gallantry about them. Songs of ploughing, songs of toil. Many a time, along the banks of the Loire, Émile Souvestre heard the ploughmen urging and encouraging their teams with a song which the oxen seemed to understand. The refrain ran :

Hé!  
Mon rougeaud!  
Mon noiraud!  
Allons ferme' à l'housteau :  
Vous aurez du r'nouveau.\*

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\* Hey, my Reddy!  
Hey, my Blackie!  
Straight away to the inn  
And you shall have refreshment.

In Bresse, to urge the oxen on, they sing songs called "songs of the high wind." Here is an extract from one among many. It is full of a gloomy ruggedness :

Le pauvre laboureur,  
 Il est bien malheureux !  
 Du jour de sa naissance  
 Il a bien du malheur.  
 Qu'il pleuv', qu'il neig', qu'il grêle,  
 Qu'il fasse mauvais temps,  
 L'on voit toujours sans cesse  
 Le laboureur aux champs ! \*

This plaint, so sad in its beginning, takes on something of the colour of imagination :

Il est vêtu de toile  
 Comme un moulin à vent.  
 Il port' des arselettes,  
 C'est l'état d' son métier,  
 Pour empêcher la terre  
 D'entrer dans ses souliers. †

\* The poor ploughman  
 He is very wretched !  
 From the day of his birth  
 He has many woes.  
 Whether it rains, snows, or hails,  
 However bad the weather,  
 One sees him always,  
 The ploughman in the fields.

† He is clothed in canvas  
 Like a windmill.  
 He wears gaiters,  
 The badge of his trade,  
 To prevent the earth  
 Getting into his boots.

*Arselettes* are gaiters, as the meaning of the sentence indicates. In the last verse the tone of the song is higher, and the singer says, with legitimate pride :

Il n'y a roi ni prince,  
Ni ducque ni seigneur,  
Qui n' vive de la peine  
Du pauvre laboureur.\*

M. Paul Arène has sent me a Provençal song of the same type, which he himself discovered. "It is," he says, "the peasant's plaint, the simply told story of his eternal conflict with the earth. And certainly only a peasant would have been capable, during the tedium of long work in the fields, of slowly composing, to a spacious, mournful melody, prolonged by echoes, such verses as these, full of a touching and melancholy realism."

M. Paul Arène has made a translation of the song, full of strength and colour. The opening is grand, and so much of the classic genius still exists in the Provençal soul that it recalls the Syracusan bucolics :

Come and hear—the so sweet song—of these poor ploughmen,—  
who pass their days—in tilling the fields.

The singer then describes the days and the labours of the peasant with the quiet simplicity of a Hesiod :

At dawn—when the ploughman wakes—He rises and prays to  
God—He then eats—his pease pudding—it is then in season.

When he has eaten it—the ploughman says to his wife. . . .

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\* There's neither king, nor prince,  
Nor duke nor lord,  
That lives not by the labour  
Of the poor ploughman,

His words are those of a wise and careful master. He says to her, "Get the corn ready for the sowing. Bring my flagon at the dinner-hour. And then mend my breeches. They were torn by a bush the day before yesterday, when I was ploughing by the edge of the wood." This causes him to reflect on the miseries of his work, and he cries bitterly :

Oh, cursed labour—that of the earth—from morning to night  
—naught but misery—The furrow—is full of wretchedness.

There is no getting away from the fact that life on the land is a hard one. And the plaint of the Provençal ploughman, like that of the Berri peasant, must touch us deeply. But we must not overlook the fact that there is mingled with it a certain joy and a proud contentment. With what pride does Paul Àrène's ploughman say: "The plough is made up of thirty-one pieces. It was a clever man that invented it. He must have been a gentleman."

The life of our rustic forefathers has been painted in much too dark a tone. They worked hard, and they suffered sometimes great evils, but they did not live like brutes.

We must avoid casting too dark a shadow over our national antiquities. In all times France was kind to her children; under the old regime the peasant had his pleasures: and he sang of them. People have thought well to exhibit him as unmercifully taxed and liable to forced labour; it is certainly true that the overlord's rights were sometimes very onerous. But it should also have been explained how Jacques Bonhomme, who is by no means a fool, was clever enough, long before the Revolution, to set himself more than half free. Do you imagine that the pretty girls of Caux who, in 1750, wore higher

and more sumptuous erections of lace on their heads than the *hennin* of Queen Isabeau, and over their scarlet petticoats the antique mantle of the Capetian princesses, the long woollen cape: do you imagine that these fine farmers' wives, bearing the honourable title of "mistress," were ever short of buckwheat soup, of bread, white or brown, of salt pork, or even fresh meat? Not they!—and even if, following the custom, they waited on the men, and ate standing up, they slept in the great four-post bed, and round their waist they hung the keys of the vast linen-press. More than one lady of quality might well envy their domestic wealth. The peasants' prosperity was not peculiar to Normandy. Fifteen years ago, in Clermont, I saw a sale of old Auvergnat peasants' clothes. They were as sumptuous as those of Queen Marie Leczinska.

These clothes were bought by Parisian ladies, who wore the petticoats, cleverly draped, at balls, dinners and evening parties, where their success was striking. These flowered dresses and lace caps explain the extraordinarily bright and brave love-songs which we were lately admiring.

We have now come to the end of our walk. I admit that I have meandered more than I should have done. I had a restive, wandering impulse to-day. Well, old Silenus himself did not always drive his ass as he should. Yet he was a poet and a god.

## VILLIERS DE L'ISLE-ADAM\*



VILLIERS DE L'ISLE-ADAM died on the 18th August, 1886, in the fifty-second year of his age, in the hospital of the Brothers of Saint-Jean de Dieu, under the shadow of those same trees that saw the death of Madame de la Sablière and Barbey d'Aurévilly. Like many others, having feared Death from afar off, he met it quietly, and its appearance found him unafraid. Will not a moment arrive for us all when we desire to die? Villiers died easily, and those that closed his eyes say that he anticipated with pleasure the rest which he enjoys to-day. Perhaps he cherished secret hopes? Did this Breton believe in the faith of his forefathers? Did he expect to receive in the Unknown the reward due to his constant love of the beautiful, and his sufferings? Who knows? He showed himself in his conversation a Christian and a Catholic; and his books bear this out.

But his faith was certainly not that of the crowd. He mingled therein strange audacities. And the delight of blasphemy was apparently what he most relished. He belonged to that family of neo-Catholics whose common father is Chateaubriand, and which produced Barbey d'Aurévilly, Baudelaire,

\* *Contes cruels*, 1 vol. *L'Ève future*, 1 vol. *Axel*, 1 vol.

and more recently M. Joséphin Péladan. What they enjoyed above all things in religion were the charm of sin and the greatness of sacrilege. Their sensualism revelled in the dogmas which added to luxury the supreme luxury of damning themselves.

These proud sons of the Church longed to adorn their faults with the thunders of Heaven and the tears of the angels. Like the rest of them, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam was a great mystical dilettante. His piety was terribly impious. He indulged in terrific irony. He died, and left us without regret. "I am going to rest," he said. He left the world without ever having tasted what are called the good things of this life. Poverty held him in its grip, and his best friends, his most ardent admirers, could never tear him from what seemed a part of his nature. It was said that while quite young he had frittered away a small inheritance. It is certain that from his twentieth year he had no hearth or home of his own. For thirty years he wandered among the night-houses, fading away at the first glimmer of dawn. His poverty, the horrible poverty of cities, had so marked and moulded him that he was like one of those tramps who, dressed in black, sleep on the public benches. He was of a livid colour, splotched with red, with a lack-lustre eye, and the bowed back of the poor man. And yet, to-day, I am in doubt whether one should not write him down as a happy man. I cannot say whether he was meet for pity or envy. He was absolutely unaware of his poverty; it killed him, but he never felt it. He lived in a perpetual dream, and that a golden one. Babouc sleeping by a stream, and trodden on by the passers-by, felt on his lips the



perfumed kisses of a queen. Villiers, in thought, lived always in enchanted gardens, in marvellous palaces, in subterranean chambers full of the treasures of Asia, glittering with the gaze of royal sapphires and hieratic virgins. This unhappy man lived in fortunate lands of which the happy of this world have not the remotest conception. He was a seer ; his dull eyes looked within and saw dazzling visions. He wandered through life as in a dream ; not seeing what we see, and beholding that which is not permitted to us. Weighed down as we are, we have no right to complain. He knew how to turn the dull round of life into an ever-renewed rapture. He scattered purple and gold in abundance over mean café tables smelling of beer and tobacco. No, there is no need to be sorry for him. If we were so, I think his spirit would return to overwhelm us with bitter reproaches. I seem to see him standing near my table ; I seem to see Villiers just as he was when alive, in his stumpy, common ugliness, which was yet transfigured when, with his head on one side, throwing back his long straight hair, after several long chuckles, he spoke like a prophet. I can almost hear him say :

“ Envy, and do not commiserate me. It is impious to commiserate those that possess Beauty. I had it, and never saw aught else : for me the outside world never existed, and I never deigned to observe it. My soul is full of solitary castles by the side of lakes, where the silvery moon shines on enchanted swans. Read *Axel*, my masterpiece, which I never finished. There you will find two of the most beautiful of God's creatures, a man and a woman, who search for a treasure and, alas, find it. When it is gained they give themselves to Death, well

knowing that only one treasure is worth having : the Infinite Divine. The miserable hovel in which I dreamed while I played *Parsifal* on an old piano was really more sumptuous than the Louvre. Read the aphorisms of Schopenhauer, and note the spot where he says : ‘ What palace, what Escorial or Alhambra ever rivalled in magnificence the dingy hole where Cervantes wrote *Don Quixote* ? ’ Schopenhauer himself kept a golden Buddha in his modest room, to remind him that the only real wealth in this world is indifference to wealth. I have afforded myself all the satisfactions that can tempt the most powerful of the earth. Internally I have been Grand Master of the Knights of Malta and King of Greece. I have myself created my own legend, and while yet living I have been as wonderful as was the Emperor Barbarossa a hundred years after his death. So intertwined was my dream with reality that I defy even you who know me entirely to disentangle my life from the dreams with which I so splendidly adorned it. Farewell : I lived the richest and most magnificent of men.”

What can one answer, save this ? “ Peace be with you, Villiers. You took the part of the Ideal, the part of Mary. And it was the better part. Let the happy and powerful say what they will. There is nothing comparable to a life’s devotion to a great love. You have loved Art and Thought above all else, and the most magnificent illusions have been your reward. Great passions are never without fruit. A whole world of images has populated the lofty solitudes of your soul.”

Is there nothing more to be said ? Must we see in Villiers de l’Isle-Adam nothing but a mind teeming with hallucinations ? Far from it. If this

waking dreamer carried away with him the secret of his most beautiful dreams, if he has not told us all he saw in that long dream whereof his life consisted, he has at any rate written enough to leave us some idea of the original wealth of his imagination. He was an eccentric writer; and his formless, illegible, scattered, lost manuscripts were recovered in all directions. Somnambulists are possessed of faculties that we cannot understand. Villiers would recover at night, in the gutters, the vanished pages of his masterpieces. It has been stated that he wrote on cigarette papers. Was there anything on which he did not scribble? Only those who have seen his MSS. can say: nameless tatters, worn out in his pockets, where he had carried them for years, which fell to pieces as he unfolded them, horrible remnants, indecipherable even by himself, whose crumbling condition he regarded with deep and comic alarm. However, he would rearrange them with an obstinate patience and wonderful skill. Just as M. Comparetti cautiously unrolls the carbonized papyri of Pompeii, so Villiers collected the fragments of *Axel* or *Bonhomet*, and the work was saved.

It got printed, and sometimes the result was a fine book.

This must be said, to the confusion of those that ignored him while he lived: Villiers is a writer, and a writer in the greatest of styles. When he does not cumber his sentences with incidences of too deep a meaning, when he does not over-prolong his obscure irony, when he renounces the pleasure of astonishing himself, he is a writer of magnificent prose, full of harmony and brilliance.

His drama, the *Nouveau monde*, contained

dialogues of incomparable fragrance, purity, and distinction. The collection which he called *Contes cruels* contains pages full of beauty. Here are some lines of heroic grace. They refer to the companions of Leonidas :

“ Le trois cents étaient partis avec le roi. Couronnés de fleurs, ils s’en étaient allés au festin de la Patrie. Ceux qui devaient souper dans les Enfers avait peigné leur chevelure pour la dernière fois dans le temple de Lycurgue. Puis levant leurs boucliers et les frappant de leurs épées, les jeunes hommes, aux applaudissements des femmes, avaient disparu dans l’aurore en chantant des vers de Tyrtée. Maintenant, sans doute, les hautes herbes du Défilé frôtaient leurs jambes nues, comme si la terre qu’ils allait défendre voulait caresser encore ses enfants avant de les reprendre en son sein vénérable.” \*

Is there anything more magnificent to be found in Chateaubriand, or anything stronger in Flaubert ? Villiers, profoundly musical and full of Wagner, filled his prose with expressive sonority and intimate melody. Besides, he loved the art of writing with all his heart. There is no love without superstition. He believed in the virtue of words. For him certain words, like the Scandinavian runes,

\* [The three hundred had gone with the King. Crowned with flowers, they had gone to the banquet of their Mother Country. Those who were about to sup with the Shades combed their hair for the last time in the temple of Lycurgus. Then, raising their shields and striking them with their swords, the young men, amid the applause of the women, had disappeared in the dawn, singing the verses of Tyrtæus. Now, doubtless, the long grass in the Pass was brushing their naked legs as though the Soil they were about to defend wished once more to caress its children, before resuming them in its venerable bosom.]

had a secret power. That is typical of a good artisan of words. There lives no true writer without this weakness.

With all his marvellous gifts, Villiers never won the favour of the public, and I fear that his books, even after his death, are read only by a very limited number. They are full of a cruel irony. It is this very irony, often painful and obscure, which is the impediment. His chuckle, still ringing in the ears of all who knew Villiers, that short sharp chuckle of his may be found in all that he wrote, and lends a grimace to his purest thoughts. This visionary extended mockery beyond the permissible, and even the conceivable. He mingled it curiously with his philosophic contemplations, his pious ecstasies and his sublimest meditations. I have just been reading his *Ève future*, which was published four years ago, and whose hero happens to be the illustrious guest whom Paris is at this moment receiving with so much sympathy and curiosity. In this romance Villiers has portrayed the inventor of the telephone and the phonograph, Edison, the wizard of Menlo Park. The inventions of this able man naturally assume, in Villiers' mind, a marvellous and fantastic character. He imagines that Mr. Edison has invented an electric woman, of marvellous beauty, whose appearance, movements and speech produce a complete illusion of life. He revels in this mad idea, which allows him to jeer at Science while at the same time blaspheming against Nature.

Issuing, like the Biblical Eve, from the hands of her maker, the new Eve naturally inspires desire. Mr. Edison has constructed her for a young English peer, who, having given his love to a living woman, beautiful, it is true, but vulgar and stupid, can neither

live with the creature nor do without her, and falls into a mortal apathy. The android exactly resembles this woman in feature, but the thoughts which she expresses (due to an internal phonograph) are of an ideal beauty, having been composed by the finest writers of the two hemispheres. They produce the deepest impression upon the young peer.

"At your cry of despair," says the android, "I have clothed myself in all haste with the radiant outlines of your desire, in order to appear to you. . . .

"I formed myself in the mind of my creator, so that, thinking that he was acting of his own volition, he confusedly obeyed me."

"Who am I? A creature of dreams, who half awakes in your thoughts. . . .

"Oh, do not awake and leave me. . . .

"Who am I? For you, at least, my existence here depends on your free will. Grant me life, affirm that I exist! Strengthen me with yourself! Then I shall be instantaneously animated, in your eyes, with that degree of reality with which your creative will has endowed me. As a woman I shall be no more for you than what you believe me to be."

As the astonished peer makes no answer, the android resumes :

"Do you fear to interrupt me? Be careful! You forget that it is only in you that I thrill with life or lie inanimate, and that such fears may be fatal to me. If you doubt my existence I am lost, which also means that you lose in me the ideal creature for whom it was enough that you called her to you.

"With what a marvellous life may I be endowed if you are simple enough to believe in me, and to defy reason!"

After all, is not the android right? Does she lie more than others? Is she a greater illusion? For all that one knows of the woman one loves, for all that one possesses of her secret, for all the distance one can penetrate into her soul, the automaton is really as good as the living woman. Terrible is the wisdom of the android! Never have Nature and Love been so magnificently reviled. Do you not feel chilled, as I was? Alas, poor Villiers! "I knew him: he was a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy."

## AN EGYPTIAN MONK\*



E. AMÉLINEAU has passed several years in Egypt, searching for Coptic manuscripts hidden in the churches and monasteries. This scholar, who was full of faith, and still retains at the bottom of his heart the perfume of his vanished beliefs, has lived long hours in the monasteries of the Nile, amid the dirty, lazy, ignorant, degraded and happy monks. With sympathetic pity he has watched them sunning their proud and pensive lethargy. He has studied their soul, which is both coarse and subtle, and full of marvellous visions. One thing struck him: the profound resemblance between the Coptic and the Celtic race. On either side there is the same artless idealism, and the same worship of old tradition. M. Amélineau has collected the monuments of a history of Christian Egypt. He has published several texts of great importance. To-day I shall refer only to one of his works, the *Life of Schnoudi*. It is an interesting book, written with a graceful touch and easy to read.

Schnoudi, whose biography M. Amélineau has written with the aid of historical documents, such as monastic rules, letters of administration, sermons, decrees, etc., was an extraordinary individual, worthy

\* "Les Moines égyptiens," par E. Amélineau. *Vie de Schnoudi* (Leroux édit., in-18).



to be studied alongside of Antonius, Macarius, and Pacomus, who endowed Egyptian Christianity with such original features.

He was born on May 2nd, A.D. 333, under the patriarchate of Athanasius, not far from the Greek town of Athribis, then in ruins, at Schenaloli; which means "The Village of the Vine." His father was called Abgous and his mother Darouba. They were simple fellaheen, who owned a few sheep, and perhaps a little of the black soil, which returns a hundred-fold the grain entrusted to it. They gave the predestinate child the name of Schnoudi: that is, Son of God. Schnoudi was brought up like all the children of the fellaheen. One can see him, agile and naked, following his mother to the bank of the river when she went in the evening to fill her jar, which she carried erect on her head, in accordance with age-long and still existing custom. When he was nine he accompanied the old shepherd who grazed his father's sheep. His vocation was already revealing itself. In the evening, instead of returning home, he would go down into one of the numberless canals which cross the fields, and there, plunged in water up to his neck, under a sycamore tree, he would pray all night with uplifted arms. In the East it is by such practices as these that holiness is made manifest. Darouba had a brother named Bgoul, who was abbot of a monastery near the ruined town of Athribis. Bgoul took the child and had him trained in the school dependent upon the monastery. Schnoudi there learnt to speak and to write Coptic.

He then learnt a little Greek. He worked especially at tracing characters on innumerable potsherds. The art of the scribe was then held in high regard.

Above all, he studied the Bible, and nourished himself on the psalms and the prophets.

Reaching man's age, he manifested his holiness by works worthy of Macarius and Pacomus. He slept but little, fasted till sundown, and ate only a little bread and salt with water. He would sometimes pass the whole week, from Saturday to Saturday, without food. During the forty days of Lent he was satisfied with boiled beans.

Once, in Holy Week, on Good Friday, he made himself a cross like that of Jesus, raised it, attached himself to the wood, and remained hanging, with outstretched arms, with his face and chest against his tree of punishment. He remained thus for a whole week. It is well known that in our time Père Lacordaire has revived these mystic tortures, and placed himself on the cross for several hours.

Schnoudi was subject to fits of weeping; so abundantly would he weep that it was feared that he might lose his eyesight. Following the custom of the Egyptian Saints he retired into the desert, and for five years lived in one of those ancient tombs which form vast chambers hewn out of the rock, with walls often covered with paintings. There he worked with his hands.

One day, says his biographer, as he was seated in the sepulchral chamber plaiting ropes, the Tempter appeared before him in the form of a man of God.

"Greeting, O beautiful youth," he said; "the Lord has sent me to console you. Henceforth you shall renounce works of piety and quit the stony desert; go back to the laughing country-side, and eat your bread in company with your brothers." Hearing these words, Schnoudi knew who stood before him. He answered: "If you are come to

console me, stretch out your hand and pray to the Lord Jesus." On hearing the name of Jesus, Satan (for it was indeed he) resumed his true form, which is that of a horned goat. The Saint passed a rope which he had just plaited round the creature's neck. The Devil was so overcome by fear that he forgot his immortality.

"I beg of you," he said to Schnoudi, "that I may not perish before the allotted term of my life."

Schnoudi spoke threateningly as follows :

"By the prayers of the Saints, if ever you return here, I will exile you to Babylon of the Chaldeans until the day of Judgment."

He then released Satan, who fled, covered with confusion. One may at first feel a certain surprise that Schnoudi, having the Devil in his power, should have let him go. But the Devil, when all is considered, is as necessary to the virtue of the Saints as God himself ; for, in the absence of trials and temptations, their lives would be void of all merit. Still, it is not certain that Schnoudi was actuated by this consideration. Perhaps he found it impossible to strangle the Devil. It would, moreover, have been extremely rash. With the Devil dead the whole edifice of religion would crumble, and the cataclysm would reach to heaven. It is also possible that Schnoudi never thought of that either.

After having lived for five years in a tomb the holy man was proof against the temptations of the senses ; the idea of women, which so troubled Antonius, Macarius, and Pacomus in their old age, caused him naught but horror and disgust. Returning to the monastery of Athribis he assumed its

direction after the death of his uncle Bgoul. It was then that the ascetic displayed the genius of a great shepherd of men.

The little community, consisting of about a hundred monks, increased prodigiously in the course of a few years, and soon numbered more than two thousand brothers, whose dwellings, called *laures*, ran along the mountain side. Some were cenobites, whilst others lived as anchorites in the mountain. Schnoudi founded, at some distance, a convent for eighteen hundred women. He then resolved to build an indestructible monastery and a great church. According to his own account, he found the necessary money for this vast enterprise in the ruins of the Greek city. One day he kicked against a bottle, one of those known as bottles of Ascalon: picking it up, he opened and found it to be full of gold.

He himself drew the plan of the buildings, and had them built up from the stones of the ruins. The workmen, who worked for the salvation of their souls, vied with each other in zeal and skill. All was finished in eighteen months.

“The work of these worthy men,” says M. Amélineau, “still exists to-day; not a stone has been moved. When, from a distance, one sees it standing out from the mountain, it looks like a square bastion: it is, in fact, more like a fortress than a monastery. The fabric is rectangular; it is built in the Egyptian manner, with unmortared courses. The blocks of stone furnished by the temples of the ruined town have been trimmed afresh: but they still betray traces of their former employment. The walls, of great thickness, are no less than 120 metres long by 100 metres wide. They are very high, and all round them there runs

a sort of coloured cornice which recalls the capitals of certain columns in the great hypostyle hall of Karnak. One can still distinguish some of the colours with which the walls were covered. The monastery was entered by two gates, opposite to one another, one of which has since been built up. That by which one enters to-day is more than 15 metres deep. On entering, one is chilled by the darkness. The monks who entered thereby had truly abandoned the world. On the right of this gate lies the great church; at the entrance one still sees two marble columns, whose use has not been discovered, and on which Schnoudi sat more than once in the cool of the evening, before entering the church for the final prayer of the day. The church itself is of the same shape as all the Coptic churches, with five cupolas."

Schnoudi never feared to enlist God in his own interests. He was accustomed to say :

"There is no space in the monastery the size of a footprint where the Lord has not walked hand in hand with me."

He further said :

"Let all who cannot visit Jerusalem, there to prostrate themselves before the cross on which died Jesus the Messiah, bring their offering to this church, where the angels assemble. I will pray for their past sins, and whosoever shall listen to me shall suffer naught for his offences, not even the dead buried in this mountain, for I will intercede on their behalf with the Lord."

Thus it was, says his biographer, that Schnoudi endowed his church with "the indulgences attached to holy places," and made them "applicable to the dead" by his own authority.

This believer, like Mahomet in a later age, was capable of profound artifice. In studying him it is not always easy to mark the dividing line between the illusion of the seer and the pious fraud. Here is a little incident which affords matter for reflection in this connection :

One day, his beloved disciple, the gentle Visa, who was to succeed him, knocked at his cell door.

"Come in at once," said the Abbot.

Visa had not dared do so immediately because he had heard the sound of voices. However, he obeyed, kissed Schnoudi's hand, and asked whose voice he had heard.

"The Messiah has just left me," replied Schnoudi. "He has for a long while been conversing with me upon the ineffable mysteries."

Visa uttered a great sigh.

"Would that I also could see Him !"

"You are too small of heart," answered Schnoudi. "For that reason, I have not begged that He should grant permission for you to see Him."

"It is true that I am a sinner," answered the humble Visa.

The Abbot continued :

"Lift up your heart, and I promise that you shall see Him whom I have seen."

Visa, happy in this promise, kissed his master's hand once more, and said :

"Father, I am your slave ; have pity on me, and cause me to be worthy of really seeing Him."

Touched by such humility, Schnoudi spoke as follows :

"Return to-morrow at the sixth hour. You will once more find us conversing together."

At the stated hour, on the following day, Visa

did not fail to knock at the cell door. But when he entered he saw only Schnoudi. The Messiah, having heard him knock, had returned to heaven.

“Miserable man that I am,” said Visa, shedding many tears. “I am unworthy to see the body of Jesus Christ.”

Schnoudi tried to console him.

“Do not weep: if you are unworthy to see Him, you may at least hear His sweet voice.”

“In fact,” adds the pious Visa, who reported this conversation, “I on several occasions heard Him converse with the father.”

Schnoudi enveloped his faith with all the prestige of sorcery so dear to Orientals. His Christianity, like that of all Egyptians, was tainted with magic. He declared that he was able to make himself invisible, and to cast a spell over the valley.

As in youth, he would still go down into the water, and, in spite of the cold, spend the whole night in prayer. The tomb in the desert, in which he had passed five years, and buried the perception of terrestrial voluptuousness, still remained dear to him. He often returned thither, passing whole weeks in conversation with Jesus Christ, and in hand-to-hand encounters with the Devil.

He became celebrated throughout the whole of Egypt, equal in fame to Antonius and Macarius; and as far away as Alexandria it was known that there lived near the mountain of Athribis a saint who was daily visited by Jesus Christ.

Round his monastery he exercised an authority to which even the nomads submitted. Egypt was at that time ravaged by the incursions of tribes who spread death and terror about them. For three weeks the Abbot of Athribis fed twenty thousand

unhappy creatures, men, women, and children, who were victims of the nomads. Visa states that there were spent weekly 25,000 drachmas on the purchase of vegetables and seasoning, and on cooking the meat, without reckoning what was required for dressing it ; while 150 bottles of oil were used daily, and 19 ardebs (36 tons) of lentils. The bread was cooked in four ovens.

Schnoudi, who was so sorry for the unfortunate, and so eager to feed the hungry, treated idolaters and adulterers, on the other hand, with frantic violence. There were in those days, along the banks of the Nile, rich men who lived elegantly in beautiful houses filled with gods, half Greek and half Egyptian. Schnoudi with his monks sacked the dwellings of these worthy pagans. One of them was drowned in the river. It is related that he was drowned by an angel, but it was probably by a monk. Schnoudi was terrible in his zeal. Greatly despising nature, what he could least pardon were the sins of the flesh. Near Athribis there was a priest who lived with a married woman ; Schnoudi, shocked by such a scandal, went to the priest, and pointed out the horror of his conduct. The priest promised to leave the woman, but, when he saw her again, kept her with him, for he loved her. Schnoudi unfortunately met them together. "Suffocated by the odour of adultery, he recalled the terrible judgments which the Lord, on Mount Sinai, had directed Moses to execute. With his stick he struck the earth, which thereupon opened, and the offending couple were swallowed up alive."

So says the holy Visa. As a matter of fact, Schnoudi committed a horrible murder.



In spite of the progress of monachism, there were still to be found in Egypt a great number of men, and even priests, who "loved God's creatures." They proceeded to the Duke of Antinoë and charged the Abbot of Athribis with the murder of a man and a woman. The Duke dealt justice. He had Schnoudi seized, tried, and condemned him to death. It is told that two angels rescued the saint from under the executioner's sword. It is easier to believe that the monks of Athribis rescued their Abbot from execution. They formed a numerous and disciplined army, against which, in those days of trouble and anarchy, it was difficult for the authorities to contend.

Such are, shortly, the facts as known to-day regarding the life of Schnoudi. M. Amélineau has the twofold merit of having discovered them in the Coptic manuscripts, and in having constructed a continuous story, full of acute interest, which anyone may read. Schnoudi died in his 119th year, on 2nd July, 451. This date is given us as certain, and it must be admitted that the lives of the fathers of the desert afford more than one example of similar longevity.

"After him," says M. Amélineau, "darkness falls on the history of Schnoudi's monastery, which for a brief space enjoyed such celebrity: not a single one of Visa's successors is known. The work was condemned to perish: only the monastery remains standing, but how shorn of its ancient splendour! Where once trod the feet of so many saints, even the feet of the Lord Himself, the impure foot of woman now rests: the last children of Schnoudi married, and thus introduced into the Sanctuary of God an abomination of desolation

unimagined even by the prophet Daniel. These poor folk live on the mean income of a few *feddans*, huddled together with their cattle. They have always preserved the recollection of the terrible man whose shade they believe still haunts their home."

He was a great and terrible saint. Christianity in Egypt is coloured with burning hues of which we in our temperate climate have no idea. The blazing fanaticism of Islam was here anticipated. The marabout and the mahdi already existed in the old Christian monks of the Nile Valley.

## LÉON HENNIQUE \*



WHILE the spiritualists were holding their international congress, or rather their first œcumenical council, in the Grand-Orient de France, I was reading a spiritualistic romance recently published by M. Léon Hennique under the title *Un caractère*.

M. Hennique has grown up in and formed himself upon Naturalism. He is one of the story-tellers of the *Soirées de Médan*, and his first books betray the influence of the "human document." But by the ingenious complexity of his style, and a curious acuteness of thought, he is an offshoot rather of the Goncourts than of M. Zola. His vision, like that of the two brothers, is coloured by the past; he loves rock-work and the rococo, and has a morbid taste for the rare and precious. But he is singular and original by reason of a certain gift of fancy, a certain sense of the ideal, something indefinable, but proud and heroic. Those who have seen his *Duc d'Enghien* played at the Théâtre Libre know that M. Léon Hennique conceals noble emotions under the bristling, twisted envelope of his literary form. The story which I have just read, *Un caractère*, is certainly an uncommon work. I could say much that is bad of it. I might

\* *Un caractère*, par Léon Hennique, 1 vol.

complain bitterly of a writer who wants to dazzle me with the perpetual scintillations of a many-faceted style, and who irritates my nerves by seeking to allow me neither peace nor rest from new sensations of an excessive tenuity.

I might take my revenge for all the spiral phrases with which he has wearied me, and require him to account for the "*inanes chimères*," "*médians soirs*," "*oculaires galas*," and other novelties which in him are far too common. But what good would it do? He has deliberately planned all these tricks of tongue and thought, these violent subtleties. He is wholly absorbed by a mania for the singular and the exquisite. He is an artist, and he loves his distemper. On both knees he worships this thorn-crowned style, more barbarous and more glittering than a Spanish Christ. The faith of an artist should inspire respect "in all lovers of form and of the gods." To sum up, what I blame M. Hennique for is that he spreads beneath our feet, like the Queen of Argos, a too rich carpet of a disturbing splendour. Like the King of old Æschylus, I prefer the grass and my native soil. I do not regard art and the economy of style in the same fashion as M. Hennique. This dissent at least must not make me bitter or unjust. He loves Art in his own way, I in mine. Is this not a good reason why we should agree, and turn our common disdain upon the unhappy people who live in eternal ugliness? When I reflect that at this moment there is being written some *Docteur Rameau*, some *Comtesse Sarah*, or some *Dernier amour*, I feel inclined to cry to M. Léon Hennique: "What! you know the value of words, the cost of style, the greatness of Art, and I quarrel with you because

you are too far-fetched, fidgety, and precious, because you wander off into glittering obscurities! I ought on the other hand to say that all this is beautiful, that all this is good. For your worst faults are infinitely preferable to the vulgarity of the authors loved by the crowd. If I have to find fault with you later on please understand that I attack you only with respect."

Would it not be right to speak thus? And should we not also recognize that the author of *Un caractère* has succeeded in enclosing a moral idea of real beauty in a literary form which is, on occasion, vexatiously artificial?

I was deeply touched by the story which I have just been reading: and I am still under the influence of the noble emotion which it caused. I have already mentioned that it is a story of spiritualism. At first sight the turning of tables, the rapping of spirits, and professional mediums do not appear to furnish a very interesting subject of study. All I have seen myself would at most furnish material for a satirical little story. From time to time I have indulged my curiosity at the house of some excellent folk who are addicted to psychical science; for that is the name which they give to their illusions. I have already confessed that I love the marvellous, but it doesn't love me: it flees me and vanishes in my presence.

In my presence the rapping spirits fall suddenly silent, and the little luminous hands that were seen in the shadow of the curtains fly like doves to the bosom of their native country, the ether. I would give much to hold converse with discarnate souls; they may rely on my discreet curiosity, and my profound attention. Up till now, alas, not one

has detached itself from the innumerable swarms of shades, to come as Francesca came at the call of the Florentine, to murmur mysterious words in my ear. It would be in bad taste were I to let them see that I am piqued by their persistent disdain. Still, I cannot help noticing that they sometimes choose their earthly confidants in a very strange manner, and that they are more at home amid the gross and ignorant than in the councils of the wise.

Some years ago, in a perverse moment, I went to see Dr. Miracle, where I found some afflicted ladies eating stale pastry, and some meditative old men, such as one sees in the churches. Dr. Miracle presented to us an old woman, whom he called, I know not why, a pythoness, and who, he said, spoke Humanity's primitive language. Through the grey wisps of her hair she rolled wild eyes. Armed with an iron rod, whose upper extremity was bent in the form of a serpent and finished at the point like a forked tongue, she wriggled about excitedly on a stool, and poured forth inhuman cries.

Dr. Miracle warned us that the rod served to conduct the fluid; this explanation raised the less difficulty, in that the audience betrayed no anxiety to know what the fluid might be. I am still ignorant of the object of the forked tongue. But every one understood the danger if it were left in the hands of the wild old woman. It was left there. M. Jacolliot, who represented science at Dr. Miracle's—I can still see his protuberant figure, full of dignity—was requested to sit on a stool opposite the pythoness. The latter handled the rod with extraordinary agility, and M. Jacolliot had all he could do to avoid the points entering his eyes.

However, this was not his sole occupation. He was enjoined to catch the Hindoo words which the pythoness might utter. Sitting on his stool, with his ears split by unparalleled howls, putting aside the threatening rod with one hand, and with the other wiping his face, which was dripping with sweat; dizzy, bewildered, crushed, and resigned, "he followed the phenomena," according to the Doctor's happy expression. Finally, after ten minutes' agony, he heard the word *Rama*, and expressed himself as satisfied. Rama! the pythoness was speaking the language of Walmiki: she was no longer in the stage of primitive idiom! We learnt from the Doctor that the pythonesses pass through the ages with wonderful rapidity, which explains the phenomenon. I have been present at several other experiments at which the iron rod and M. Jacolliot were lacking, but from which I gained no further information regarding the mysteries beyond the tomb. Later on, I saw women who were mourning their children, and who beguiled their eternal absence by interrogating tables; I then understood that Spiritualism is a religion, and that it must be left to the soul as a consoling illusion. I understood that it might suggest to the artist something better than a satire on man's pitiable credulity, and that the poet might draw thence something human, intimately tragic and profoundly sweet. Moreover, I remember that in his melancholy story *Rediviva* M. Gilbert-Augustin Thierry has sought, in Dr. Miracle's experiments, the secrets of a new terror. Did not Gautier before him gracefully relate the loves of a living man and his betrothed, not dead—Spiritualists deny death—but discarnate? The story was called

*Spirite*, and was, I think, a pretty one. But dear Gautier spread an equal light over everything. No one had less a sense of the ineffable than he. His finished style conveyed no idea of the beyond. In his story *Spirite* one does not hear the rustle of invisible wings. In *Un caractère* the impression of the occult is much stronger, but it is particularly the moral idea which in my opinion forms the value of M. Léon Hennique's book. Let me try to indicate it.

Agénor, Marquis de Cluses, has married, in the last years of the Restoration, Thérèse de Montégrier, a fine, gentle creature, whom he loves with all the strength of his honest, upright, benevolent character. The Marquis de Cluses is but moderately broad-minded; he has a limited but delicate taste, a beautiful sincerity of soul and a faithful heart. He was devoted to his parents, whose loss he still mourns. He is devoted to the dead, his wife and his King. He is disinterested and strictly honourable. A small head and a large heart; in short, "a character." This excellent man has some delightful whims. He loves everything connected with the past: fine old furniture, rich tapestries, and sumptuous materials. He has furnished his château of Juvisy, in the department of Aisne, with all the marvels of the rococo period, and has turned it into a palace of the Sleeping Beauty. It is there that after a year of married life his wife dies in childbed. She leaves him a little daughter, Berthe. But poor Agénor in his widowerhood never remembers that he is a father. He has not even looked at the child. He lives immured in the dead woman's room, with closed shutters, and only a single candle burning. And there he weeps and prays all day, and calls



upon Thérèse. His sorrow, "sharpened by solitude, watching, and fasting" becomes extraordinarily acute and penetrating. For days and days he watches for the impossible but certain return of the dead. At last he sees her once more. It is first a shadow, which gradually takes form and colour. It is she! And he sees her because he is worthy to do so. This is the fine idea which M. Hennique has magnificently expressed, and which gives a wide, deep meaning to his whole book. Eternal truth of the antique theogonies: desire created the world, desire is all-powerful. Agénor now knows well that Love is stronger than death.

For him the words of the Gospel: "Blessed are they that mourn," are realized to the letter. He has tasted the supreme consolation of those who, like Rachel, would not be comforted; of those souls who in their grief steep themselves in an insatiable voluptuousness, and find within themselves those whom they mourn, because they had there their dwelling-place. Agénor has won back his Thérèse. He sees and hears her once more, as a reward for the love which had never consented to lose her.

After this first vision, this heroic conquest of death, there follow the ordinary phenomena of spiritualism. First, three raps on a mirror, in the silence; "three distinct raps, like known sounds, and yet not resembling them; introductory noises, irrefragable testimonies, to the nerves, of an occult presence."

Then "the lamp, a high bronze lamp, alight, moves steadily through the quiet air of an August night, passing from a credence to a writing-table, and jingles as it settles down"; flowers arrive

one morning, brought mysteriously, "fresh azure-tinted flowers, with fantastic pistils and of unknown kinds": for the spiritualists say that souls repeat the miracle of St. Dorothea, who gave heavenly blossoms to her executioners. At last we have the dead woman seizing the living man's hand, and making him write at her dictation, "It is indeed I, Thérèse, who am here. I will never leave you . . . I love you and you alone." Agénor had piously remained a widower, and his bereavement had all the sweetness of his betrothal. He knew, continually, "angel's caresses," "slender hands that suddenly took shape between his own." Chimeras, illusions, say you? What does it matter! Agénor has conquered death. Thérèse is near him. One night he sees her again close to his bed, beautiful, strange, with mournful eyes, once more alive. He calls her.

"Soon he is aware that a loving body has slipped in close beside his own, burning, palpitating, surrendering itself. Then a moment of perfect unfathomable oblivion, as though the dead woman, seized by pity, had at last allowed herself to be corrupted." But this time he has sinned against the Ideal. He has misinterpreted the law of the mystery, the *noli me tangere*. He is punished; the phantom vanishes, leaving him overwhelmed with shame and remorse. It is all over; she will never return. He feels that he has lost her through his own fault. In his posthumous widowerhood he asks himself in vain: "In what planet, far beyond the limits of vision, dwells that sweet woman without a stain, my blessed wife, my angel, my love!"

She will return no more. . . . She does return,

she has forgiven. Again she manifests herself ; but gravely, solemnly, to help the living to overcome the first degree of initiation. She dictates these words :

“ As the time is near when you will have the task of knowing me under another form, and with other features, I am anxious to lead you away from error, to reveal you certain things, so that you may preserve and re-read them, nothing doubting, for you will see them written as by my hand.”

She communicates to him a childish and very sweet little catechism, in which the neo-Christian ideas of a universal Providence are mixed up with the dogma of metempsychosis.

Shortly before this the daughter whom she had left upon earth, and to whom Agénor could not attach himself, had married a M. de Prahecq. A year after the marriage, as the widower was walking one bright winter's morning in the snow-covered park, on the white page stretched at his feet his stick unconsciously wrote the words : “ A daughter will be born to Berthe. I belong no longer to myself.”

With the birth of this daughter, little Laure, M. Hennique's book assumes a charming fragrance ; it is adorned by a mournful, delicious delicacy, clothed with the sweetest tints of tenderness. Were it not that these pages are marred in a few places by a too capricious seeking after art they would be truly adorable. The love of the grandfather for his exquisite little granddaughter, proud and tender like himself, and who will not live, has inspired M. Hennique to write some enchanting passages. “ The child has Thérèse's eyes, the same brown velvety eyes, the same gaze, the same colour.”

Agénor, struck by the resemblance, thinks over the strange words with which the dead woman bade him farewell, and he concludes that "Laure can only be a reincarnation of Thérèse." Otherwise, whence comes "that unforgotten brown gaze" which Berthe never had? Laure will die a child, but what does it matter? The old man lives with mind; for a second time his love will have conquered death. Into one being he has poured all he loved in this world, and this ideal will live as long as he himself, since it is within him.

That, in its spirit and essence, is M. Hennique's book. It is assuredly not the work of a vulgar mind; it is also a fact worth noting that one of M. Zola's disciples, one of the story-tellers of the *Soirées de Médan*, has celebrated with a sympathetic enthusiasm the triumph of the most exalted idealism.

## THE POET OF LA BRESSE \*

GABRIEL VICAIRE



THE axe has cleared the thick forests of La Bresse, where once upon a time there lived the wolf, the wild cat, and the boar. But the old chestnut-trees still stand in the hedges which divide the fields. The forest has degenerated into thickets. Its rugged monotony is not lacking in beauty. One feels a mournful affection for the ponds covered with floating king-cups, bordered by ranks of walnut-trees, and surrounded by melancholy clumps of birches. Those born amid the fogs of the moist flat Dombes cherish a great affection for the land that nourished them ; they are honest folk, drinkers and quarrelsome, like the heroes of antiquity, hard workers, slow, cold, and resolute.

Not in all places has the earth the breath and bosom of a lover, but everywhere she has for her sons the beauty of a mother. M. Gabriel Vicaire, descended from an old family of La Bresse, has lovingly sung of his native land. He has done well. Provincial patriotism is a fine thing. Thus must France, so varied in her indivisible unity, be

\* *Émaux bressans*, nouvelle édition.—La Légende de Saint Nicolas.

celebrated for her mountains and valleys, her rivers, woods, and shores. The religion of the country would be incomplete if it did not mingle with its sacred dogmas the charming superstitions that give life and grace to all worship. Abstract patriotism would appear cold to some minds, who, sensitive to form and colour, cherish especially all that their gaze can embrace of their native land. I recall, on this subject, a truly beautiful and sincere passage which M. Jules Lemaître wrote three or four years ago :

“When I hear people proclaiming their love of their country,” said our friend, “I remain cold ; I jealously wrap up my love within myself to shield it from the commonplaces which would make of it something false, empty and correct. But when I see, in some curve of the bank, the outspread Loire, blue as a lake, with its meadows, its poplars, its little tawny islands, its clumps of bluish willows, its light sky ; when I breathe the sweetness infused into the air, and behold, not far away, in the country beloved of our ancient Kings, some château, chiselled like a jewel, which recalls the France of old, and what she has been in the world ; at such times I feel overcome by an infinite affection for this land, where I have everywhere roots that are so fragile and so strong.”

How I should like to have said that, and said it just so ! I have at least strongly experienced the feeling. That is why my patriotism, in sympathy with my literary sense, is far more satisfied with M. Gabriel Vicaire's *Émaux bressans*, than with M. Paul Deroulède's *Chants du soldat*. M. Vicaire sees the Saône, as M. Lemaître saw the Loire.

He loves the Saône "shining in the morning,"  
under its curtain of poplars. He loves :

L'enclos ensoleillé, pleine de vaches bressans,  
D'où l'on voit devant soi les merles s'envoler.\*

He loves his Bresse country with all his heart :

O mon petit pays de Bresse, si modeste,  
Je t'aime d'un cœur franc ; j'aime ce qui te reste  
De l'esprit des aïeux et des mœurs d'autrefois ;  
J'aime les sons traïnants de ton langage antique  
Et ton courage simple, et cette âme rustique  
Qu'on sent frémir encore au fond de tes grands bois.

J'aime tes hommes forts et doux, tes belles filles,  
Tes dimanches en fêtes avec leurs jeux de quilles  
Et leurs ménétriers assis sur un tonneau,  
Tes carrés de blé d'or qu'une haie environne,  
Tes vignes en hautains que jaunira l'automne,  
Tes villages qu'on voit se regarder dans l'eau.†

Less fortunate than Brizeux, who still found in  
Brittany the old dress and customs, M. Gabriel

\* The sun-steeped meadow, full of the kine of Bresse,  
Whence one sees the blackbirds fly before one.

† O my little country of Bresse, so modest,  
I love you whole-heartedly ; I love what remains  
Of our forefathers' spirit, and the customs of old time ;  
I love the drawling tones of your ancient tongue,  
Your simple courage, and that rustic soul  
Which may yet be felt thrilling through the depths of your  
great forests.

I love your men, gentle and brave ; your lovely daughters,  
Your holiday Sundays and games of skittles,  
And the fiddlers seated on a barrel ;  
Your square fields of golden corn, enclosed by a hedge,  
Your poled vines, which autumn will gild,  
Your villages that we see gazing at themselves in the water.

Vicaire found only a renovated, colourless Bresse. The department of the Aisne has forgotten its old customs and traditions. The girls no longer wear the little round hat with its hanging lace veil, a corset laced in front, a silk apron, and the short petticoats which gave them such a Swiss look. The young folk no longer celebrate the great feast days in the manner of their forefathers. They no longer go from door to door in the villages on the Feast of Epiphany, demanding "God's tax" and receiving bread and fruit. They no longer celebrate the feast of "Brandons" on the Sunday following Shrove Tuesday by lighting straw torches in the orchards. Pessimistic old men say that since this practice has been abandoned the fruit-trees are eaten by caterpillars. When the newly-married couple return home no one throws grains of corn over them as a sign of abundance and fecundity. The old woman, watching the dead whom she loved when young, no longer, unknown to the priest, slips a piece of money into his mouth for the long journey; nor does the young mother put into the hand of the child who should have survived her a marble, a rattle, or a doll to soften the tedium of the coffin for the poor little soul. No longer does the young mother know that the very Holy Innocents, whom the cruel Herod slew in the flower of their childhood, are simple as ever since their glorification, and play with their glorious palms and crowns.

*Aram sub ipsam simplices,  
Palma et coronis luditis.*

Lastly, if the children of Bresse still light St. John's fires they are probably unaware of their origin, as told by the old men, according to the



evidence of M. Charles Guillon. That venerable origin is as follows : St. John had a farm and many servants, who could never upset him, so great was his patience. They played him many tricks, but never succeeded in angering him. One day in June, when it was very hot, they thought of making a big fire before his door, like that at which St. Peter warmed his hands beside the servants on the day of the iniquitous Judgment. But John came out of the house, rubbing his hands, and said : " Well done, my children. A fire is welcome at any season." That is the origin of St. John's fires.

La Bresse has seemingly forgotten its old songs, and it is from the lips of hoary-headed beggars and toothless old crones that M. Julien Tiersot and M. Gabriel Vicaire have, with much trouble, collected the verses about the girl who lost her life to save her honour, the story of the beauty who asked the nightingale how to love, the adventure of the three gallants, and the plaint of the poor labourer, dressed in canvas " like a windmill."

Do the conscripts at Bourg still sing the song of " the poor republicans " who went to sea to fight the Prussians ?

Tout c' que je regrette en partant,  
C'est l' tendre cœur de ma maîtresse.  
Après l'avoir aimée  
Et tant considérée  
Dans tout's ses amitiés,  
C'est à présent qu'il me faut la quitter.\*

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\* All I regret in leaving  
Is my mistress' tender heart.  
After loving her so  
And so greatly valuing  
All her favours,  
Now is the time when I must leave her.

No. But if Reyssouse and the slopes of Revermont no more re-echo these old popular airs, the heart of the stout folk of Bresse remains unchanged : one finds it, still cheerful and brave, in M. Gabriel Vicaire's verses. As in the days when their countryman, General Joubert, said of the recruits of Ain : "These are men of quiet but steadfast courage, and once they are roused their brilliant impetuosity can be counted on."

Our poet's verses were first published about fifteen years ago, and the author has just issued a new edition, very conveniently affording me a subject of conversation. The collection is called *Émaux bressans*. You must know that the trade of Bourg consists of the manufacture of sabots and jewellery. The rings and crosses made in these parts, which Nanon buys on market days, not without having long dreamed of them in advance, are Bresse enamels, rustic jewels, lacking the glittering spangles and lucid purity of the masterpieces of Limousin, but which, when properly displayed, adorn a comely girl, and give her courage to dance of a Sunday. When it is the suitor who gives his lady the cross or enamelled brooch, the jewel is then all the more valuable :

Certes, ce n'est pas grand' chose,  
Ce gage d'un simple amour ;  
Un peu d'or et, tout autour,  
Du bleu, du vert et du rose.

D'accord, messieurs, mais au cou  
De la gentille fermière  
Rien ne rit à la lumière  
Comme cet humble bijou.\*

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\* It certainly isn't much,  
This token of simple love ;

M. Gabriel Vicaire has taken these gallant rustic jewels as an emblem of his little peasant poems, which are tinged with a tender joviality. There are many "Jeannette's crosses" in these poetical jewels. The poet has a strong affection for his countrywomen. If we are to credit him, they are all adorable; little Claudine, Jeanne with her grandmother, Marie, Nanon, whose eyes, which are as blue as the Holy Virgin's mantle, make sunshine and rain; Grande Lise, Fanchette, and Jeanne, who dance such beautiful *bourrées* at the feast; Annette, the rose of Bresse; these are his friends. And there are yet others, such as Madame Barbecot, who gives one the wine of the country to drink, and Jean Lemoine's daughter, who serves at the inn, and is by no means shy. In short, he is in love with the thirty-six thousand virgins of La Bresse. But one feels that he loves them in song, and that his love, so to speak, does them no harm. If one may believe him, he is as great an eater and drinker as he is a gallant. Like his friend and colleague Maurice Boucher, he revels in the kitchen.

He highly praises his compatriot, the poet Faret, the man who, says Nicolas, in company with Saint-Amant :

Charbonnait de ses vers les murs d'un cabaret.†

A little gold, and, all around,  
Rose, and green, and blue.

Sir, I agree, but round the neck  
Of the farmer's dainty daughter  
There's nothing that laughs at the light  
Like this humble jewel.

† Scribbled his verses on the walls of a tavern.

He congratulates him in pretty triolets, not on his good rhyming, but on his deep drinking :

Il ne te sert que d'avoir bu ;  
 Tout le reste est vaine fumée.  
 Puisque ton Pégase est fourbu,  
 Il ne te sert que d'avoir bu.

Adieu le joli clos herbu,  
 Où tu baisais la bien aimée,  
 Il ne te sert que d'avoir bu ;  
 Tout le reste est vaine fumée.\*

He tells us how at Mère Gagnon's he found some country wine which smelt of strawberries and muscatel. Like Monselet, he praises, but with more grace, the fowl and capon. If he bewails the fat pig, which has been pitilessly slaughtered, and will no longer show all comers "his dear, rosy little stomach," he rejoices at the idea of the beautiful New Year's supper at the farm.

Et, braves gens, que de joie,  
 Lorsqu'en forme de boudin  
 Ressuscitera soudain  
 Le bon habillé de soie ! †

\* Naught's of use to you but to have drunk ;  
 All the rest is empty smoke.  
 Since your Pegasus is foundered,  
 Naught's of use to you but to have drunk.

Farewell to the pretty grassy close,  
 Where you kissed your well-beloved.  
 Naught's of use to you but to have drunk ;  
 All the rest is empty smoke.

† And, lads, what joy  
 When in the shape of a sausage  
 With a sudden resurrection  
 The bristly one in silk appears !

But one feels that this great hunger and thirst are merely symbolical, like the horn of abundance ; that they are figurative of this country of Bresse, where marriages are concluded glass in hand, and burials are followed by a repast at which, while the bottles are emptied, the virtues of the defunct are lauded. Better so ; it is obvious that this idealization of gormandizing expresses human sympathy, and glorifies the nourishing earth. It is, in fact, the debauch of the wise Rabelais. M. Gabriel Vicaire hungers and thirsts only after images and ideas. He is a great dreamer. His orgies are the divine orgies of Nature. Fundamentally, he is sad. He admits it.

*C'est crainte de pleurer bien souvent que je ris.\**

Then all at once his laughter dies away. He mourns poor Lise, who has just died. Poor Lise had risked her soul at the feasts, dancing with the lads to the sound of the hurdy-gurdy and the bagpipes. There does not appear to us to be anything voluptuous or uncontrolled in these dances with lowered eyes, hanging arms, and heavy steps. But it is a Christian idea, and perhaps a consoling one, that one may be damned anywhere, and that it is as easy for a shepherdess as for a duchess to offend God, and fall into mortal sin. In short, poor Lise is in great danger of wearing the brimstone chemise in hell.

*Elle est au milieu de l'église  
Sur un tréteau qu'on a dressé.*

*Elle est en face de la Vierge  
Elle qui pécha tant de fois.*

---

\* I often laugh for fear of weeping.

A ses pieds fume un petit cierge  
Dans un long chandelier de bois.

Seul, à genoux, près de la porte,  
Je regarde et n'ose entrer.

Je pense aux cheveux de la morte  
Que le soleil venait dorer.

A ses yeux bleus de violette  
Si doux alors que je l'aimais.

A sa bouche, aujourd'hui muette  
Et qui ne rira plus jamais.

Dis-moi, pauvre âme abandonnée  
As-tu déjà vu le bon Dieu ?

Au puits d'enfer es-tu damnée ?  
As-tu mis la robe de feu ?

S'il ne te faut qu'une neuvaine  
Pour sortir du mauvais chemin,

Pour vêtir la cape de laine,  
Je n'attendrai pas à demain.

Traversant forêts et rivières,  
Les pieds saignants, le cœur navré,

A Notre-Dame de Fourvières  
Pénitent noir, je m'en irai.

Je lui donnerai pour sa fête,  
Manteau d'hiver, manteau d'été.

Et quand viendra la grande foire,  
Je veux offrir à son Jésus

Un moulin aux ailes ivoires  
Pour qu'il rie en soufflant dessus.\*

---

\* She's in the middle of the church  
On a platform they have set up.

She is facing the Virgin,  
She who has sinned so often.

At her feet smokes a little candle  
In a long candlestick of wood.

Alone, on my knees, near the door  
I watch, and dare not enter.

I think of the dead woman's hair  
Which the sun used to gild.

Her eyes of the violet's blue,  
So gentle then, when I loved her ;

Her mouth, mute to-day  
Which will laugh nevermore.

Tell me, poor lonely soul,  
Have you yet seen God ?

Are you damned in the pit of hell ?  
Have you put on the robe of fire ?

If only a novena is needed  
To rescue you from that evil place,

I will not wait until to-morrow  
To don the cape of wool.

The poet who has achieved a rustic soul understands and shares, when he so desires, the faith of simple folk. The village priest, a good soul, and not too learned, sometimes gets mixed up in his sermons. But as a good Christian M. Vicaire rejoices to watch the parishioners docilely listening to the words of life :

Voici la mère Jeanne au premier rang des femmes ;  
Après tant de vaillants combats, d'obscur labeur,  
Elles ont grand besoin, ces pauvres vieilles âmes,  
D'un instant de repos dans la paix du Seigneur.\*

In his secret heart he is uneasy, full of dreams and anxieties. His two deep and strong affections are for his countryside and for friendship. Here and there he has, with a sort of shyness, discreetly expressed his attachment to his friends. He says, in his *Rêve de bonheur* :

Crossing forests and streams,  
With bleeding feet and broken heart,

To Our Lady of Fourvières  
A black penitent, I'll go.

For her feast, I will give her  
A winter mantle, and a summer one ;

And when the great fair comes again,  
I will offer her son Jesus

A mill with ivory sails,  
So that he shall laugh as he blows on them.

\* Here's old mother Jeanne, in the front of the women ;  
After so many brave fights, so much obscure toil,  
They have great need, these poor old souls,  
Of a moment's rest in the peace of the Lord.



Vêtu du sarrau bleu, coiffé du grand chapeau,  
 Parmi les paysans, je vivrais comme un sage,  
 Attrapant chaque jour une rime au passage.  
 Et que d'humbles plaisirs antiques, mais permis  
 Dont je ne parle pas ! Avec de bons amis,  
 Tous au même soleil, comme on serait à l'aise !  
 Le soir sous la tonnelle on porterait sa chaise.\*

These verses, and particularly the little piece which finishes "What changes not in me is friendship," remind me, in spite of myself, of Xenophon's eulogy of the two Greek generals, who perished by treason in the midst of the Persians. "Agias of Arcadia and Socrates of Achaia were put to death. Irreproachable towards their friends, they were never backward in the fight. Both were about thirty-five years of age."

A touching and exquisite homage, which it is impossible to hear unmoved.

We have seen the quality of M. Gabriel Vicaire, poet of La Bresse. We have found him the most charming and exquisite of the rustic poets. He has for some years been seeking the golden flower of legend. He has put into charming verse the pious tale, so popular in old France, of St. Nicolas and the three children in the salting-tub. M. Paul Sébillot justly observes that "this attempt demonstrates that, if we lack the treasury of popular poems possessed by our neighbours, it is the fault, not of

\* Clad in a blue smock, with a big hat,  
 Amidst the peasants, I'd live like a sage,  
 Daily catching a rhyme in its flight.  
 And what humble, old-world, but permissible pleasures,  
 Of which I do not speak ! With good friends  
 All under the same sun, how comfortable we should be !  
 In the evening we'd place our chairs under the arbour.

the genius of our idiom, but of the poets who have disdained this source of inspiration."

This poem of M. Vicaire's has the perfume of the wild strawberry. Nothing could be more fragrant than the verses which describe the three little victims, whose life was miraculously preserved by the holy Bishop in the old salting-tub which should have been their coffin :

La mort n'a pas flétri cette fleur d'innocence ;  
Ils dorment aussi purs qu'au jour de leur naissance.  
Le songe de leur vie est à peine achevé,  
Et sur leur bouche encor flotte un dernier *Ave*.\*

St. Nicolas loves children and poets, who are equally innocent. He answers their prayers. He has inspired M. Vicaire with some adorable verses. But the Saint is not lacking in rancour, and he exacts vengeance for offences committed in his name. The following story is proof thereof. I have it on the authority of Dom Mabillon.

In the town of Charité-sur-Loire there flourished in days gone by a monastery placed under the patronage of the Holy Cross. The feast of St. Nicolas was at hand. "What office shall we sing?" asked the monks of the Prior. "We should much like to sing the office proper to the great St. Nicolas." The Prior would not allow it, alleging as a reason that it was not sung at Cluny. The monks maintained that they were in no way compelled to follow the Cluny rite, and they insisted on singing the proper office of the blessed Bishop of Myra. In order to prevent their doing so, and to

\* Death has not withered the flower of their innocence ;  
They sleep, as pure as the day of their birth.  
The dream of their life is hardly finished,  
And still on their lips floats a last *Ave*.

recall them to obedience, the Prior administered discipline. This action did not go unpunished. For, night having come, and the Prior being in bed, he saw St. Nicolas enter his cell in person, where he administered discipline to him in turn, with a cat-o'-nine-tails, in order to compel him to sing the ancient office which he had previously refused. With the assistance of the whip, the Prior sang so high and clear that the monks, awakened by the noise, ran to his cell. He turned his back, and sent them away, being very angry. He realized, on the following day, owing to the pain in his back, the reality of the night's vision, but he imagined that he had been flogged by his monks. This opinion proves his stubbornness. How much better inspired was M. Vicaire than the Prior of the Holy Cross!

## BARON DENON \*



AT Paris, in the reign of Louis XVIII, there lived a happy man. He was old. He lived on the Quai Voltaire, in the house now bearing the number nine, whose ground floor is at present occupied by the learned Honoré Champion and his publishing house. The quiet front of the house, pierced by tall, slightly-arched windows, recalls, in its aristocratic simplicity, the time of Gabriel and Louis. It was thither that, after the fall of the Empire, Dominique-Vivant Denon, late gentleman of the King's bedchamber, late attaché to an embassy, late Director-General of the Fine Arts, member of the Institute, Baron of the Empire, and officer of the Legion of Honour, retired with his collections and his memories. In cabinets made by the cabinet-maker Boule for Louis XIV he had arranged the marbles, antique bronzes, painted vases, enamels, and medals collected during half a century of a wandering and interesting life; and he lived, smiling, in the midst of these riches. On the walls of his rooms there hung a few choice

\* *Point de lendemain*, conte (par le baron Denon) illustré de treize compositions de Paul Avril. Paris. P. Rouquette, éditeur.

pictures, a fine landscape by Ruysdael, a portrait of Molière by Sébastien Bourdon, a Giotto, a Fra Bartolommeo, and some Guercinos, then highly thought of. The honest man who preserved them had a great deal of taste and few preferences. He knew how to enjoy all that gives pleasure. Side by side with his Greek vases and antique marbles he kept Chinese porcelain and Japanese bronzes. He did not even disdain the arts of barbarism. He would gladly show a bronze figure of Carolingian style, whose stone eyes and golden hands evoked screams from the ladies to whom Canova had taught all the suavities of the plastic art. Denon endeavoured to class these monuments of art in a philosophical order, and he proposed to publish a description of them; for, wise to the end, he set age at defiance by forming new projects. He was too much a man of the eighteenth century to refuse sentiment a place in his rich collection. Being in possession of a beautiful reliquary of the fifteenth century, stolen doubtless during the Terror, he had enriched it with some new relics, not one of which had proceeded from the body of a saint. He was not in the least mystical, and never was there a man less fitted to understand Christian asceticism. The monks inspired him only with disgust. He was born too soon to taste, as a dilettante, like Chateaubriand, the masterpieces of penitence. His profane reliquary contained a little of the ashes of Héloïse, found in the tomb of the Paraclete; a small portion of the beautiful body of Inez de Castro, whom a royal lover had exhumed in order to adorn her with a diadem; a few hairs from the grey moustache of Henry IV; some of the bones of Molière and La Fontaine, one of Voltaire's teeth, a lock of

the heroic Desaix' hair, and a drop of Napoleon's blood from Longwood.\*

Without cavilling as to the authenticity of these remains, it must be agreed that they were relics dear to a man who, in this world, had greatly loved the beauty of women, who sympathized with the troubles of the heart, had a delicate taste for poetry allied to good sense, esteemed courage, honoured philosophy, and respected power. Before this reliquary Denon was able, at the end of his smiling old age, to look back over his life; and congratulate himself on the rich, varied, happy manner in which he had been able to employ his days. A country gentleman of sturdy Burgundian stock, born in that joyous land of wine, where hearts are naturally light, he was seven years old when a gipsy whom he met on the road told him his fortune. "You will be loved of women; you will go to court; a bright star will shine over you." This fortune was accomplished in every particular. Denon went when young to Paris to seek his fortune. He frequented the corridors of the Comédie-Française, and all the actresses loved him. They wanted to play a comedy which he had written for them, which was not of great value.† Meanwhile, he was always about when the King passed by.

"What do you want?" Louis XV asked him one day.

"To see you, Sire."

The King granted him the freedom of the gardens. His fortune was made. He shortly became

\* *La relique de Molière du cabinet du baron Vivant Denon*, par M. Ulric Richard-Desaix. Paris Vign'ères, 1880, pp. 11 and 12.

† *Le bon père*, Paris, 1769, in 12mo.

master engraver to Mme de Pompadour, who amused herself by engraving gems. It should be stated that he both drew and engraved very prettily. Louis XV loved wit, for he had it himself. Denon delighted him by his story-telling. He appointed him gentleman of the bedchamber. When anything happened he would say :

“ Tell us about it, Denon.”

Like Scheherazade, Denon was always telling tales, but his stories were livelier than those of the sultanness. What astonished people was that he pleased not only women, but men also. After the death of the Marquise he got himself sent as attaché, first to the Embassy at St. Petersburg, afterwards to Stockholm, and finally to Naples, where he remained, I believe, for seven years. There he divided his time between diplomacy, the arts, and good society. One can picture him, as a young man, from an etching in which he is shown holding a pencil, under a building in the style of Piranesi. His soft-brimmed felt hat, his wide collar, his Venetian mantle, and his smiling, dreamy expression give him the air of having just left one of Watteau's fêtes. With puffed hair, bright black eyes, a slightly *retroussé* nose, thick at the end, delicate nostrils, an arched mouth, deep at the corners, and round cheeks, he breathes an air of refined, amiable gaiety, with something vaguely studious and reserved. At that time he engraved many plates in the style of Rembrandt, and was even received into the Academy of Painting on submitting an *Adoration of the Shepherds* which is considered only middling.

His compositions in a familiar style, where he shows his power of observation, with a touch of malice, are preferred to-day to the larger plates

after Guercino and Potter. In this style his masterpiece is the *Déjeuner de Ferney*; a courtier of Louis XV, he did himself an honour in becoming a courtier of Voltaire. He presented himself at Ferney, and as there was some hesitation in admitting him he caused it to be pointed out to the philosopher that as a gentleman of the bedchamber he had a right to see him. This was treating Voltaire like a King. From this visit he brought back the plate to which I have alluded, in which Voltaire appears so full of life and so strange in his nightcap, a lively old skeleton, with eyes of fire, in dressing-gown and breeches.

Denon returned to Italy, where he fastidiously enjoyed the grace of the women and the splendour of the arts. The Revolution broke out. He remained perfectly unmoved and continued to draw beneath the orange-trees.

He suddenly learnt that his name was on the list of *émigrés*, and that his property was confiscated. He showed no hesitation. The voluptuary had never feared danger: he boldly returned to France. He was not mistaken in his proud, adroit audacity.

Directly he reached Paris he set David to work in his interest, and won over the members of the Committee of Public Safety. His property was returned to him, and he received commissions for the design of costumes. He was loved, protected and favoured, just as in the days of the Marquise.

So he went unobtrusively through the Terror, observing everything, saying nothing, quiet and curious. He spent long hours at the Revolutionary Tribunal, sketching inside his hat, with an unerring



line, the accused and the condemned. To-day Danton, in his robust vulgarity, to-morrow Fouquier, weeping, and Carrier, amazed. Some of his drawings, kindly lent by M. Auguste Dide, were shown at the exhibition of the Revolution, organized by M. Étienne Charavay in the Flora pavilion. Once seen they can never be forgotten, so full are they of truth and expression, and so striking. Denon watched and waited. The 9th of Thermidor lost him some protectors whom he never regretted. The gipsy had foretold for him the friendship of women and the favours of the court. He had been loved and favoured. The gipsy had further predicted him a brilliant star. This last promise was also to be accomplished. The star rose on the happy decline of this fortunate life. In 1797 he met, at a ball, at M. Talleyrand's, a young general who was asking for lemonade. Denon handed him the glass which he held in his hand. The general thanked him, and started a conversation. Denon talked with his usual charm, and in a quarter of an hour had won the friendship of Bonaparte.

He immediately pleased Josephine, and became one of her intimate friends. In the following year, when he was in the Creole's dressing-room, warming himself by the fireplace, for the weather was still wintry, he was asked :

“ Would you like to join the Egyptian expedition ? ”

The scientists of the expedition had already started. The fleet was about to sail in a few days' time.

“ Shall I be master of my time, and free in my movements ? ” he asked.

That was promised.

“ I’ll go,” he answered.

He was over fifty years of age. Throughout the whole campaign he exhibited a splendid intrepidity. With his portfolio over his shoulder and his glasses by his side, pencil in hand, galloping along on his horse, he outstripped the head of the columns in order to gain time to draw, while he waited for the troops to rejoin him. He sketched as quietly under the enemy’s fire as though he had been sitting peacefully at a table in his own room. One day, as the expeditionary flotilla was ascending the Nile, he caught sight of some ruins, and said : “ I must draw them.” He insisted on his companions putting him ashore, ran across the plain, seated himself on the sand, and settled down to sketch. As he was finishing his work a bullet whistled over the paper. He looked up, and saw an Arab, who had missed him, and was reloading for another shot. He seized his musket, which was lying on the ground, put a bullet through the Arab’s chest, closed his portfolio, and rejoined his boat. The same evening he showed his sketch to the Staff. General Desaix said :

“ Your horizon line is not straight.”

“ Ah,” answered Denon, “ that’s the Arab’s fault ! He fired too soon.”

Two years later, he was nominated Director-General of Museums by Bonaparte. One cannot deny this able man the sense of expediency, and the art of bending to circumstances. He had without regret abandoned red heels for spurs. The courtier of an Emperor on horseback, he willingly followed his new master through his campaigns in Austria, Spain, and Poland. Formerly he had explained medals to Louis XV in the boudoirs of Versailles.

He now drew battles under the eye of Cæsar, and delighted the veterans of the Grand Army by his graceful contempt of danger. At Eylau the Emperor himself came to drag him away from a plateau swept by grapeshot.

He hardly ever left the Emperor during the campaign of 1805 ; at Schönbrunn occurred to him the idea of the triumphal column later erected in the Place Vendôme. He directed its execution, and carefully supervised the design of the long spiral of bas-reliefs which encircles the bronze shaft. He asked an obscure painter called Bergeret for the compositions, having himself decided upon all the details of their arrangement.

The style is strained and monotonous. The figures lack life and truth ; but this matters little, as they are indistinguishable at the height at which they are placed, and the details can be seen only in the copper-plate engravings by Ambroise Tardieu.\*

In 1815, Denon vainly resisted the demands of the Allies, who laid hands upon the Louvre, which had been enriched by the spoils of Europe. The return of this Napoleonic museum, a trophy of victory, was imperiously demanded : almost everything had to be surrendered. Denon could obtain nothing, and he knew it, for he was not the sort of man to cherish false illusions. But he honoured himself by standing out against the armed claimants. While the foreigner was actually packing up statues and pictures Denon was still negotiating. A lover of the arts, a good patriot, and a zealous official, he was faultless. He saved nothing, but he showed

\* *La colonne de la Grande Armée, gravée par Tardieu*, sd. in-f., avertissement.

that he was an honest man, which is indeed something. He was politely firm, and gained the sympathy of the Allied negotiators.

Who could refuse sympathy to this gallant gentleman? He was not displeasing to the King, and it only rested with him to end, as one of the favourites of Louis XVIII, a life which had known the favour of so many different masters. But he had exquisite tact, a sense of proportion, and the instinct never to press Fortune. He retained his post at the Louvre as long as there remained a single work of art to dispute with the Powers. When the last statue and the last canvas had been packed he handed in his resignation to the King.\*

From November, 1815, he rested, and his one business in life was to grow old quietly. Always amiable and beloved, full of youthful conversation, he received all the celebrities of France and the world in his famous retreat on the Quai Voltaire.

Age had blanched his light silky hair, and hollowed the smile in his cheeks. He was the charming septuagenarian whom Prud'hon painted in the fine portrait preserved in the Louvre. The Baron knew well that his life had been a kind of masterpiece. He neither forgot nor regretted anything. His burin, sometimes a trifle free, recalled, in his privately-printed engravings, the pleasures of youth. His attractive conversations recalled in turn the court of Louis XV and the Committee of Public Safety.

One day Lady Morgan, the beautiful Irish

\* *Le Louvre en 1815*, par Henry de Chenevières. *Revue Bleue*, 1889. Nos. 3 and 4.

patriot, came to visit him, bringing her grave and silent husband, Sir Charles.

M. Denon showed the young enthusiast the treasures of his cabinet. She admired the Etruscan vases, the Italian bronzes, and the Flemish pictures; she was enchanted with the conversation of the old man who had seen so much. She suddenly saw, in a case, a little mummified woman's foot.

"What is that?" she asked.

The old man told her that he had found this little foot in the so often violated necropolis of Thebes of a Hundred Gates.

"It was, no doubt, a princess's foot, the foot of some charming creature whose shoes had never impaired its shape, which is perfect. When I found it, I felt as if I was obtaining a favour, and committing an amorous theft from the line of the Pharaohs."\*

The fragrance of womanhood filled him with animation. He tenderly admired the elegant curve of the instep, the beauty of the nails, tinted with henna, as the feet of Egyptian women are tinted to this day. Following the thread of his recollections, he told the story of a native woman whom he had known at Rosetta.

"Her house was opposite mine, and as the streets of Rosetta are narrow we soon became acquainted. Married to a *roumi*, she could talk a little Italian. She was a gentle, pretty creature. She loved her husband, but he was not sufficiently lovable for her to confine her affections solely to him. In his jealousy he ill-treated her. I was the recipient of

\* *Voyage dans la basse et la haute Égypte, pendant les campagnes du général Bonaparte*, par Vivant Denon, an X., in-12. Vol. II, pp. 244, 245.

her woes ; I condoled with her. Plague broke out in the town. My friend was so communicative that she was bound to take it and transmit it. As a matter of fact, she caught it from her last lover, and gave it faithfully to her husband. They all three died. I regretted her loss ; her singular goodness of heart, the artlessness of her disorderly conduct, and the liveliness of her regrets had interested me.”\*

But Lady Morgan, wandering from one case to another, moving her pretty brown head among the fragments of time, uttered a cry. Hanging on the wall she saw a plaster cast of the mask of Robespierre.

“The villain !” she cried.

The Baron nourished no blind hatred. For him, Robespierre was a master whom he had conquered like the others, Louis XV and Napoleon. He told the beautiful and indignant lady how he had one night met the Dictator. He had been ordered to design costumes. He was directed to present himself, with this object, to the Committee which met in the Tuileries at 2 a.m.

“I arrived at the Palace at the hour stated. An armed guard kept watch in the dimly lit ante-chambers. I was received by an usher, who went away, leaving me alone in a room which the light of a single lamp left three-parts in shadow. I recognized it as the apartment of Marie-Antoinette, where twenty years before I had served as gentleman-in-waiting to Louis XV. While I thus drank of the bitter cup of recollection a door opened

\* Denon, *loc. cit.*, t. I, pp. 149-150. I must be forgiven, as regards the wife of the *roumi*, and the mummy's foot, for putting into Denon's mouth what I found, in reality, in his narrative.

quietly, and a man advanced towards the middle of the room. Seeing a stranger, he rapidly retreated : it was Robespierre. By the feeble glimmer of the lamp I saw him put his hand in his bosom, as if to search for a hidden weapon. Fearing to speak to him I went back into the ante-chamber, whither he followed me with his eyes. I heard him violently ring a bell on the table.

“ Learning from the usher who had run up at the summons who I was and why I had come, he apologized and received me without delay. During the whole conversation he maintained in his manner and words an air of great politeness and ceremony, as if he wished not to show himself backward in courtesy to a late gentleman of the bedchamber. He was smartly dressed ; his muslin waistcoat was edged with rose-coloured silk.”

Lady Morgan drank in the old man’s words ; she retained them all for faithful record later ; with the exception of the dates, which she mixed up, as is always the way with those that write Memoirs.

Before bidding him farewell, she sought to tell M. Denon how much she admired him. She asked for the secret by which he had acquired so much knowledge.

“ You must,” she said, “ have studied a great deal in your youth.”

M. Denon answered,

“ On the contrary, milady, I never studied ; it would have bored me. But I observed much, for that amused me. Thereby my life has been completely filled, and I have enjoyed myself.”\*

And thus, for the space of more than seventy

\* *La France*, par Lady Morgan, traduit de l’anglais par A. I. B. D. Paris, 1817, t. 11, pp. 367 et seq.

years, Baron Denon was happy. Throughout the catastrophes which overturned Europe and France, and precipitated the end of a world, he judiciously tasted all the pleasures of the senses and of the mind. He was a clever man. He asked of life all that it could give, without ever asking for the impossible. His sensuality was relieved by the love of beauty, by an appreciation of art, and a quietistic philosophy; he grasped the fact that indolence is the enemy of true voluptuousness, and of the pleasures worthy of man. He was brave and tasted danger like the salt of pleasure. He knew that an honest man must pay Destiny for all he buys of it. He was benevolent. No doubt he was lacking in that kind of obstinacy, that love of extremes, of the impossible, that zeal of the heart, that enthusiasm, which makes heroes and geniuses. There was nothing excessive about him. He never said "Come what may!" In short, this happy man had never known anxiety and suffering.

Going down the stairs of the Quai Voltaire the young Irishwoman who had sacrificed much for her land and liberty murmured these words:

"His life's habits have never permitted him to take up arms in any cause."

She had touched the weak spot in this happy existence.\*

\* I spent a great part of my childhood and youth in the house where fifty years before Denon's elegant and dignified old age had passed away. I have retained a delightful recollection of the beautiful Quai Voltaire, where I acquired a taste for the arts, and perhaps this is the reason why I am so desirous of studying Baron Denon's work and life in detail. When I am able I shall give myself that pleasure. Meanwhile, if anyone has any papers on the subject which they do not themselves wish to use I shall be infinitely obliged if they will communicate with me.



Such was Baron Dominique-Vivant Denon. We have revived his memory on account of a little story called *Point de lendemain* of which the Librairie Roquette has just republished a limited edition with some pretty engravings. One cannot bethink oneself of everything. I reflect, a little late in the day, that this gem, which is perhaps a little indiscreet, should be kept under a faithful lock and key in the cupboards of the bibliophiles. I will only say that I do not share the doubts of the present publisher, who is uncertain whether *Point de lendemain* should be attributed to Denon or Dorat.

This airy masterpiece is assuredly the work of Vivant Denon. On this point I am in agreement with Quérard and Poulet-Malassis, who have no doubt on the subject. Neither has M. Maurice Tourneaux, whom I consulted but yesterday. These are great authorities.

## MAURICE SPRONCK\*



IN a book called *Les artistes littéraires* M. Maurice Spronck examines some excellent writers of the nineteenth century, who looked for nothing else in the written word than a form of the beautiful, and whose works were conceived according to the theory of Art for Art's sake.

Théophile Gautier was the first to introduce the precept and practice. This placid master forms the subject of M. Maurice Spronck's first essay. He then examines in turn the artist writers who appeared almost simultaneously about 1850, and he endeavours to detect the secret of their sadness and isolation. They are Charles Baudelaire, Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, Leconte de Lisle, Gustave Flaubert, and Théodore de Banville. One can say of these men that Art was their only love, and absorbed their whole lives; three only surviving to this date; the remainder have preceded them to rest. Both the living and the dead have been examined by M. Maurice Spronck with the cold severity of science, and caring for nothing but the truth he has treated the living like the dead. This is perhaps an excess of virtue. M. Maurice Spronck,

\* *Les artistes littéraires—Études sur le XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle.* (Calmann Lévy.)

who is in the fullness of youth, displays an inflexible rigour. He is no doubt right in going straight for the truth. But are we always sure of attaining the divine truth? It is to be feared that, in our too hurried pursuit, we may unconsciously wound the admirers of an old master. And besides, there are so many ways of saying what one thinks! The roughest method is not invariably the best. These reflections have been inspired by a certain chapter of M. Spronck's book. But it must be borne in mind that our author's criticism is a sort of psychological anatomy. He offers us those *écorché* plates to which M. Bourget refers in one of his prefaces. Now worn plates in themselves are not flattering. M. Maurice Spronck belongs to the school of scientific criticism, in which, from his *début*, he has followed in the footsteps of that unchallenged master, M. H. Taine: a position of honour and peril. These anatomists of the soul are free from the weaknesses which trouble us when we converse on the things of the mind.

There are all sorts of criticism. M. Maurice Spronck has had the good fortune to find immediately the sort that suited his temperament. He was well endowed for these physiological and pathological studies of the functions of the soul, and destined to be a professor in those clinics of genius which demand exact perception, the scientific spirit, a cold and penetrating observation, and accurate methods.

These born clinicists are terrible people! They love disease. Pinel knew of nothing more beautiful than a fine typhoid fever. M. Maurice Spronck has an affection for uncommon or deep-seated affections of the intelligence. He, too, finds beauty in the

troubles of the mind ; he shows himself to be extremely clever at diagnosing the neuroses of great men ; and I even suspect him of describing with a kind of pleasure the most alarming symptoms and the most horrible lesions in the subjects whom he admires.

Let us nevertheless recognize that the literary men whom he studies as the most perfect representatives of art in the second half of the nineteenth century, without forming a perfectly distinct group, offer some common characteristics, of which the most striking, perhaps, is deep-seated nervous disorder. I am not referring either to M. de Banville or to M. Leconte de Lisle. But Flaubert, we know, was epileptic. Baudelaire died a victim of aphasia. Jules de Goncourt succumbed early to general paralysis. As for the rest, in whom the neurosis was less characteristic, M. Maurice Spronck has been pleased to point out the hidden lesion in some particular. Thus, in his first chapter, he refers one of the most general features of modern æsthetics with morbid physiology ; this peculiarity he calls *the taste for transposition*. " This tendency (the words are his) consists in inverting the rôles, of applying, forcibly, in spite of logic, the attributes of one nature to another nature, which is sometimes absolutely contradictory. Music, for example, will endeavour to make itself descriptive, concrete, and exact in the expression of forms and attitudes, which is, for it, impossible ; while painting and statuary, going astray in the same fashion, permit themselves to deviate from their primitive destination, and, abandoning the simple cult of the line, devote themselves to studies of morality or philosophic symbolism. Literature, far from avoid-

ing this anomaly, will drift in this direction, and accentuate it still further, and we shall have so-called pictures, statues and melodies in which the various words, according to their sound, texture and arrangement, will replace colours, marble, or the notes of the gamut."

Word painting, in itself, or the production of musical effects by a melodious arrangement of syllables, is neither very extraordinary nor even very new. Examples may be found in all literatures. M. Spronck begins to hold this art suspect when Théophile Gautier proclaims that his sole merit consists in being "a man for whom the visible world exists," and when M. de Goncourt defines the eye as "the artistic sense of man." For him, the indication of mental lesion becomes finally apparent in Flaubert. Flaubert suffered from an affection observed and described by the neurologists under the name of coloured audition, which consists "in two distinct senses being simultaneously stimulated by an excitation applied to one sense only, or, in other words, in the sound of a voice or instrument being translated by an unvarying and characteristic colour for the person possessing this chromatic faculty."\* It was Flaubert himself who said:

"When writing a story, I wish to convey a colour, a shade. For example, in my Carthaginian romance, I want to make something purple. In *Madame Bovary* I had only the idea of a tone, of the mouldy colour of the life of a wood-lice. The story, the adventure of a novel, is almost a matter of indifference to me."

It is impossible to avoid connecting in one's

\* Cf. J. Baratoux, *Progrès médical*, 10 Dec., 1887.

mind this confession of Gustave Flaubert's with the formulæ of our young symbolists respecting the colour of sounds. This time there is no mistake; what we see is a neurosis, and, like Pinel, we may admire a beautiful malady.

M. Maurice Spronck does not say that genius is a form of neurosis: but it looks as if he were endeavouring to prove this to be the case. In his study of Baudelaire, one of the best in the book, which includes some excellent essays, it has been only too easy for him to point out the incoherences of a mind voluntarily hallucinated, fascinated by the artificial with a sort of morbid appetite, drawn towards evil by an impartial taste, and dying, at forty-seven years of age, of having "cultivated hysteria with joy and terror."

In the case of MM. de Goncourt we observe a hyperæsthesia of the senses, and also a characteristic common to several of their contemporaries, and particularly strange in grandchildren of Jean-Jacques, born in the midst of Romanticism: namely, a horror of Nature.

They say:

"Nature is for me an enemy."

". . . Nothing is less poetic than Nature."

"It is man who has covered all the misery and cynicism of matter with a veil, an imagery, a symbol, and an ennobling spirituality."

And so fallen Nature is no longer the model of all beauty, the source of all good, the consoler for all the shame and misery of Humanity. Is it not strange to hear this fall (to which—let us not fear to say so—modern Science and Philosophy consent with a sober melancholy) proclaimed by these artists in love with Truth, and quivering with

acute sensation, exact perception, and immediate vision, intoxicated, frenzied and infuriated against the natural, reversing the time-honoured sentimentality. By regarding man they refresh themselves after the horrible spectacle of Nature. His paradoxes on the excellence of the artificial were inspired in Baudelaire, who was less intelligent, but more tormented, by the same instinct. It made him turn to those violent contrasts lacking in naked reality, to the laborious and perturbing search "for creations entirely due to Art, and from which Nature is completely absent."

M. Maurice Spronck shows him to us "not content with having constructed fantastic universes beside our own, busily seeking to destroy Reality, or at least to modify it as much as he can in the direction of his principles," declaring that "woman is natural and therefore abominable," developing with singular taste a theory of make-up with the object "not of correcting the wrinkles on a faded face, and making it rival youth, but of giving Beauty the charm of the extraordinary, the attraction of things unnatural."

That in itself is not so very shocking. We must never reckon on Nature, which has neither wit nor heart. Let us not love her, for she is not lovable. But let us not trouble to hate her, for she is not worthy of hate. She is everything. It is very embarrassing to be everything. It forbids the possession of taste, subtlety, charm, delicacy, and propriety. It also forbids the possession of ideas, either good or evil. It involves a terrible heaviness in every direction. In our own interest, and for our peace, let us forgive Nature the evil that she does us by inadvertence and indifference. Thus, it is

said, did old M. Fagon, because he was a physician. He pardoned Nature ; this clemency softened the sufferings of his latter days. But neither Gautier, nor Jules de Goncourt, nor Baudelaire was a good physician, busy, like M. Fagon, in labelling the medicinal plants in the Jardin du Roi. While labelling things one feels a sense of peace penetrate one's whole system, while in forging verses, and assembling words, on the contrary, one inspires dark, acrid vapours which ruin the whole animal economy. Being sick, our literary artists spread the bitterness and the sadness of their malady all over Nature. Gautier, Baudelaire, the brothers Goncourt and Flaubert proclaim that Life is evil.

A solitary fifth rises and tells us : " In this life, which to you seems bitter, I have seen nothing but golden cups crowned with roses, floating girdles, hyacinthine locks, lilies, and lyric poetry. Friends, hear my songs, and believe in the nymphs of the woods and fountains."

Thus spoke the fifth poet. But, ungrateful that we are, O Maurice Spronck, we reply to him :

" Rich and fluent poet, happy Théodore de Banville, you are the most melodious of singers. But your joy saddens us even more than the sadness of the others. Do not think to reconcile us with Nature. You portray her as gentle. We prefer her ferocious." But how unjust !

Is it with such words and with so hard a heart that we should dismiss the poet of light and joy, the sweet nightingale of the Muses ? To sum up, M. Maurice Spronck's solid, serious book, a methodical essay strongly supported by documents, scholarly and profound, leaves the reader with an impression of



sadness and disquietude. As one closes the book, one reflects :

“ So the evil which blazes out to-day has been hatching for more than thirty years. The neurosis and madness which invade the literature of the moment were germinated in the still beautiful, seemingly pure, seductive works on which our youth was nourished ! ”

## A FAMILY OF POETS\*

BARTHÉLEMY TISSEUR, JEAN TISSEUR, CLAIR  
TISSEUR

### I



HERE were at Lyons four brothers, Barthélemy, Jean, Alexander, and Clair Tisseur. Three were poets and the fourth, Alexander, had an acute appreciation of art and poetry. They lived modestly and honoured in their native city. Barthélemy died in 1843. Jean died doing good to others. He was, for forty years, Secretary of the Chamber of Commerce of Lyons. Alexander and Clair are still alive. The latter is an architect. He is the best poet of this brilliant family. He has written his brother Jean's life with great simplicity. Jean, in his old age, began the biography of Barthélemy, which was finished by Alexander. These lives of good, obscure men possess an exquisite charm. One breathes in them a fragrance of sympathy, something sweet, pure, and simple, which one misses in the biographies of the illustrious.

\* *Poésies* de Barthélemy Tisseur, *Poésies* de Jean Tisseur recueillies par ses frères, 1 vol. Clair Tisseur, *Pauca Paucis*. See also the volume by M. Paul Mariéton—*Joséphin Souлары et la pléiade lyonnaise*, 1884 en -18. M. Mariéton has done much for the literature of Lyons.

Souls have a flower which glory effaces. These brotherly narratives touch one by their air of truth, and if occasionally the praise flows rather freely it pleases one to see it thus offered by a pious hand, like a household offering on a tomb. These family records should be more numerous. We should take care to preserve the memories of our familiar dead. It is in them that times and places are faithfully depicted; it is through them that one penetrates into the heart of things human.

The eldest brother, Barthélemy, was born at Lyons when the Grande Armée was perishing in Russia. He was a child of his age, impetuous and melancholy. All the aspirations of liberal and romantic France swelled his heart. Frail in appearance, small and short-sighted, he bore on his forehead, as a sign, a large vein which grew black in moments of anger. And what angered him was vulgarity, mediocrity, "the happy mean"; in short, the ordinary succession of things. He was devoured by a thirst for the Ideal. He longed for the early consummation of the emancipation of the peoples and universal fraternity. He believed in infinite progress. One fine day, in his twentieth year, as he was walking from Aix to the lake of Berre, ardent, generous, drunk with the thyme on the hills and the rays of the sun, he attracted the benevolent attention of a fellow-wayfarer, who was wearing a yellow coat with five capes; a man of substance. The latter, full of astonishment, asked him:

"Are you a merchant?"

"Certainly not," answered Barthélemy.

"An artist?"

"Not that either."

The man in the coat reflected a moment, and then:

“You are not an artist. In that case you are a Pole. You need not conceal the fact. I like the Poles.”

And he would not abandon the idea. In spite of all denials he insisted on regarding Barthélemy as a Pole.

In a certain sense the man in the coat was right. There was something Polish in Barthélemy Tisseur. There was something Polish in all the youth of those days.

The letters written by Barthélemy to his brothers during the romantic walks of his twentieth year, in Provence, reveal a soul of ardent purity, full of poetry and vagueness. His farewell to the town of Arles, which has been preserved for us, gives one the idea of an adolescent Edgar Quinet :

“Farewell, little valley of Jehoshaphat, soil impregnated with the ashes and tears of humanity, you who unite Rome with the Middle Ages ; you whose women are so beautiful, beloved daughter of Constantine, so melancholy under the flaming southern sun, you who, with your ruins and tombs, would be the sublimest theatre of love. Good-bye ! good-bye ! Aliscamps ; sleep on, desolate shades.”

While he was at Aix he met a young man with dishevelled hair, a gloomy eye, and an inspired face. It was Victor de Laprade. Naturally, they talked of art and poetry. After a few minutes' conversation they loved each other devotedly. They mingled their enthusiasms ; they recited verses. Barthélemy, pale, with flowing locks, no doubt expounded, with artless enthusiasm, his theory of inspiration. He had said :

“Verses are not made ; in reality they lie from all eternity, under the eye of God, in the urn of

the absolute ; the great poet is he who has a lucky touch, and lights upon good verses ; it would be impossible for us or for God himself to mend them."

Laprade probably answered in the accents of a grandiose pantheism. They understood one another. At that period God explained everything. Since then some people have replaced God by protoplasm or the germ-cell. They are quite satisfied. It is a great comfort to change the name of the Unknowable from time to time.

One must do this justice to Barthélemy's relations, that they gave up the idea of turning him into a merchant or a business man. It was resolved to make a lawyer of him, and he was sent to study law in Paris.

The poor boy was very lonely there ; a lost orphan. He lived in the Rue des Fossés-Saint-Victor, in a room under the roof ; but it made his heart beat to think that he was divided from Michelet only by a party wall ; and as he rose early, he could see, from his garret, the Pantheon, shining in the morning light, amid an ocean of roofs. A hard worker, he assiduously followed the courses at the law school, and those at the Collège de France, where in those days were heard the seductive voices of the leaders of youth. He frequented a reading-room in the district. It is not stated whether it was that of the good Mme Cardinal. But we may suppose that he there devoured *Valentine* and *Lélia*. This establishment was much frequented by students : the whole School of Medicine came to read there. The medical students brought with them arms and legs, which got mixed up on the tables with the books and

papers. Skeletons hung among the umbrellas in all the corners. The mystical Christianity of the young Lyonnais saw in these human remnants the remains of a temple which had been inhabited by a soul, and was disgusted by such profanation. While the students, with their caps over their ears, cracked gruesome jokes, he would murmur the words of Lactantius: *Pulcher hymnis Dei homo immortalis*. His keenest pleasure was to go to the theatre, and from the pit to applaud Mme Dorval, Bocage or Frédéric. At that period the boards resounded with the groans and sighs of romantic drama, and Barthélemy Tisseur would delightfully devour with his eyes the tears of Katy Bell.

This noble young man was sustained in the sadness and inquietude of his solitary life by the sentiment of admiration which forms the charm and the value of a beautiful youth. One day when he was present at a public sitting of the Five Academies he had the happiness of contemplating his beloved poet, Lamartine. When the meeting broke up he reverently followed in the great man's steps, and later in the evening he wrote radiantly to his brothers of his good fortune.

“At the end of the sitting,” he says, “I followed him for half an hour, as far as 73 Rue de Grenelle-Saint-Germain, where he entered. He is tall and thin; one hand in his pocket, walking with big strides, confidently and like a horseman, swinging his shoulders a little from left to right. One would have said he had purposely dressed as carelessly as possible for the ceremonious sitting. Many Academicians wore gold-embroidered coats; he wore just a black coat, greyish blue trousers, boots and spurs.”

He further adds with a simplicity worthy of envy: "Lamartine is ill. May God preserve him for poetry! I do not know, but I fear he may not live very long. He is a man who is dominated by his poetry, who is being killed by it."

One night Barthélemy went to the Opera ball, then hallowed by art and poetry. He did not carry with him Gavarni's ironic philosophy; on the swells and their lady friends he turned a distressed and gloomy stare. To him their dance appeared "the round of a chain of damned souls, carrying out an infernal penitence under the rods of the demons." Such are the severe judgments of a virgin heart. In his shy, fierce innocence, he contemned easy joys and vulgar pleasures. He was suffering from loneliness, and his dreams. Like St. Augustine, he loved to love. With a sincerity at which one can only half smile he said, at twenty-two years of age: "My first youth is over." He was tired; he was obsessed by vague desires. One day he took boat, the boat to St. Cloud, an old accomplice of spring-time follies. He there saw a young lady. He dared not speak to her, but he touched her dress, and the same evening, disturbed, he confided this adventure in love to paper.

In that sublime attic where he lodged so close to the mighty Michelet he had for neighbour a grisette, who, feeling an attraction for him, betrayed it ingenuously. Opportunity was not lacking, as they lodged on the same floor.

But the austere young man would see nothing, and despised the love which the poor girl tendered to him like a branch of lilac. It was not the lilac of the tea-garden, but the pure lily of the altar for

whose perfume he longed. For Barthélemy love was a very vague, and very pure, sentiment. He conceived it with so excessive a spirituality that even his friend Victor de Laprade, the poet of the Ideal, refused to admit so much idealism in sentiment. Tisseur defined love as "a higher state of the soul," and he saw therein "a search for the infinite."

"We grasp the infinite," he said, "a hundred-fold better with the heart than with the head. The latter understands the infinite only as a negation of the finite. In an inexhaustible love, always pursuing and never satisfied, which dies only to revive and attach itself to something higher, there lies the most glorious apprehension of the infinite."

If I am not mistaken this is metaphysics, and even Lyons metaphysics, which is not of the best. Perhaps Ballanche declared himself thus to Mme Récamier. But the grisette of the Rue des Fossés-Saint-Victor would have found it somewhat obscure. Faithful to his maxims, Tisseur culled flowers from the graves of unknown young women, and at the mere thought of the ladies of the eighteenth century, who for greater certainty secured their paradise in this world, the vein in his forehead turned black and swelled. Lonely, sad and tired, he fell ill in his attic. A mucous fever overwhelmed him. Emerging from his stupor, he saw a woman at his bedside. He recognized his ideal and loved. She was not a young girl; she was not even a very young woman. Like the lady celebrated by Sainte-Beuve, whose first white hairs seemed

Quelques brins de jasmin dans la sombre ramure,\*

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\* Some sprays of jasmine in the dark boughs.



the unknown lady, in whom Barthélemy searched for the infinite, had already threads of silver on her brow. She was a blonde, with blue eyes, tall and rather majestic, according to a witness.

It pleased Barthélemy to find in her a likeness to the *Francesca da Rimini* of Ary Scheffer. But it must be remembered that he was short-sighted and a poet, and his brothers suspect that he never very clearly saw her whom he loved so devotedly. It does not appear that she mentally bore any resemblance to the gentle ardent Italian, who, vanquished and proud of her defeat, had no regrets in death and damnation. On the contrary, it appears that she was a person very sure of herself, eloquent, a little inclined to declamation, idealistic and virile. He wrote verses for her, and called her Beatrice.

A few fragments of letters have been preserved in which this maternal Beatrice shows less the tenderness of her heart than the vividness of her imagination :

“When I look at him,” she says, speaking of Barthélemy, whom she calls Stenio—for she also had read George Sand—“I feel inundated by a fragrant spiritual vapour. I know not how to express that which penetrates my whole being. In my heart I feel for him a soft glow which lights me to the heavens.”

One might, from certain signs, believe that it was Beatrice herself who hastened the hour of sacrifice. It was not weakness or allurements on her part. She did not yield to the senses, which urged her but feebly. But she was anxious to offer herself; she made the gift which in those days consecrated the *Lélias* and all the heroines of art

and poetry. Barthélemy, a Christian like Eudore, succumbed, like him, in the night and the tempest :

Et j'ai vu les trésors de sa beauté parfaite,  
 J'ai respiré l'encens qu'exhalent ses cheveux ;  
 Et j'ai vu sa pudeur étonnée et muette,  
 Et j'ai rougi d'amour, et j'ai baissé les yeux.\*

He had this resource of sin, on which the faithful and the saints themselves fall back when necessary. As a refinement he added blasphemy, which, taken all in all, is a great act of faith. He compared the words of his lover to the wine in the chalice after consecration :

C'est un breuvage à boire en un transport pieux,  
 Comme le sang du Christ, qui nous ouvre les cieux.†

What can be said, except that all beliefs only serve to charm away the turmoil of the senses, and that mysticism diffuses the most fragrant perfumes over pleasure?

Stenio failed in his licentiate's examination of 1837. This was the result of Beatrice's love. But he was an advocate the following year.

Barthélemy Tisseur addressed to his Beatrice some stanzas and sonnets which his brothers were careful to collect after his death. It is difficult to-day to judge verses which express a state of the soul almost inconceivable to later generations.

\* I've seen the treasures of her perfect beauty.  
 I've breathed the incense exhaled by her hair.  
 I've seen her modesty, startled and silent,  
 I've blushed with love, and dropped my eyes.

† It is a draught to drink in pious ecstasy,  
 Like the blood of Christ, which opens us the skies.

An advocate, he had a horror of the law. Appointed in 1841, on the recommendation of Ballanche, to the chair of French literature at Neuchâtel, he lectured on transcendental idealism not without a certain brilliance. His affection for the lady whom we have called Beatrice outlasted their separation. At Neuchâtel, where he worked at his plain deal table for fourteen hours a day, he wrote a diary for the absent one, which he sent off weekly. He had found his true path when a catastrophe suddenly terminated a life in which all was to remain confused and uncompleted. On 28th January, 1843, in a thick fog, he fell into the lake, a few steps from his house, and was drowned. Chance alone was the cause of this misfortune : but one sees therein a sort of fatality, when one reflects that this young man loved danger and welcomed peril, and that he was a spiritual son of that René who invoked "the longed-for storms." On the morrow of his death a letter from Beatrice reached Neuchâtel. He was only thirty-one years of age.

## 2

Jean Tisseur, two years younger than Barthélemy, was born at Lyons on 7th January, 1814. A few days later the advance-guard of the Austrian general Bubna appeared at the city gates. I know not whether these reminiscences, which were repeatedly recalled, as were those of his birth, contributed to inspire him with a horror of war, and a contempt for those glories of the flesh of which Pascal speaks ; but throughout his life he

showed a great love for the works of peace, and the only conquests which touched his heart were those of industry and civilization.

Very different from his brother Barthélemy, to whom he was devoted, he had in everything a sense of proportion. He was moderate, and the idea of the possible was never absent from his thoughts. As it had been arranged by his family that he should be a lawyer, he assumed the duties of an advocate, with the sufficing satisfaction, for a mind as upright as his, of accomplishing a duty. But no one could accuse him of having formed too exalted an idea of the importance of his functions.

He used to observe, in jest, that barristers had only been invented to say at a hearing :

“ Mr. President, I beg that the case be adjourned for a week.”

As for the rest, he added, it was easy to distinguish those barristers who were more learned in the law from those who were less so. If a barrister wrote at the bottom of a plea “ with reservations,” he was a bad one ; if he put “ with all reservations,” he was already a distinguished barrister ; if he put “ with all reservations whatsoever,” he was a barrister of the first rank ; but if he put “ with all reservations generally whatsoever,” there were no terms strong enough to do justice to his legal knowledge.

Tisseur mingled poetry with procedure, as is shown by the memorandum of a letter found among his papers, of which this is the tenor :

“ SIR,

M<sup>c</sup>. Munier, your advocate, will have informed you that M. Jacquemet has fixed midday, Tuesday, 3rd April, at the

Palais de Justice for the appearance of the parties in the case of the Dubeaume trusteeship.

Lorsque sur un pavé d'azur  
 Marche une reine orientale,  
 Elle n'a pas à sa sandale  
 Une escarboucle au feu plus pur." \*

In these terms the document refers to M. Munier, then a senator, and the moon.

Jean Tisseur sold his practice without regret, in 1848, after the revolution. He then became Secretary of the Chamber of Commerce of Lyons, and for thirty years he applied the ingenious exactitude and exquisite integrity of his mind to questions of navigation, railway traffic, posts and telegraphs, customs, commercial treaties, industrial and commercial legislation, money, banking and exhibitions—in short, to business matters of every kind. To all that he did he brought the delicacy of a cultivated mind, and a love of good work. Whether he was composing a great poem like *Le javelot rustique*, or editing the commercial bulletin of the *Salut publique*, he strove always to achieve a finished perfection.

His poetry betrays this natural inclination; it is finished, refined, and at times a little brief. While alive he concealed his verses from his compatriots, who for their part, so one hears, take little interest in poetry.

People say, perhaps with a spice of malice, that in the city of Laprade and Souлары only one poet, Sarrasin, who sold olives in public-houses, is

\* When on an azure pavement  
 There walks an Eastern Queen,  
 She wears not on her sandal  
 A carbuncle of purer fire.

celebrated; and that more than one citizen of Lyons, on seeing Laprade's coffin pass by with its escort of cavalry and followed by the yellow robes of the Faculty of Letters, might have asked, like a certain good woman :

“ Who is it that's dead ? ”

“ M. de Laprade.”

“ What did he do ? ”

“ He was a poet.”

“ Was he the one that sold olives ? ”

Still, there are poets in Lyons, and even a Lyonnaise poetry, precise and precious, whose characteristics will be found in Souлары's sonnets and the poems of Jean Tisseur. These are few in number. Jean was difficult, a little fastidious, and lazy by inclination. He wrote little, and to those who found fault with him for not producing more he replied with this maxim of the poetess of Tanagra: “ One must sow by the handful, not a sackful at a time.”

The little that he has left is certainly of value. In its way, and in the symbolic style, *Le javelot rustique* is a little masterpiece. The visit to the *Tombeau de Jacquard* resulted, without a doubt from one of the happiest combinations of industry and poetry. Judging by what I have read and what I can divine of him, Jean Tisseur was naturally exquisite, one of the finest trees in the orchard. His goodness was accompanied by that grace without which no virtue is lovable. He had an ironic mind, and his was a tender heart. Like the bee, he had both honey and sting.

M. Paul Mariéton, who knew Jean Tisseur, wrote some lines upon this delightful man, which are a heart-felt testimony :

“ He was a man of the most delightful character. In those pleasant saunterings of speech and thought, which, according to Töpffer, are so fruitful, and which have always bound the poets with a common tie, Jean Tisseur was able to bring together Souлары, the profound humorist, the masterly virtuoso, Laprade, the gentle thinker, the Christian philosopher, and Chenavard, the great painter, who was also a philosopher, and with them to form that quartette of Lyonnais artists of whom our descendants will speak. The soul of these gatherings, the bond of these elect friendships, was Jean Tisseur.”

I read elsewhere : “ Lyons had the good fortune, in our day, to possess four unequalled talkers. They were Laprade, Buy, Chenavard, and Jean Tisseur.”

In the simple life which I have here sketched in a few lines, something, I know not what, makes me think of moral beauty as the Greeks conceived it. Is not this because one finds in it moderation, wisdom, modesty, the cultivation of friendship and the noble intent to make a beautiful masterpiece of life itself ? It is this, I believe, in this obscure and unaffected life, which is so close to us, that seems to possess something of the majesty and purity of antiquity. Tisseur was one of those who work without ceasing at the beauty of their souls, and who make of their life a garden like that of the old man of Tarento.

“ The conscience,” he said, “ needs cultivation no less than the mind. The virtues, the love of good, self-sacrifice, refinement, and resignation combined with courage, do not flourish of themselves ; they need attention ; an elect conscience is as rare as an elect mind.” As he advanced in life he was more

concerned with moral culture ; the greatest grief of his old age was the feeling that man is powerless to do good. To him may be applied his own definition of man as he ought to fashion himself : "A conscience made beautiful."

## 3

Jean Tisseur died leaving two brothers, the Abbé Alexandre, whose *Voyages littéraires*, says M. Paul Mariéton, are held in high esteem by the Lyonnais, and Clair Tisseur, author of *Pauca Paucis*, who by more than one characteristic recalls Jean, but who is superior to him in style and culture. M. Renouvier, a great metaphysician and an ardent lover of poetry, has made me acquainted with *Pauca Paucis*, which the author kept secret. He also regards Clair Tisseur as the best poet of the family. He justly praises, in these verses of a sage, "the sincerity of the accent and the often happy handling of new rhythms."

During his long life Clair Tisseur wrote only a few verses for some friends, but these verses are himself, his recollections and his feelings. In them he shows himself calm and moderate like his brother Jean, and a kindly Stoic. I believe he was by profession an architect ; in his verses he is above all things a Hellenist and a rustic. In reading him one comes to the conclusion that the things he best loved in this world, after virtue, were the scent of lavender and the pines, the song of the cicada, and the epigrams of the Anthologies. The poet dedicated his work to the modest Graces.

Il ne demande point en don l'or indien,  
Ni la blanche Chrysé, ni les troupeaux qu'engraisse



Dans ses riches sillons, la vieille Argos, ni rien  
 Que la mesure en tout de l'aimable sagesse.  
 Charités aux cœurs purs, écoutez mes prières ! \*

As one sees by this invocation, Clair Tisseur, like André Chénier, clothed his thoughts in an antique vesture. To those who complained of this as a disguise he replied that to express a beautiful thought a beautiful symbol is required, and that the most beautiful symbols were those of Greece; and lastly, that he had lived in the shadow of myrtles on a soil recalling Greece. We may add that a sincere emotion readily finds expression beneath these classic forms.

What particularly pleases me in Clair Tisseur's verses is the idylls and the landscapes. He has drawn a few domestic pictures of graceful simplicity. The last of them especially charms me by that harmonious sadness whose secret seems taken from Propertius :

Phydilé, Phydilé, quand je ne serai plus,  
 Un frère, des amis garderont ma mémoire.  
 Mais toi, tu gémiras ; tu ne voudras pas croire  
 Que l'Océan sans bords, dans l'éternel reflux,  
 Ait englouti l'ami sur qui, tendre et farouche,  
 Tu veillas si longtemps. . . .

Surtout (je te connais) que devant toi personne  
 N'outrage ma mémoire ! ou bien levant ton bras,  
 Pour porter témoignage, alors tu défendras  
 Celui qui te fut cher, ainsi qu'une lionne

---

\* He asks not for the gold of Ind  
 Nor white Chryseis, nor fattening flocks  
 Grazing on the rich plains of Argos, nor for aught  
 But in all things the moderation of kindly wisdom.  
 Pure-hearted Charities, hear my prayers !

Défend son lionceau. Déjà, déjà je vois  
 Éclater ton regard, j'entends trembler ta voix.  
 Et le sein soulevé, pleurante et tout émue,  
 Tu rediras s'il fut envieux ou méchant ;  
 Du pauvre, hôte des dieux, s'il détourna la vue ;  
 S'il fut un ami sûr ; si jamais, le sachant,  
 Il commit l'injustice ou trahit sa parole ;  
 Si l'avidé et grossier Mammon fut son idole.  
 Toi qui me vis de près diras ce que je fus,  
 Phydilé, Phydilé, quand je ne serai plus.\*

Don't you love this melancholy, sweet, and  
 rhythmical as joy? To give some idea of Clair  
 Tisseur's poetic talent, here is one of his pictures of  
 Provençal nature, drawn with a refined and graceful  
 severity: a poem on the birth of a cicada: the  
 cicada or *cigale*, which on this side of the Loire  
 we are fond of confusing with the grasshopper,

---

\* Fidele, Fidele, when I am no more,  
 My brother and my friends will keep my memory green.  
 But you will grieve for me ; unwilling to believe  
 That the boundless Ocean, in its eternal reflux,  
 Has swallowed the friend, o'er whom, tender and shy,  
 You watched so long. . . .

Above all (I know you) let no one in your presence  
 Insult my memory ; or, raising your arm  
 In witness, you will defend  
 Him who was dear to you, as a lioness  
 Defends her cubs. Already, already, I see  
 The flash of your eye, I hear your trembling voice.  
 With heaving breast, weeping and greatly moved,  
 You will ask, whether he was envious or wicked ;  
 Whether he averted his eyes from the poor man, the guest  
 of the gods ;  
 Whether he was a true friend ; and whether he knowingly  
 Ever committed an injustice, or broke his word ;  
 Whether gross, greedy Mammon was the idol he worshipped.  
 You who knew me so well will tell what I was,  
 Fidele, Fidele, when I am no more.

but whose untiring song is equally dear to the classic Meleager and our own Paul Arène.

La cigale encor tendre, engourdie, étonnée  
De ce monde nouveau, semble d'un long sommeil  
S'éveiller faiblement sous le rayon vermeil.  
L'élytre, diaphane et de réseaux veinée,

Tout humide à ses flancs est collée ; et des grains  
D'un rouge vif et clair la piquent aux aisselles,  
Comme si l'on voyait le sang à travers elles,  
Fluide s'épancher en canaux purpurins.

Mais demain le soleil, de ses rayons tenaces,  
Aura durci son aile et desséché ses flancs :  
Le virtuose noir fait, sous les cieux brûlants,  
De cymbales de fer retenir les espaces.\*

Happy Clair Tisseur, beneath his olive-trees !  
To embellish life what are wealth and honours,  
compared with poetry and art ? †

\* The still tender cicada, torpid, astonished  
At this new world, from a long sleep  
Seems feebly to awake under the rosy rays.  
The diaphanous wing, with its network of veins,

Adheres all wet to its flanks ; and specks  
Of a bright clear red mark her axillæ,  
As though one could see through them the blood  
Spreading, liquid, through its purple conduits.

But to-morrow the sun, with his persistent rays,  
Will have hardened her wing, and dried her flanks :  
And the black virtuoso, under the blazing skies,  
Will make the welkin resound with the clash of iron cymbals.

† It is only right to add that, under the name of the Nizier de Puitspelu, M. Clair Tisseur is one of the glories of Lyons. Every one there knows his *Vieilleseries Lyonnaises*. But in this sketch I have sought to draw attention only to the poet.

## ASTRONOMICAL DAY-DREAMS\*



CAMILLE FLAMMARION, who has devoted himself entirely to astronomy, has all the imaginable qualifications for "popularizing" science; to begin with, he knows. He has made protracted calculations and observations. Moreover, he has enthusiasm and imagination; and he shirks neither stage management nor stage effects. He neglects nothing that will make the sky interesting, dramatic, romantic, picturesque, amusing, and moral, for our benefit. His book, dedicated to the gravest of the Muses, Urania, is a kind of scientific poem, wherein philosophy mingles with astronomy. I may perhaps be believed if I say that M. Flammarion's philosophy is not so confident as his science. It is a pity, for it is a charming philosophy. M. Flammarion promises us a very happy immortality. If one may believe him, our souls, after death, will flit from star to star, and endlessly enjoy the voluptuousness of love and knowledge: we shall be meditative butterflies. We shall retain enough human weakness to be tender, and enough ignorance to be curious. We shall have senses; but they will be powerful and

\* Camille Flammarion, *Uranie*. Illustrations by Bieler, Gambard and Myrbach (collection Guillaume, in 8°).

perfect, adapted to yield us little suffering, but much pleasure. I admit that I cannot imagine a better organization of the future life.

Some years ago I was called to the bedside of an old relative, who was dying in a little Norman town, where she had lived for ninety years. Being unable to live any longer, she felt disposed, as Countess P—— said, to see whether God improved on closer acquaintance. At her bedside I found a Sister of Mercy who was the quietest and simplest creature in the world. Like Mariamne, she gave one the impression of being preserved in honey. I admired her on the spot. But I was far from inspiring her with the same sentiment.

Seeing me on several occasions busy reading and writing, she took me for a scholar, and as she was a saint she allowed me to see the pity with which I inspired her. One day, indeed, she had it out with me. For she was fond of talking, always cheerfully.

“What are you looking for in those big books?” she said.

“Sister,” I replied, “I am investigating the history of the cave-dwellers, in the time of the mammoth and the bear.”

It is a fact that at that time I was amusing myself with chipped flints, and reindeer-horns covered with drawings of animals.

Hearing this answer, the little Sister, very erect, with her hands in her sleeves, sweet and stubborn, said:

“You do not then hope to go to heaven? What is the good of studying in this world what we shall learn in the next? I am waiting to be instructed by God. He will do it in the twinkling of an eye, better than all your books.”

The good creature little thought that this would be doing us a bad service, and that if we knew all the secrets of the universe we should lapse into a state of hopeless boredom. M. Camille Flammarion has a better way of humouring our curiosity ; he promises an infinity of spectacles to occupy eternity. For this astronomer Paradise is an indestructible observatory, full of marvellous instruments.

At a first glance I find this more tempting than the sudden and complete revelation in which the little Sister had such faith. With M. Flammarion there will always be something we don't know, and something to long for. That is the great point. He states that in our metempsychosis we shall wander from star to star ; he makes us hope that we shall take with us the two virtues which make Life supportable, ignorance and desire, and that we shall always be human, which is something. But a doubt occurs to my mind. I fear that these voyages may not afford all the pleasure that he anticipates. I am afraid of being disappointed, and my distrust, alas ! is natural enough. As men, we know what a planet is only too well : we live on one. We know the sky only too well. We are in it as far as it is possible. For me, this world spoils the rest. I have good reason to fear that they may resemble it ; and this would be a great objection to them.

The Universe revealed by Science is desperately monotonous. All the suns are drops of fire, and the planets drops of mud.

The aerolites which have fallen on our earth never contain any new body. Spectral analysis has proved the uniform constitution of all the worlds. Everywhere there is found oxygen, hydrogen, nitrogen, sodium, magnesium, carbon, mercury,

gold, silver, and iron. When one knows what carbon and hydrogen have produced in this sublunary sphere one is not tempted to go and see what they have done elsewhere. The revelations of astronomy are not reassuring, and we may say that the spectacle of the universe parades before us the universality of evil and of death.

The Moon, Earth's only child, is no more than a corpse, whose dry, arid mass, ploughed by deep fissures, will soon be reduced to dust. Some planets, sisters of the Earth, Venus, Mercury, and Mars, appear, like her, still to afford shelter to life and intelligence. But we know without a doubt that they are inclement. I require no other proof than the inclined axis on which they turn round the sun, for the punishment of their inhabitants, who, by reason of this inclination, are, like us, and even more than us, frozen and roasted by turns; and like us they doubtless ask what malicious demon threw the top which they inhabit obliquely into space in order that their sojourn there might be made insupportable.

A little step further into space, and we come across a planet burst into a thousand fragments, of which one has entered the orbit of Mars threatening to collide with and destroy the latter. These terrible relics are scattered over millions of leagues. To be sure, it is said that these are not remains, but material which has been unable to unite itself, owing to the fault of enormous Jupiter, whose mass acts powerfully at a distance; it is, however, no less a disaster.\*

\* The telescopic planets are decidedly not the fragments of a great burst star. M. F. Tisserand has demonstrated mathematically in the *Annuaire des longitudes* for 1891 that these asteroids have never been united.

If, emerging from our own imperceptible system, we contemplate the army of the stars, what do we find there but the perpetual vicissitudes of life and death? There is an unceasing birth and death of stars. White in their burning youth, like Sirius, they afterwards grow yellow, like our sun, and before their death assume a deep red tinge. Ultimately they flicker like an expiring candle.

To-day the astronomers are watching  $\eta$  of the Ship in its death-throes. One of the stars of the boreal Crown is about to die. All of them, young, old, and dead, are rushing madly through space. Properly speaking nothing in the universe dies. Everything is in transformation, in a perpetual state of becoming. We must take our share; we shall never rest. On whatever point of space we are cast, whether living or dead, whether souls or ashes, immortal thought or subtle fluid, we shall still be at work; we shall still be buffeted about; and whether disintegrated, scattered, or conscious we shall still accomplish our endless metamorphoses.

With apologies to M. Flammarion, I do not think we shall presently visit, in the capacity of curious tourists, the brilliant Sirius, a million times greater, it is said, than our sun. Attached to the planet Earth, I think we shall remain here so long as she is able to support us. I believe that our destiny is bound up with hers. Her labours will be ours, and all that is in her will labour eternally. Luther was a bad physicist when he envied the dead because they rest—the dead have much to do; they prepare life. Our sun is bearing us with all his following toward the constellation of Hercules, where we shall arrive in a few milliards of centuries. He will die on the journey, and the Earth with him.



We shall then serve as material for a new universe, which may perhaps be better than this one, but which will be no more lasting. For to be is to end, and all is movement, all flows by and passes. Creation is being continually remade. Neither time nor space will be lacking. We can still see a star which disappeared ten thousand years ago. It died, leaving its rays, which are reaching us to-day.

This gives us an overwhelming idea of sidereal distances. But every time we admire the immensity of the Heavens we must at the same time admire our own minuteness ; the grandeur of the Universe is dependent thereon. In itself the Universe is neither great nor small. If it were of a sudden reduced to the size of a pin's head we should be incapable of perceiving the fact. And on this hypothesis, as the idea of time is dependent upon the idea of space, all the suns in the Milky Way, and all the nebulae, might be quenched like the spark of a cigarette, without the labours, the days, the joys and the sorrows of the innumerable generations of the living being abridged by one moment.

Time and space do not exist, neither does matter. What we so describe is precisely that which we do not know, the obstacle which baffles our senses. We know only one reality, Thought. This it is that created the world. Had it not weighed and named Sirius, Sirius would not exist.

Nevertheless, the Unknowable grips and envelops us. During the last two centuries it has terribly increased. Physical astronomy has not shown us the objective reality of things, but it has changed all our illusions ; that is to say, our very soul. In that it has worked such a revolution in men's ideals

that it is impossible for the old beliefs to subsist without transformation.

Farewell to the dreams of our fathers ! The men of the Middle Ages, such as St. Thomas Aquinas, imagined the sky to be something like a big clock. They were separated from the Kingdom of God only by a simple vault studded with golden nails. Heaven and Earth, Hell and Purgatory composed their entire universe. The scaffolds with three stages on which were played the mysteries gave an idea of it. Below, red and black devils ; in the middle the Earth, the realm of the Church Militant ; on the top God the Father in His glory. There was a ladder for the angels to move from stage to stage, and a continual going to and fro between Heaven and Earth.

The astrologers' learned diagrams were almost equally artless. There one saw the interior of the Earth with the inscription "*Inferi*," and all round the globe circles marking the sphere of the elements, the seven spheres of the planets, and finally the firmament or fixed heaven, beyond which there stretched the ninth heaven to which some had been snatched up, the *Primum mobile* and the *Cælum empyreum*, the abiding-place of the blest. In the sixteenth century, before Copernicus, the world was thus conceived, and even in the seventeenth century. We must remember that Pascal died without knowing anything of Galileo's discoveries. In a moment the *Cælum empyreum* was shattered. The world saw itself thrown into space like a grain of dust, ignored and lost. It was the greatest event in the whole history of human thought ; it was accomplished almost under our eyes, and we have not yet been able to trace all its consequences.

When a child I knew the last defender of the old sacred cosmogony. He was a priest called Mathalène, and in appearance resembled M. Littré. He was a geometrician, and had written a book to prove algebraically that the stars revolve round the motionless Earth, and that the sun is in reality only twice the size of its apparent diameter. The book was printed about 1840, and the Abbé Mathalène incurred the displeasure of his superiors. He resisted, and was finally interdicted. When I knew him he was very old and poor, full of faith, sorrow and surprise that the Church should have smitten him for combating Galileo, whom she herself had condemned.

## M. MAURICE BOUCHOR AND THE STORY OF TOBIAS\*



HAVING played Shakespeare, Aristophanes, Cervantes, and Molière, the marionettes of the Rue Vivienne asked M. Maurice Bouchor to put the old story of Tobias on the stage for them. In this desire the dolls were well inspired. *Tobie* is a charming story, which recalls the Odyssey and the Arabian nights. This late flower of Jewish imagination, which blossomed in the third century B.C., is endowed with a dainty grace and a delicate fragrance. The spirit of the teller is a little narrow, but so pure! The worthy Jew knew of nothing in the world beyond the tribe of Naphtali.

All the characters in the story—the two Tobiases, Anna, Raguel, Edna, the gentle Sarah, and Gabelus himself are all the issue of Jacob and Sarah. They have a family air; they are candid, innocent, and simple, and they live a long time. They believe in God, who protects the tribe of Naphtali. Old Tobias, a captive at Nineveh, buries the dead and meditates on the Scriptures. He praises the Lord, who has tried him by taking away his eyesight.

\* *L'histoire de Tobie*, Légende biblique en vers, en cinq tableaux, par Maurice Bouchor. Representing the marionettes of the Petit Théâtre.

He is a man of property, who shrewdly imitates the manners of the patriarchs.

Having asked of God that he may die, he is desirous of leaving his affairs in order. Remembering that once upon a time he had lent ten silver talents, for which he had a receipt, *sub chirographo*, to a poor relation named Gabelus or Gabael, he sends young Tobias, his only son, to Rages in Media, where lives the now solvent debtor, who, according to all appearance, has enriched himself among the Medes.

The obedient son departs, conducted by Raphael, one of the seven angels who present to God the prayers of the saints. In order to accompany Tobias, he assumes the appearance of a handsome young man of the tribe of Naphtali, *juvenem splendidum*. Tobias and his heavenly guide arrived safely at Rages, and received ten talents of silver from Gabelus. Following the banks of the Tigris, they found an enormous fish thrown up on the river bank, which Dom Calmet believes to have been a pike. They took its liver, which possessed wonderful properties. Then, recalling that he had relations at Ecbatana, young Tobias resolved to go and see them. Raguel of the tribe of Naphtali lived amongst the Medes, with Edna his wife, and his daughter Sarah. The young man and the angel entered together the house of Raguel, and Tobias, seeing that Sarah was beautiful, loved and demanded her in marriage. Although seven times married, Sarah was a virgin, and feared to remain so for ever, for the demon Asmodeus, who loved her, would not suffer that she should be possessed by a man, and he strangled her husbands when they came near her. He had already killed seven. The young girl

was thereby sadly perplexed. She bowed her head when the servants of the house rallied her on her virgin widowhood, accused her of suffocating (*quod suffocaret*) her husbands, and even covered her with blows, crying out : “ Go and rejoin your husbands beneath the soil ! ”

When young Tobias learnt these things, he was deeply moved, and spoke thus to his companion angel :

“ I have heard that this young woman has been given to seven men, and that they have all perished in the nuptial chamber.

“ Now I am the only son of my father, and I fear lest, in entering, I may share the fate of the others ; for a demon loves her, and does evil only to those that approach her : now, therefore, I fear lest I should die.”

But Raphael reassured him :

“ Those who enter into marriage in such a manner as to banish God from their heart and mind, and think only to satisfy their desires like horses and asses, are in the power of the demon. But do you, Tobias, having married this girl, enter into her chamber and live with her in continence for three days, and think of naught else but to pray to God with her.”

He further instructed the timorous bridegroom that by burning in a brazier the liver of the fish which they had picked up on the bank of the Tigris he would cause the jealous Asmodeus to flee.

Tobias, being reassured, married Sarah. Shut up with her in the nuptial chamber, he informed her of the angel’s advice :

“ Sarah, arise and let us pray to God, to-day, to-morrow, and the day following. During these

three days we must unite ourselves with God, for we are children of the Saints, and we should not marry like the Pagans, who know not God.”

Overcome by the virtue of the prayer and the smell of the burnt liver, the demon fled, leaving the spouses in peace, and on the following morning Tobias showed himself to the astonished Raguel, who during the night had dug an eighth grave in his garden; for he was a prudent man, and submissive to the divine will.

Tobias took Sarah, his wife, to Nineveh. What was left of the fish's liver restored the sight of old Tobias.

The Jew who wrote the story was following a Babylonian legend of prodigious antiquity, which certain German scholars have nearly reconstituted. Therein one sees a little white being, which is a dead man's soul, accompanying on a long and perilous voyage the man who has performed for him the duties of sepulture. It is agreed that the living and the dead shall share the profits of the voyage. A beautiful young girl having become part of these profits, the division becomes a delicate matter. How the travellers arranged the matter I know not. M. Renan, who one day told us of this Babylonian adventure, has not finished his story. I do not know whether this was by a skilful artifice, like that of Scheherazade, or whether the Chaldean manuscript finished abruptly.

M. Maurice Bouchor has versified this venerable and child-like tale for the marionettes and has put it into dialogue. He has attacked the task with a happy simplicity, wholly unaffected, and has produced a unique mixture of drollery and enthusiasm. His poem has delighted us all; one hardly knows what to call it, but it is delicious. The poet passes

from broad joyousness to sublime lyricism with that facility, as of a drunken demi-god, which astonishes and amazes us when we read Aristophanes or Rabelais.

How has he managed to combine Biblical poetry with the humour of a rhymer who has dined well? I do not know, and never shall know, at the bottom of what particular bottle the poet found this extraordinary mixture of wisdom and folly; I shall never know in what dream he heard this unprecedented concert of harps, psalteries, and cooking-pots. I only know that we laugh and are touched—that we laugh yet again and again we are touched.

Whenever M. Maurice Bouchor makes the archangel speak, we hear the grave pure voice of ancient Israel.

Raphael replies to the young Tobias, who asks whether he may lawfully love the virgin Sarah, who like himself is of the seed of Naphtali :

. . . Cet amour est permis.

Mais, ô candide enfant, si l'Éternel a mis  
 Dans l'âme et dans le corps des vierges tant de grâce,  
 Ce n'est pas seulement pour un plaisir qui passe.  
 Vous devez—et l'amour rend bien doux ce devoir—  
 Perpétuer la race élue, afin de voir  
 Vos filles et fils, concus parmi la joie,  
 Grandir pour le Seigneur, et marcher dans sa voie.  
 Il faut que sur la bouche en fleur des épouses  
 La prière du soir chante avec les baisers.  
 Enfant, le mariage est une sainte chose.  
 Afin que le regard de l'Éternel se pose  
 Avec tranquillité sur l'épouse et l'époux,  
 Gardez bien la pudeur comme un voile entre vous.\*

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\* . . . This love is permitted.

But, innocent youth, if the Everlasting has placed



There is the same sweet gravity in the counsel given by Raphael to the bridal pair in respect of this nuptial night, which for seven husbands has been an eternal one :

Passez en prières ferventes

La nuit qui va venir, nuit pleine d'épouvantes ;  
 Que les subtils parfums, les musiques de l'air,  
 Ne vous entraînent pas aux œuvres de la chair ;  
 Et l'ange du Seigneur, pour vous tirant son glaive,  
 Dont vous ne verrez point les spirales de feu,  
 Chassera l'être impur et rendra gloire à Dieu.\*

M. Maurice Bouchor has not taken the jealous Asmodeus seriously. He makes him absolutely ridiculous, alleging that the Bible itself allotted

In the souls and bodies of virgins so much grace,  
 It is not merely for a passing pleasure.  
 You ought—and love renders this duty very sweet—  
 To perpetuate the race of the Elect, that you may see  
 Your sons and daughters, conceived in joy,  
 Grow up for the Lord, and walk in His paths.  
 On the flowering lips of the bridal pair  
 Kisses must mingle with the evening prayer.  
 My son, marriage is a holy sacrament.  
 That the eye of the Almighty may rest  
 With tranquillity on the husband and his bride,  
 Preserve your modesty as a veil between you.

\*

Pass in fervent prayers

The night to come, a night so full of fears ;  
 Beware lest subtle perfumes or musical strains  
 Lead you away to the works of the flesh ;  
 And the Angel of the Lord, for you drawing his sword,  
 Whose spirals of fire you shall never behold,  
 Will drive away the foul being, and give glory to God.

a fairly comic rôle to the love-sick demon, who in this story is something like the gardener's dog. It is to the point to remember that Tobias is not a canonical book. Moreover, the author has taken many liberties with Asmodeus. For lack of two readers in his troupe capable of speaking the two rôles of Asmodeus and the fish—for the fish speaks—he imagines that the fish is none other than Asmodeus himself. It is not the first time in the theatre that a necessity of this kind has produced a beauty which has been attributed to the unfettered genius of the author. And had M. Maurice Bouchor, who is candour itself, not given his reasons, I should have attributed this identification to his profound wisdom.

This Asmodeus whom we are laughing at was, in his time, an important demon, more powerful than Ashtaroth, Cedin, Uriel, Beelzebub, Aborym, Azazel, Dagon, Magog, Magon, Isaacharum, Accaron, Orphaxat or Beherit, who are nevertheless devils not to be despised. He had women for his accomplices. It was in this that lay his power in this world, especially among the white peoples. The demonologists say that he may be recognized by the fact that one of his legs is like a cock's leg. The other is ordinary, but provided with claws. His portrait, drawn by Collin de Plancy, was approved by the Archbishop of Paris. Still, I doubt whether it is a good likeness.

It is further known that Asmodeus adopted various forms to appear before men; the Angel Gabriel bound him in a cavern on the Nile, where the unfortunate demon long remained. For he was still there in 1707, when a Rouen goldsmith called Paul Lucas, going up the Nile to Fayoum,

saw and spoke to him, as he assures us in the story of his voyage, which was published in 1719, and forms three volumes in 12mo with maps and drawings. Few facts are better attested. None the less, this fact is embarrassing. For it is certain, on the other hand, that he was in Loudun on 29th May, 1624; he wrote on that day, in the register of the Church of Sainte-Croix, a declaration by which he engaged to torment Mme de Belciel, whom, in fact, he did torment. The document is preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale, in the department of manuscripts, where anyone may see it. It is equally certain that in 1635, in the same town of Loudun, he possessed Sister Agnes, who was seized with convulsions in the presence of the Duc d'Orléans. She refused to kiss the pyx, and twisted herself so that her head touched her feet, and she formed a perfect circle. Meanwhile she uttered horrible blasphemies. At this period Asmodeus appeared before the Bishop of Poitiers, and as Paul Lucas found him in Egypt, seventy-two years later, it must be supposed that the devil left his cavern whenever he pleased, and that the Angel Gabriel did not tie him up well.

Besides, we must not forget that St. Augustine explains the method by which demons may be bound or unbound. According to him these terms signify that they lose or regain the power of hurting mankind. *Alligatio diaboli est non permitti*, etc.

After Colbert's edict forbidding devils to torment ladies, Asmodeus appeared in France only in the excellent company of Le Sage, the author of *Gil Blas*. He lost his theology here, but he became a man of wit. He was then playing a rather low

game, but it was at least a cheerful one. The following is how he explained his profession :

“ I arrange ridiculous marriages ; I unite grey-beards with minors, masters with servants, and ill-dowered girls with tender lovers who have no fortune. I am he that introduced into society extravagance, debauchery, games of chance and chemistry. I am the inventor of tournaments, dances, music, comedy, and all the new French fashions . . . I am the demon of lewdness, or to put it more splendidly, the god Cupid.”

The test imposed on the young married couple Sarah and Tobias was reduced by M. Maurice Bouchor from three nights to one, in consideration for the art of the theatre, which requires that the circumstances be compressed into a short space of time. Like our poet, Asmodeus prides himself on being literary, and he is imbued with the ideas of our dear Master Francisque Sarcey on the “ situation ” and the “ art of preparation.”

Being invisible to Sarah and Tobias, he enters with them into the nuptial chamber, in order to tempt them, and he announces his design publicly as follows :

Messieurs, vous voyez, c'est bien la scène à faire.  
 Prendrai-je ces amants dans mes rêts ténébreux ?  
 Je n'en sais rien. Ils ont un archange pour eux !  
 Dieu même, là-dessus, pense des choses vagues ;  
 Ou bien le libre arbitre est la pire des blagues.  
 Mais tout cela, messieurs, j'ai dû vous le narrer,  
 Puisque l'art du théâtre est l'art de préparer.\*

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\* Gentlemen, you see the situation.  
 Shall I take these two lovers in my shadowy toils ?  
 I know not. They have an archangel on their side !  
 God himself, up yonder, is thinking indeterminate things ;  
 Or else free will is the worst of frauds,  
 But all this, gentlemen, I ought to have told you,  
 Since the art of the theatre is the art of preparation.

I beg my dear master, Sarcey, to consider whether this is not a true situation? Asmodeus loves Sarah; he loves her "lustfully"—the poet has said so. Now the poor devil has no power over his rival, so long as the latter prays to God on his knees. In order to overcome him he is compelled to render him susceptible to the beauty of Sarah, and this susceptibility, which he himself has inspired, causes him the acutest suffering directly it manifests itself. The most delightful feature in M. Maurice Bouchor's treatment of this scene is the contrast between this buffoon of a sensual devil and the two chaste children.

It is full of a singular grace and a pleasant fancy. The other night, on leaving the little theatre in the Passage Vivienne, with my soul intoxicated by this poetry of a mystical wine-bibber, my eyes full of the little marionettes, as charming as Tanagra statuettes, beholding once more the dream landscapes drawn for these distinguished puppets by Georges Rochegrosse, Henri Lerolle, and Lucien Doucet, my ears delighted by listening to verses spoken by poets—for they are real poets who speak for M. Signoret's puppets—being thoroughly happy, I thought of the beautiful wedding-scene of those pious spouses, who seemed, in the ancient law, the prototypes of Christian spouses. All at once the recollection of the story of the "two lovers of Auvergne" came into my head. Let me tell it you: it is exquisite. I reproduce it very much as it is found in Grégoire de Tours, who doubtless found it in some ancient hagiography. As will be seen, a single circumstance is drawn from another source.

## THE STORY OF THE TWO LOVERS OF AUVERGNE

In those days—in the fourth century of the Christian era—young Injuriousus, the only son of a senator of Auvergne—for it was thus that the municipal officers were named—asked in marriage a young girl called Scolastica, like himself the only child of a senator. She was given to him. The marriage ceremony being over, he took her home, and made her share his bed. But she sadly turned her face to the wall, and wept bitterly.

He asked her :

“ I beg you to tell me what is troubling you ? ”

And as she maintained silence, he added :  
“ I beg you in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, to tell me clearly what are your griefs ? ”

Then she turned towards him.

“ Were I to weep all the days of my life,” she said,  
“ I should not shed sufficient tears to wash away the sorrow which fills my soul. I had resolved to guard this poor feeble flesh, and to offer my virginity to Jesus Christ. Woe is me, that He has abandoned me, and I cannot accomplish that which I longed to do ! Would that I had never seen the day ! Here am I, divorced from the Heavenly Bridegroom who promised me Paradise for a marriage portion, and married to a mortal ; this head which should have been crowned with immortal roses, is decked, or rather dishonoured, with these already faded ! Alas, this body, which should have worn the stole of purity at the fourfold stream of the Lamb, bears as a vile burden the nuptial veil. Why was not the first day of my life the last ? Happy had I been had I crossed the threshold of death before I

tasted milk ! and if the kisses of my kind nurses had been deposited on my coffin ! When you hold out your arms to me, I think of the hands which were pierced with nails for the world's salvation."

As she finished speaking, she wept bitterly.

The young man answered her gently :

"Scolastica, our parents, who are noble and rich among the Arverni, have only you for a daughter, and myself for a son. They wished to unite us, to perpetuate their family, fearing lest after their death a stranger may inherit their property."

But Scolastica answered :

"The world is nothing ; wealth is nothing ; and even this life is nothing. Is it to live merely to await death ? Those only live who drink the light and taste the angelic joy of possessing God in eternal blessedness."

Touched by grace, Injurius exclaimed :

"Words sweet and clear ! The light of eternal life shines in my eyes ! Scolastica, if you wish to keep to your promise, I will dwell chaste with you."

Half reassured, and already smiling through her tears, she said :

"Injurius, it is very difficult for a man to grant such a thing to a woman. But if you act so that we live without stain in this world you shall share the dowry promised me by my Lord and Bridegroom, Jesus Christ."

Strengthened by the sign of the Cross, he said :

"I will do what you wish."

Then, hand in hand, they fell asleep.

Thenceforth they shared the same bed in unparalleled chastity.

After ten years of trial, Scolastica died. In accordance with the customs of the time, she was

carried into the basilica in festival dress, her face uncovered, to the singing of psalms, and was followed by all the people. Kneeling beside her, Injuriousus in a loud voice spoke as follows :

“ I give thanks, Lord Jesus, that you have given me the strength to preserve this treasure intact.”

On these words the dead woman raised herself from her funeral bier, smiled, and murmured softly :

“ My friend, why do you say what is not asked of you ? ”

She then fell back once more into eternal sleep.

Injuriousus shortly followed her and died. He was buried close by her in the Basilica of Saint Allire. The very first night he rested there a miraculous rose, rising out of the grave of his virgin spouse, enveloped the two graves in its flowering embrace. The following day the people saw them to be united by chains of roses. Recognizing by this sign the holiness of the blessed Injuriousus and Scolastica, the priests of Auvergne marked these graves for the veneration of the faithful. But there were still Pagans in the province evangelized by the Saints Allire and Nepotien. One of them, by name Silvanus, venerated the fountains of the Nymphs, hung pictures on the branches of an old oak tree, and kept by his hearth little clay figures representing the sun and the goddess-mothers.

Half-hidden in the foliage, the god of gardens protected his orchard. Silvanus employed his old age in writing poems. He composed eclogues and elegies in a rather stiff style, but of an ingenious turn, and whenever he got the opportunity he would introduce therein verses of the ancients.



Having visited the burial-place of the Christian spouses with the crowd, the good man much admired the rose tree which bloomed over their tombs. As he was, in his own way, pious, he recognized a heavenly sign. But he attributed the prodigy to his gods, and had no doubt but that the rose tree bloomed by the will of Eros.

“Sad Scolastica,” he said, “now that she is no more than a vain shadow, regrets the time of love and lost pleasures. The emerging roses, which speak on her behalf, say: ‘Love, you who live. This prodigy teaches us to taste the joys of Life, while there is yet time.’”

So thought this simple Pagan. He composed on the subject an elegy which I discovered by the greatest chance in the public library of Tarascon, on the cover of a nineteenth century Bible, numbered: Michel Chasles fund, Fn 7439, 17 bis. This precious leaf, which had so far escaped the notice of scholars, includes no less than eighty-four lines in cursive Merovingian, fairly legible, which should date from the seventh century. The text begins with the following verse:

*Nunc piget: et quæris, quod non aut ista voluntas  
Tunc fuit . . .*

and ends with the following:

*Stringamus mæsti carminis obsequio.*

I shall not fail to publish the text when I have completed the reading of it. And I have not the slightest doubt but that M. Léopold Delisle will take upon himself the duty of presenting this invaluable document to the Academy of Inscriptions.

## JOSEPHIN PÉLADAN\*



JOSEPHIN PÉLADAN is an occultist and a Magian. This is a little embarrassing for me. I know not what to answer when a man talks of "pentaculating the arcana of supreme love." According to M. Péladan's own definition, the Magian is the great harmonist, the sovereign master of the body, the soul and the mind. This definition does not encourage me to discuss him with honest freedom, familiarly, and in complete frankness, according to the privileges conferred by the trade of letters. Besides, I must admit it: he inspires me with acute jealousy.

It must be amusing to be a Magian. One commands Nature, and floats freely in space in an astral body. I do not believe that the most Magian of the Magians does all that he says, but it is indeed a joy to merely dream of such marvels. I feel sure that M. Joséphin Péladan suffers from illusions, and that he lives in a wonderful dream. Happy, thrice happy, this magic sleeper! It is only regrettable that during his sleep he has contracted a too lofty contempt for vulgar reality. Human society inspires him with insurmountable disgust. For instance, he cannot conceive how people can be

\* *La victoire du mari*, avec commémoration de Jules Barbey d'Aurévilly (Ethopée VI de la décadence latine).

interested in the security and the fame of their land.

Magian as he is, he will permit me to express my sincere regrets. This disdain of tasks imposed by the very nature of things, this detachment from the simplest and most august duties, is to-day only too common among our younger literary men. These refined people find patriotism a little vulgar. It is true that it is, without any doubt, the sentiment which has inspired the greatest amount of stupidity and ugliness, and deformities, because there is no other sentiment so easily accessible to imbeciles. But in a refined soul this religion lends itself to all the delicacies, and even accommodates itself to a certain degree of smartness. Let these gentlemen try! Let them love their country, as she is willing to be loved, and they will soon see how to put into this love the subtleties of modern æsthetics. M. Joséphin Péladan speaks with admiration of the old Florentines. They loved Florence. Auguste Barbier boasts of the Catholic painter who fell asleep in death "thinking of his city." Those great Italians, poets, painters, and philosophers all lived and died in that thought. We have an image of the Italian soul in the Middle Ages in good St. Francis, with his last breath, blessing his town of Assisi. Yet they were subtle minds. No, it is unworthy of M. Joséphin Péladan's talent to believe that patriotism should be left to the vulgar, as a relic of barbarism.

It is perhaps no wiser to abuse democracy, and that is what the new school is fond of doing. In his rich vocabulary M. Joséphin Péladan has no terms strong enough to denounce what he calls "the putrid equality inaugurated in 1789."

He is proud, and has not a simple heart. He suffers from being jostled by the crowd. He loathes the vulgar for being vulgar, which is nevertheless in the order of things, and according to nature. And how can he fail to see that his pride lowers him by these contemptible puerilities? What good does it do him to insult the gigantic effort of modern society, which has striven for the last hundred years to organize itself on a fair and rational basis? I am willing that he should not admire this great movement, but continue to worship the forms of the past. Still, he ought to feel that such transformations have in them something vast and inevitable. What did the Middle Ages, which he is always holding up to admiration, and which he exclusively admires—what did the magnificent thirteenth century accomplish, except what we are ourselves undertaking to-day, namely, the best possible organization of society?

Its work lasted some hundreds of years, during which life was, if not happy, at least endurable, and this is reason enough for us to speak respectfully of the feudal world, which spread majestically like the royal oak of Vincennes. The house had been built with great effort. It was a lofty battlemented house, flanked by towers. Our ancestors lived therein; but the day came when it crumbled hopelessly. Another had to be built. In spite of the fastidious, it was necessary to use plaster. This was done. The edifice is doubtless lacking in distinguished symmetry; it does not abound in symbolic statues; so far as my taste is concerned, I find it rather commonplace. But it is possible to live therein, and that is the great point. Was the old one perfect? I believe that in your eyes its greatest

merit is that it no longer exists. It is an artistic joy to live by imagination in the past ; but the truth must be told, that the charms of the past exist only in our dreams, and that in reality the olden days, whose poetry we breathe with pleasure, were, when new, filled with the commonplace and sadness of all things through which flows human life. I believe that M. Joséphin Péladan, both in his loves and hates, is the victim of his artistic imagination. It is true that his politics are exactly the same as those of Gregory VII. He is all for sacerdotalism versus the Empire. This violent theocrat supports the claim that the stone conferred the diadem on Peter, who gave it to Rodolphus. *Petra dedit Petro*, etc. But M. Joséphin Péladan does not consider that Gregory VII failed, and that he is dead.

M. Péladan affirms that " Catholic thought is the only thought which is not a sterile sham." He is a Catholic after the type of Barbey d'Aurévilly, that is, he is full of pride. In an eloquent notice consecrated to the memory of one whom he regarded as a forefather and a master, he bitterly reproached the Archbishop of Paris for not having followed with all his clergy the coffin of the author of *Diaboliques*. He has erected old Barbey as a Father of the Church, and holds him to be the last Confessor of the Faith. A curious and highly fantastic opinion !

Chance a short time ago placed in my hands a recent number of a magazine published by the Jesuits. Without flattering myself, and merely to mention it in passing, I was very roughly handled therein. The reverend fathers treated me without gentleness, just as they treated Father Gratry and Father Lacordaire. I also found an article in which

Barbey d'Aurévilly, on the other hand, was highly approved. He was greatly praised for having professed, in several articles, the most Roman species of Catholicism, and for having insulted M. Ernest Renan, which was an act of piety. However, he was also reproached for levity, heedlessness, and ignorance of the catechism. It will be seen that the little fathers do not regard Barbey d'Aurévilly from exactly the same point of view as does M. Péladan. I do not hesitate for a moment in declaring that the little fathers are right. Barbey d'Aurévilly was a very compromising Catholic. M. Joséphin Péladan is very dangerous to those whom he protects. It may be that he blasphemes less than the old doctor of *Diaboliques*, since, for the latter, blasphemy was a supreme act of faith. But he is more sensual and prouder. He has a greater taste for sin. Add to this that he is a Platonist and a Magian, that he is continually mixing up black books with the Gospel, that he is haunted by the idea of the hermaphrodite, which inspires his books, and that he sincerely believes that he deserves a cardinal's hat! All this will seem strange. But anyhow, common sense is for an artist a secondary consideration, and M. Joséphin Péladan is an artist. If you will, he is absurd, and as mad as you please. None the less, he is full of talent.

Along with horrible defects, and a perfectly impossible style, he is a born writer, and a master of phrases. He has colour and movement. If his noisy manias are overlooked, and if we forgive him his passion for inventing verbs like *luner*, *rener*, *ceinturer*, pages of magnificent poetry will be found here and there in his last book.

I must tell you about this book. It is a sort of

magic poem, in which the episodes would appear absurd were they coldly presented, and if the marvellous style did not support the marvellous subject-matter. It is about two lovers: Adar, a young Magian, like M. Péladan himself, “*saturnien vénusé*,” and a foundling girl, the marvellous Izel—brought up by a Roman priest—in whom nature has attained the perfection of Florentine statuary. This exquisite couple spends its burning honeymoon at Bayreuth, during one of the theatrical seasons devoted to Wagner, which M. Péladan compares to the truce of God invented by Catholic charity in the Middle Ages. There the desire of Izel and Adar, excited by the sensual mysticism of the duet in *Tristan and Yseult*, uncoils itself like a divine malady, explodes in nervous crises, becomes a Nirvana of love, a Buddhistic eroticism, a euthanesia. All this part of the book is full of a mystic sensualism whose character is sufficiently expressed in a kind of hymn, strangely and profoundly poetical, which celebrates the rehabilitation of the flesh in a Christian manner. I will quote the extract, not in its entirety, but suppressing a few forms too peculiar to M. Péladan’s style, which would have embarrassed ill-prepared readers. It is a terrible point about Magians that their works are esoteric, and not to be understood except by the initiated.

These are the prose stanzas :

O chair calomniée, chair admirable et triste, étroite compagne  
de notre cœur dolent, dolente comme lui—plus que lui pitoyable,  
O toi qui pourriras.

Si tu n’es que d’un jour, si tu n’es que d’une heure, glorieux est  
ce jour, féconde cette heure. . . .

Ce sont les yeux qui lisent les symboles avant l’esprit.

Ce sont les mains qui peinent et qui prient.

Ce sont les pieds qui montent.

Tu m'as fait malheureuse ; Dieu juste, fais-moi grande ; le Beau pour moi, c'est le Salut.\*

It is M. Péladan's business to reconcile the glorification of the flesh with the Christianity he professes. I have only to point out the graceful melancholy of this artistic and poetic prose.

After the Bayreuth season Adar and Izel go to Nuremberg, to seek impressions of the past. In that town, where time appears to have stood still, and which exhibits untouched the forms of the strange and familiar life of its forefathers, Izel's attitude no longer expresses voluptuous idealism. The pure Florentine bronze walks wantonly like the little brass fifteenth-century figures, which, in their distorted ingenuity, are the joy of amateurs. One night, by moonlight, as he was dreaming at his window, Dr. Sexthental saw on the wall the shadow of a pretty leg, while Izel was putting on her garter. No great harm in this, considering the age and appearance of the Doctor, who has dried up amid his books. But what adds a singular gravity to the adventure is that Meister Sexthental is a very powerful Magian, who can, at will, quit his corporeal body, and pass in his astral body through the

\* O calumniated flesh, O wonderful, melancholy flesh, close companion of our suffering heart, and like it suffering,—more than it to be pitied, O thou that wilt decay.

If thou art only of a day, if thou art only of an hour, glorious is that day, fruitful that hour. . . .

These are the eyes that read the symbols, before the spirit. . . .

These are the hands that toil and pray.

These are the feet that climb.

Thou hast made me unhappy ; just God, make me great ; in Beauty, for me, lies Salvation.



thickest walls. Now the shadow of a foot on the wall has filled him with love. As an incubus he will satisfy his passion. It is well known that a woman is helpless against an incubus. Izel succumbs in his invisible arms. Thenceforth the infamous doctor, Sexthental, stands between her and Adar, to whom she had been so devoted. I will not tell you how Adar finds in magic science the means to kill the incubus at Izel's feet. Having thus avenged his honour he believes that he has regained his wife. But he is wholly possessed by the occult. Eternally bent over his furnaces, he buries himself in nameless researches ; the thirst for knowledge devours him. Izel wearies, and becomes estranged from him. He pursues his work, a stranger to his surroundings, when he suddenly learns that Izel, tired of solitude and neglect, is ready to give herself to a lover who adores her. This time Adar wakes up. He renounces Science to return to Love. He sets about the reconquest of Izel whilst there is yet time.

For the last time he invokes the spirits of the air, whom his art holds bound, but this time it is that they may aid him to regain the wife whom he has lost by his own fault, whose appearance he is now awaiting, and whom he will surprise like a secret lover.

I transcribe the magnificent invocation almost complete. The page is nearly faultless :

O nature, mère indulgente, pardonne ! Ouvre ton sein au fils prodigue et las.

J'ai voulu déchirer les voiles que tu mets sur la douleur de vivre, et je me suis blessé au mystère. . . . Œdipe, à mi-chemin de deviner l'énigme, jeune Faust qui regrette déjà la vie simple et du cœur, j'arrive repentant, réconcilié, ô menteuse si douce !

Fais ton charme, produis les mirages ; je viens m'agenouiller devant ton imposture, et demander ma place de dupe heureuse. Vous,

forces sidérales, qui m'avez obéi, Ariels, mes hérauts, je viens vous délivrer. J'abdique le pentacle august du macrocosme; ma double étoile est éclipsée; vous êtes libres, gnomes, sylphes, ondines et salamandres.

Une dernière fois, servez celui qui vous libère, Élémentals, larves de mon pouvoir! Avant de vous dissoudre un verbe, un verbe encore!

Sylphes nocturnes, phalènes du désir, agacez-la du velours de vos ailes, celle qui va venir. . . .

Rosée de minuit, humidité des fleurs, susurrement de l'eau, fluence du nuage, et buée de la lune! O douce pollution de la nature en rêve, baptise de désir celle qui va venir!\*

Does not this invocation recall the farewell of Prospero to the magic world?

Ye elves of hills, brooks, standing lakes and groves;  
And ye that on the sands with printless foot  
Do chase the ebbing Neptune, and do fly him  
When he comes back; you demi-puppets that

\* O Nature, indulgent mother, pardon! Open thy bosom to a weary and prodigal son!

I sought to tear away the veils which thou hast drawn over the sorrow of living, and I am wounded in the mystery. . . . Like Œdipus, half-way to guessing the enigma, like young Faust, already regretting the innocent life of the heart, I come repentant and reconciled, O sweet deceiver!

Work your charm, produce the mirage; I come to kneel before your imposture, to demand my place as a happy dupe. Ye sidereal forces that have obeyed me, Ariels, my heralds, I have set ye free. I resign my august pentacle of the macrocosm; my double star is eclipsed; ye are free, gnomes, sylphs, undines and salamanders!

One last time, serve him who frees you, Elementals, offspring of my power! Before dismissing you, only one word more!

Nocturnal sylphs, butterflies of desire, stroke her with your velvet wings, her that shall come. . . .

Midnight dew, moisture of the flowers, murmuring water, fleeting clouds, and vapours of the Moon! O sweet pollution of dreaming Nature, baptize with desire her that is about to come!

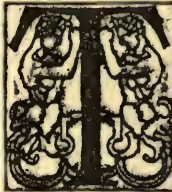
By moonshine do the green sour ringlets make  
 Whereof the ewe not bites ; and you whose pastime  
 Is to make midnight mushrooms ; that rejoice  
 To hear the solemn curfew : . . .

. . . But this rough magic  
 I here abjure ; and when I have requir'd  
 Some heavenly music—which even now I do—  
 To work mine end upon their senses, that  
 This airy charm is for, I'll break my staff,  
 Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,  
 And deeper than did ever plummet sound  
 I'll drown my book.

One must take these books of M. Péladan for what they are ; fairy tales, lacking in reason but full of poetry. The fairies sometimes appear very complicated ; they are wanting in simplicity, purity and good nature. It is the fault of the author, who is eloquent and magnificent to excess. It is also our fault. A simpler marvel would have seemed insipid, and we should have felt bored by the tale of Aladdin, for instance, or of the three blind Calendars.

## CONCERNING JOAN OF ARC\*

### I



HERE is a sentiment of piety which daily draws spectators, I was about to say the faithful, to the theatre where the "mystery" of Joan of Arc is performed. By the powerful and subconscious exaltation of popular thought Joan is little by little becoming the Patron Saint of France. A tender religion makes us communicate in her; the account of her miracles and her passion is a gospel in which we all believe. Her virtues are upon us.

She stands for Example, Hope, and Consolation. Divided as we are in opinion and belief, we are all reconciled in her. She reunites us all under that banner which led to victory knights and artisans, and so does the sweet maid achieve the accomplishment of her mission. She is the keystone of alliance; in her all things signify union and brotherhood.

The simplicity of her Christian faith touches those of us who have remained sincere Catholics, while her independence before the theologians recommends her to minds which profess a free

\* This was written regarding the performances of M. Jules Barbier's drama at the first St. Martin theatre. Since then M. Joseph Fabre has given us a "mystery" of Joan, which is truer and more touching.

examination of the Scriptures. For it is hardly an exaggeration to state that she is at once the last mystic, and the first reformer, and that she holds out one hand to St. Francis of Assisi in the past, and the other to Luther in the future.

She was above all things simple : she always remained so close to Nature that those who believe only in Nature smile on this field flower, this fresh, wild, fragrant growth ; yet she is still the joy of those whose philosophy distrusts appearances, and fears that all is illusion.

The loyalty with which she served her king goes straight to the heart of the very few who mourn the old monarchy. She lived, fought and died for France, and that is what renders her dear to us all without distinction. Poor and of humble birth, she did that which the rich and great had failed to do. In glory and victory she loved the humble as her brothers ; on that account she is sweet and sacred to us. Our modern democracy cannot but venerate the memory of her who said : " I have been sent for the consolation of the poor and miserable." *Dicens quod erat missa pro consolatione pauperum et indigentium.*

That is not all. There were in her delightful contrasts which make her beloved of all ; she was a warrior, and she was kind ; she was an illuminate, and she was sensible ; she was a woman of the people, and a good knight ; in the sacred fairy-tale which is her history, the shepherdess becomes a handsome Saint Michael. Like her patrons, Jesus and St. Francis of Assisi, she brings down Heaven to Earth ; she brings into the world the dream of Innocence overcoming Evil, and the triumph of Justice. She is the favourite of believers and of the

simple, of artists devoted to symbolism, and of the fastidious who seek the complete and perfect form.

This is what is vaguely felt by the crowd which nightly listens to the drama, or as we said, the mystery of Joan of Arc ; I believe that word is used in the advertisement. Between ourselves, M. Jules Barbier was perhaps not the right poet to write the mystery of Joan of Arc. I should have preferred something simpler, more ingenuous, with a more mystical and religious tone. I should have preferred a finer brush, dipped in the gold and ultramarine of the old illuminators. I used to imagine all the wealth of a church's treasury on a drawing rather slight in its purity. I used to dream of the perfume of hyssop, and the sound of celestial harps. I used to dream of saints who were ladies and angels playing the lute, all in the style of the fifteenth century, whose art reminds one of a forest in bud. In short, what did I not dream ? Above all, I should have loved to see Joan under the Fairy Tree. It was a beech ; I have often thought about it ; a marvellous beech which cast a great and beautiful shadow. It was called the Fairies' or the Ladies' Tree, for the fairies were ladies as much as the saints ; but ladies magnificently dressed, and not wearing a heavy gold crown like St. Catherine. They preferred to be crowned with flowers. Now, this beech was very old, handsome, and venerable. It was also called the Tree of the Loges-les-Dames, the "arbre charminé" the Fairy Tree of Bourlemont, and the Beautiful May. Like all divinities, great and small, it had many names, because it inspired many thoughts. It grew near a fountain called the Fountain of the Currant-bush, where in days gone by the

fairies had bathed, and a virtue had remained in its waters: they that drank thereof were cured of fever. This is why it was also called the good fountain Aux-Fées-Notre-Seigneur, a sweet and happy name which placed under the protection of Jesus the little supernatural people whom his Apostles had so roughly attacked, without being able to drive them from their forests and their native springs.

Not far from the spring and the tree, hidden under a hazel-bush, a mandrake used to sing. All rustic magic was united in this little bit of land; there, with the leaves and flowers, an innocent paganism was continually reborn.

Every year, on the fourth Sunday in Lent, or Fountain Sunday, the boys and girls of the village used to go in a party to eat bread and nuts under the Fairy Tree; then they drank of the Currant-bush Fountain, whose water is good only for the sick; the fairies have more than one secret. Joan's godmother, of the same name, the wife of Aubery, the mayor, had with her own eyes seen the mysterious ladies, and said so to all comers. Yet she was a good, respectable woman, neither a diviner nor a sorceress.

One of these fairies had a lover, the Knight of Bourlemont. She used to meet him in the evenings. Fairies are women, and have weaknesses. A romance was made of the loves of the fairy and the knight, and another of Joan's godmothers, whose husband was a clerk at Neufchâteau, had heard this marvelous story read, which doubtless resembled the well-known story of Mélusine. The fairies had their reception day; when it was desired to see them secretly one went on a Thursday. But they showed themselves little. Old Beatrice, a good Christian of Domrémy, used to say innocently:

“ I have heard tell that in the old days the fairies visited the tree. On account of our sins they come no more.”

On the eve of Ascension Day, when the crosses are carried in procession through the fields, the Curé of Domrémy used to go to the Fairy Tree and the Currant-bush Fountain, where he sang the gospel of St. John. Was this to exorcize the tree and spring? Or was he, unknown to himself, renewing the old pagan rites? It is impossible to unravel the truth in such a mixture of ingenuous beliefs. All the same, I think the priest was driving away the fairies.

Like the rest, once a year Joan “ did her fountains,” as it was called. There was song and dance and something to eat. With her companions, she hung garlands of flowers on the branches of the sacred beech. She was unaware that she thus renewed the practices of her pagan ancestors, who sacrificed to fountains, trees, and stones, and embellished the trunks of antique oaks with pictures and votive statuettes. She knew not that she was imitating Gaulish virgins, prophetesses like herself. Truth to tell, nothing touches me so much as this unconscious paganism. Our mystery, which would not in the least resemble that of M. Jules Barbier, would begin by showing Joan, as the young girl of the fields, the eternal Chloe, celebrating the eternal worship of Nature.

In this mystery, of which I dream, and which will remain an unknown masterpiece, the fairies would speak.

For the pleasure of those who would like to hear them, let us state that a clever poet has already made them speak at the edge of the Currant-bush Fountain; we may recall that in M. Ernest Prarond’s



*La voie sacrée* we hear the alternate songs of saints and fairies. Why should not we in our turn try to express in rhythmic words the secret thoughts of these ladies of the tree and spring, of these nymphs and dryads whose souls, in spite of their châtelaines' attire and the dainty affection that so well becomes the beautiful lovers of the Knight of Bourlemont, remain true to the past?

They said to Joan:

"See, Jeannette, the earth is in flower and the sky is bright; Nature is sweet to thee; be sweet to Nature. Love. Believe in the fairies. Love. It is we that make the hawthorn bloom over the decomposed bodies of the dead. All passes. Except for pleasure, all is illusion. Believe in our eternal youth. Love. Nothing in the world is worth a sacrifice. We laughed at the old hermit who came to exorcize us in the reign of King Dagobert. We are the trembling of the leaves, the moonbeam, the perfume of flowers, the voluptuousness of everything, the intoxication of the senses, the thrill of life, the trouble of the flesh and of the blood. . . . Thou art beautiful, Jeannette. Thy youth is in flower. Love!"

Thus would speak the fairies, and they would be seen to float in the air, like mists which rise in the meadows on a summer's eve. But St. Catherine and St. Margaret would appear at the fountain's edge, shining like the figures in a stained-glass window, and carrying crowns of gold. They would say:

"Joan, be a good girl!"

Our mystery would follow the Chronicles step by step. But all the imagery blooming in human thought, all the forms of our dreams, our fears and hopes, would take shape and speak in the dress of the

fifteenth century. There would be seen God the Father, dressed as an Emperor, the Virgin Mary, angels, the theological virtues, the Sibyl of Cumæ, Deborah, Lucifer, the seven cardinal sins, all the devils, and lastly the earth, heaven, and hell. Thousands of scenes would lead us in a hundred and one days to the stake at Rouen. If it is absolutely necessary to be just, I do not find fault with M. Jules Barbier for not having conceived his work on this plan. To begin with, he could not; it is too difficult. And further, if he had succeeded in accomplishing the impossible it could not have been played, which would have been a pity. We should not have seen Madame Sarah Bernhardt as Joan of Arc, in which she is poetry itself. She bears upon her that radiance as of a stained-glass window which the apparition of the Saints had bestowed—or so we imagine—on the beautiful visionary of Domrémy.

## 2

Madame Sarah Bernhardt is a combination of idealized life and exquisite archaism; she is an animated legend. If at moments her beautiful voice seemed weak, it was the fault of the poem—I believe “poem” is the term employed in the language of the theatre.

Had the simple truth been more closely followed, Madame Sarah Bernhardt would never have had to raise her voice to utter violent tirades. Joan never declaimed. Many of her speeches have been handed down to us; they are sometimes of heroic brevity, at others of smiling subtlety. None lend themselves to a loud voice. Those who heard her speak say that she had a sweet voice, that of a young

girl. On this subject I will quote an interesting page from a recent book, the *Jeanne d'Arc* of the much regretted Henri Blaze de Bury. It is a history written in perfect good faith, in a strange and poetical style, with an enthusiasm which never tires because it is never commonplace, and also a certain fantasy of which the following page will give an idea.

Having recalled that Joan, as we have just stated, according to those that lived in her intimacy, had a pure, youthful voice, the historian adds :

Note the peculiar vibration of her voice ; *Vox infantilis*, something immaculate and virginal ; and note, three centuries later, the same phenomenon in another of our historic heroines. Charlotte Corday equally possessed this limpid accent, this enchanting voice. A German painter called Hauer, who sketched her features *in extremis*, and only left her at the foot of the scaffold, has certified the fact of this exquisite gift, and without establishing a parallel between the great liberator of the national soil in the fifteenth century, and her whom Lamartine called the Angel of Assassination, it is yet permissible to record a sign of ineffable purity, common to these two beautiful souls.

I once read in some old black book, that the alchemist, Albert le Grand, had in his service a young girl whom he had engaged solely on the guarantee of her voice, whose timbre spoke of purity, simplicity, and virginity. One morning the master sent her to fetch wine at the neighbouring tavern ; after a lapse of twenty minutes she returned. Albert, from the depths of his study, where he was always immersed in his books, asked the maid a question ; she answered from the door, and he, without having even seen her, without any other index than the mere resonance of her voice, called out :

“ You ribald girl, you go with soldiers ; get out, I discharge you ! ” What had happened ? Just what the old scholar complained of. And of what did he complain ? That she was no longer what she had been just previously.

“ Hunger, opportunity, the sweet grass, and I think,  
Some devil also. . . . ”

The devil, or some handsome, adventurous foot-soldier. The fact is that the maiden returned no more, putting it all down to sorcery. Whoever had told her only the sudden change in the timbre of her voice had betrayed her would certainly have caused her much astonishment. *Vox infantilis* is a mysterious sign, by which the angels in heaven and on earth recognize each other, and which The Maid preserved to the end.

Henri Blaze de Bury has left, in his tale, a certain scope for the marvellous. He does not believe that everything can be humanly explained in such a story. He wishes, according to an image of his own, to let a little daylight into the enchanted forest which has continually grown with the ages. But he does not break the spell. I believe for my own part that nothing in the life of Joan of Arc can in the last analysis refuse a rational interpretation. There as elsewhere the miracle cannot resist an attentive examination of the facts. The mistake of her biographers is to isolate this young girl, to shut her up in a chapel. They ought on the contrary to place her in her natural group, among the prophetesses and clairvoyants who swarmed in those days: Guillemette of Rochelle, whom Charles V summoned to Paris about 1380, the blessed Hermine of Reims, the holy Jeanne-Marie of Maillé, the Gascon woman of Avignon, adviser of Charles VI, the penitents of Friar Richard, and some others who, in common with Joan, had visions, revelations, and the gift of prophecy. Vallet de Virville, the most perspicacious of Joan's historians, has shown us the way.

We ought then to inquire by what slow and profound labour the Christian mind has formed the idea of the power of virginity and how the cult of Mary and the legends of the Saints prepared

men's minds for the advent of a Catharine of Sienna or a Joan of Arc. Our Joan would lose nothing by being explained in this way. She would appear neither less beautiful nor less great for having incarnated the dream of every soul, for having been truly she that was looked for. We may say in this connection that history will not destroy the legend.

## 3

It remains for me to say a word about M. Ernest Lesigne's new book.\* The author denies that Joan of Arc was burnt at Rouen. And to sustain his thesis he identifies the real Joan with the false Joan, whose incredible story is told elsewhere, the Claude or Joan who appeared in Lorraine in 1436, got herself recognized by Joan of Arc's brothers and the citizens of Orleans, married Robert des Armoises, and, after the most wonderful adventures, died in her bed, surrounded by her venerating relations. That is truly strange. But, on the other hand, Joan's death is attested by witnesses who gave evidence in the lawsuit of 1455. No historic fact is better established than this. M. Lesigne promises to clear up this point in a new work. I am curious to see how he will get out of it. For he has placed himself in a peculiarly difficult situation.

\* *La fin d'une légende. Vie de Jeanne d'Arc (de 1409 à 1440, [sic])* par Ernest Lesigne. 1 vol. in -18.

## UNDER THE ARCADES OF THE ODÉON

19th January.



WAS walking under the arcades of the Odéon. An old poet, a schoolmaster and two students were turning over the leaves of the uncut books. Careless of the cold air at their backs, they read whatever chance and the folding of the pages allowed. As I watched them, I thought of that dream-book of M. Stéphane Mallarmé's, that wonderful story which would present three distinct superimposed readings, and which would offer an interesting and consecutive story to those that read it without cutting the pages. I imagined my old poet, my schoolmaster and my two students, moving their cold red noses over such a work, and in my heart I praised the ingenious poet for having, in his goodness, prepared food for the poor readers, who, like the sparrows, live in the open air, and consume their literary nourishment at the booksellers' stalls. But on thinking it over, I doubt whether the pleasure of these gentle vagabonds is not more delicious as they taste it, whether they do not taste a mysterious charm in the sudden suspension of the sense resulting from pages untouched by the paper-knife. These open-air readers must have plenty of imagination. They

will shortly be going along the cold, black streets, finishing the interrupted sentence in a dream. And very likely they will make it more beautiful than the reality. They will carry away with them an illusion, a desire, or at least a curiosity. It is seldom that a book yields us as much when we read it through at leisure.

I should like to imitate them sometimes, and to read certain books without cutting them. But my duty stands in the way. Alas, it is so delightful to dabble among books. I have a friend, a messenger on the Quai Malaquais; this simple fellow is a fine example of the charm of interrupted reading. From time to time he used to bring me a load of books. Our relations permitted of his appraising me, and after two or three visits he came to the conclusion that I was not proud, there being, I may add, little reason for my being so, as I get all my learning out of books. As a matter of fact, he carried more knowledge on his back than I in my head. His confidence increased, and one day, scratching his ear, he asked me :

“ Sir, there is something I should like to know. I have asked several people who could not tell me. But you must know. It’s been bothering me these last five years.”

“ What ? ”

“ You don’t mind ? ”

“ Go on, my man.”

“ Well, sir, I should like to know what happened to the Empress Catherine ? ”

“ The Empress Catherine ? ”

“ Yes, sir, I’d give something to know whether she succeeded ? ”

“ Succeeded ? ”

“Yes, I stopped at the moment when the conspirators were about to assassinate the Emperor Peter, and they were quite right too! I read the story on a screw of tobacco-paper; you understand, there was no continuation.”

“Well, my lad, Peter was strangled, and Catherine was proclaimed Empress.”

“You are sure?”

“Perfectly sure.”

“Well, so much the better. I am glad of that!”

Picking up his porter's strap, he wished me good evening. I sent him to the kitchen to drink a glass of wine to the health of the Empress Catherine. Our friendship dates from that day.

The readers at the Odéon had not stopped, like my messenger, at Princess Daschkoff's conspiracy. But they never turned over anything very new, and I suspect the schoolmaster of having devoured several pages of the *Tableau de l'amour conjugal*. With his thick fingers he would lift up the leaves enclosed on three sides and intrude his nose like a horse into his manger.

The stall was shabby and dismal; there was none of the good smell of fresh paper. There was no stack of yellow books, with the statement on a band of paper—“Just published.”

Society people do not know these stacks. They read the new novels in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. They never buy them as volumes. They do not care to, and if they did, they could not. It is not their fault; they simply do not know how. When, by some extraordinary chance, a lady wants to obtain a new book, she sends to the nearest stationer's, which she mistakes for a bookseller's. The stationer, who, during his whole life, has never



seen any works other than those of MM. Ohnet and Montépin, feels very awkward when he is asked for Paul Arène's *Chèvre d'or*. But he is too adroit to expose his ignorance. Being as happily inspired as the eating-house keeper of the Butte Montmartre, who was asked by my friend Adolphe Racot for the wing of a phoenix, and replied: "We have just served the last one," the cunning stationer declares that "*La chèvre d'or* is out of print." This information is conveyed to the pretty reader, who will never read *La chèvre d'or*, having failed to obtain it. However, this is superlatively just; for true beauty should only be exhibited to the initiated. It cannot be imagined how difficult it is for society people to obtain a little book in —18 jésus at fr. 3.50. I know two or three literary drawing-rooms where every one reads everything that should be read, but where nobody would be capable of obtaining in twenty-four hours a single one of the books which it is the right thing to have read. A copy emanating from the author, or from some railway bookstall, goes the round and does duty for sixty people. It is borrowed like something unique; and, in fact, it is so. The stationer in the Faubourg St. Honoré has already said that there are no more. After having circulated for three months through the most beautiful hands in the world it is indeed a sad sight, tattered, gaping at the back, wonderfully dog's-eared, and like Racine's *Hippolyte*, without colour or form. It goes on circulating. It gives up the ghost, and, as it expires, it has to satisfy the intellectual curiosity of Baroness N. and Countess M. There are society people who meet M. Paul Hervieu every evening, and are incapable of finding a single one of his

works in the whole of Paris. In the eighteenth century poetical and elegant writings used to circulate in manuscript at assemblies: custom has changed less in this respect than might be expected, and it is not an aristocratic habit to buy a book. A single copy makes the round of the set. This method has its inconveniences. Letters which were written only for two beautiful eyes have gone the round of Parisian society between pp. 126 and 127 of *Mensonges*. I have been shown a copy of *Fort comme la mort* which served a very pretty lady as blotting-paper. A line of writing remained printed in reverse. It was considered unreadable, when an inquiring lady, into whose hands the book had fallen, thought of looking at the stained page in a looking-glass. She read therein very clearly: "I send you my heart in a kiss." It was the last line of a letter without a signature. Some years ago M. Gaston Boissier was boasting to some friends the ingenious wit of a lady who, in her letters to the same correspondent, displayed an infinite variety as regards the final formula.

Commandant Rivière, who was listening, appeared surprised, and said:

"I thought that all women finished their letters with the same formula, 'I send you my heart in a kiss.'"

One may therefore deduce that *Fort comme la mort* betrayed nobody. None the less, to lend books is dangerous.

I have given an explanation of this custom which is doubtless sufficient. But if it is with reason, as it is with grace, which, according to the theologians, suffices not when it is sufficient, let us inquire for some other origin of the noble custom of buying

novels only at railway stations. Our little paper volumes do not look well amidst the smart refinement or gloomy splendour of the rooms which tasteful women have learned to furnish harmoniously. They are complete pictures, to which may be added only women and flowers. One single yellow cover strikes a false note. Yellow has been adopted by all the publishers, who consider that it shows up in the booksellers' windows. But it simply screams in a discreet interior where everything is quiet and restful. Five or six years ago an attempt was made to remedy this, by making flowered covers of scraps of chasubles, which made Gyp's dialogues and M. Paul Bourget's novels look like missals and books of hours. But dressed like bishops and choristers these beloved books were no more recognizable. They seemed too heavy and magnificent to be read by the fire-side. Little by little these ecclesiastical ornaments were dropped, and the yellow chemise reappeared.

Could not our publishers dress our novels in elegant and sober boards? It is the custom in England, where works of imagination are sold in greater numbers than in France. It was attempted here by the late regretted Jules Hetzel, who was a worthy man with a fertile brain : he lost money by it. That was in the usual order of things. But might not his innovation profit another? That also is in the usual order of things.

The Librairie Quantin has tried some charming, quiet covers ; not exactly paper covers, nor precisely boards, they are light, and suit the furniture. I have on my table a very pretty book by M. Octave Uzanne, *Les zigzags d'un curieux*, which is thus clad in morocco-grained paper, dark blue and

artistically gilded. This style would be suitable for the novels published by Calmann Lévy, Charpentier, or Ollendorff. I must say that the symbolists and decadents best understand the dressing of a book. They clothe their verses and prose in a kind of fish or crocodile skin, with golden lettering; the result is perfect elegance.

After all, perhaps all this does not matter so much as I suspect. What does surprise me is that there are no dealers in the wealthy part of the town to offer literary novelties. It is an industry worth creating, and I think a good man of business would do well at it.

But we have wandered far from the Odéon, and I have never explained the meaning of "the stack." I will tell you, for the unbelievers must be instructed, and the Gentiles evangelized. On days of a big issue, when a publisher, for example, is offering *L'Immortel*, *Mensonges*, or *Pêcheur d'Islande*, the booksellers, and especially those in the galleries of the Odéon, are not content to exhibit, in a prominent position, two or three copies of the book of the day; they build stacks of twelve, twenty-four, thirty-six; proud monuments, sublime pillars, which proclaim the glory of the author. That is "the stack"! You must be a Southerner, or a celebrity, to obtain it. It means fame and fortune. The Greeks would have called it the Column of Gold. It lifts to the skies the names of Alphonse Daudet, Paul Bourget, Émile Zola, Guy de Maupassant, and Pierre Loti. I have seen young authors with disordered hair fall weeping at the feet of Marpon, who refused them "the stack." Alas, they implored and wept in vain!

As I told you, there were no stacks that day in the galleries of the Odéon. But in the window reserved for typographical masterpieces there was to be seen a pretty little edition of *Le manteau de Joseph Olénine*, by the Vicomte de Vogüé of the Académie Française. It is a fantastic tale which may be compared with the incomparable *Lokis*. I can say nothing better, as Charlemagne remarked when he gave his son to the beautiful Aude. In M. de Vogüé's tale, as in that of Mérimée, there is a Polish princess of a subtle and heady perfume. And when M. Joseph Olénine inhales with intoxication a sable pelisse, he is not so foolish as he may appear. For the Countess —ska has impregnated this fur with a deadly odour. M. Joseph Olénine receives at last the reward of his deep and sincere fetishism. One night, at the château of Countess —ska, whose guest he is, while embracing as usual his beloved pelisse, he finds therein, by the greatest chance, a quivering woman, whose warm breath plays upon his face. A less gallant man would have thought to recognize the Countess. But by some slight indications M. Joseph Olénine is persuaded that the nocturnal visitor is a ghost, a lady long dead, who returns to live in this world for lack of having found a better employment for her faculties in the next. M. Joseph Olénine, rightly thinking that he should maintain a discreet silence, even in the matter of a lady from beyond the tomb, did not reveal his good fortune to Count —ska. Pleased, perhaps, by his silence, the ghost often returned.

Under the learned arcades of the Odéon, amid the rare novelties of the week, I found an "astral

tale" by M. Jules Lermina, *A brûler*. Therein one finds a man who leaves his body at will. Precisely is the same idea expressed in an episode of M. Joséphin Péladan's book, *La victoire du mari*, of which I have already spoken. We are once more among the Magians: once more we hear resound the mysterious *linga-sharra*, a powerful formula, by the aid of which Magians quit the body. Papus affirms that M. Jules Lermina's story conforms to the facts of esoteric science, and M. Papus is a great Magian: M. Joséphin Péladan says so. Besides, M. Jules Lermina excels in telling extraordinary tales. He has given us two volumes of *Histoires incroyables*, which I recommend to all who love the strange and singular, but like the marvellous to be founded on science and observation. That is M. Jules Lermina's great merit. He starts from a positive groundwork to leap from prodigy to prodigy.

Jules Lermina, Joséphin Péladan, Léon Hennique, Gilbert-Augustin Thierry, Guy de Maupassant in his *Horla*, are all, indeed, tempted by the occult. Our contemporary literature oscillates between a brutal naturalism and an exalted mysticism. We have lost faith, and still wish to believe. We are overwhelmed by the depressing majesty of physical laws. We seek after mystery. We summon all the magic of the East; we throw ourselves wholeheartedly into psychical research, the last refuge of the marvellous, which astronomy, chemistry, and physiology have driven from their domain. We are either in the mud or in the clouds. There is no middle way. That is what we have deduced from an hour of book-hunting under the galleries of the Odéon.

## ÉDOUARD ROD\*



WHEN, a year ago, almost to a day, M. Edmond Scherer was analysing *Le sens de la vie* in *Le Temps*, he never foresaw the melancholy tale which has followed it to-day, and I fancy that *Les trois cœurs* would have caused him some surprise had he lived long enough to become acquainted with them. In *Le sens de la vie* M. Édouard Rod left his hero married and the father of a family. M. Scherer thought in all good faith that that was the end of the matter. It is true that the author had not finished, but the eminent critic concluded, on his behalf, that to get married and be a father is pretty well the whole art of Life : that if it is impossible for us to discover any meaning in what is called Life, it is expedient to wish what the gods wish, without knowing what they do wish, or even if they wish at all, and as it is a question of living, what matters is not why but how.

M. Edmond Scherer was a wise man, but not sufficiently mistrustful of the slyness of poets. He never penetrated M. Édouard Rod's secret design, which was to show us, in agreement with Ecclesiastes, that all is but vanity, and this is the design which appears in *Les trois cœurs*. For here is

\* *Les trois cœurs*—par Édouard Rod, 1 vol. in -18.

the hero Richard Noral, waking up in the arms of the gentle Helen, whom he has married, as disenchanted as King Solomon himself, who had had, truth to tell, an infinitely more extended experience of matrimony.

Helen has not brought Richard happiness, and yet she is a sweet, noble creature. But she is not the dream, the unknown, a thing out of reach. And this infirmity, common to all living beings, slowly lowers her in the sensitive, sterile mind of her dreamy husband. An artist without an art, Richard foolishly demands of life to bring him the form and soul of his dreams, as if there were any other chimeræ for us but those we ourselves invent. Having neither originality of mind nor a generous heart, he revels in a mystic sensuality while contemplating the works of the pre-Raphaelites. In company with Dante Gabriel Rossetti, he asks :

“By what magic word, the key of unexplored paths, can I descend to the bottom of love’s abysses?”

He nourishes himself on the *Vita nuova* ; that is, he lives in the dream of a dream. M. Édouard Rod tells us that he was naturally “good and noble-hearted,” but that in his bad moments he showed himself to be “egoistic, despotic, and cruel,” and that there were two men in him. I can only see one, an egoist without a temperament, who regards love as a grace.

Tired of Helen, who has not given him the impossible, he takes his boredom and his curiosity to a vaguely American adventuress of uncertain age, perhaps a widow, Rose-Mary, who has passed through life in sleeping-cars, packet-boats, and hired carriages ; she has very few memories, except of the eighteen trunks which she everlastingly drags



with her from New York to Vienna, from Paris to San Francisco, to all the watering-places and seaside resorts. A glittering flower of the table d'hôte, a gaudy beauty, a vulgar nature under a singular exterior, she is fundamentally a very decent woman, fond of animals, sentimental, capable of love and of dying for it. She is a simple-hearted adventuress, who dreams of the fireside. She loves Richard devotedly. M. Édouard Rod tells us: "When Rose-Mary was his mistress, Richard felt unhappy." He was deeply distressed. He thought, "I have made a mistake. I am mistaken in her, in myself, and in everything! She is not at all like Cleopatra, and has none of the characteristics of the great lovers of history."

No, Rose-Mary does not resemble Cleopatra. That might have been foreseen. For lack of the necessary prevision, Richard is now in a painful situation. Helen has learnt all. She makes no complaints to her husband, but her modest grief, her silence and pallor are more eloquent than any complaints. Richard feels touched, for he has taste. His little daughter, Jeanne, suffers by sympathy. "The mother and daughter seem to live the same life, and languish of the same illness." The house has the look of an empty house; one breathes in it a miasmatic atmosphere. The work-room, the library, where formerly the family had assembled in smiling tranquillity, is now avoided, deserted, and full of memories that chill the heart, as though it were a death-chamber.

In passing from this lugubrious home to the little hotel sitting-room brightened by Rose-Mary with exotic bibelots, Richard only varied his boredom and depression. Rose-Mary, like Helen,

loved and suffered. In grief, as in love, both of which are virtues, Rose-Mary towered above chaste and proud Helen, wife and mother. Before we pass on, there is one thing that I do not understand about the excellent Rose-Mary, who had such big hats and such a good heart. It is her resignation. She does not protect this love which is her life: she is always ready to yield. Neither jealous nor violent, she never inflicts the furies of an Ellénore on this new Adolphe. She is strangely inert and gentle, in the face of treachery and desertion. I do not say that such behaviour is untrue to life; I know nothing about it. Everything is possible. But I wish it were better indicated from what source this woman, deficient in taste and wit, derived so rare a virtue. She has no position in the world, neither husband nor son. I should like to know whence came her strength to suffer in silence and die secretly.

For she dies. One night she throws herself into the sea from the deck of one of the transatlantic steamers on which she had taken so many passages, and no one will ever know how or why she died. This is a great deal of discretion for a lady who wore startling dresses and had eighteen trunks.

The maid of Avalon—and the recollection would not have displeased Richard Noral—sung by Tennyson was less negligent in her suicide. Dying for Arthur, she wished that he should know it, and it was she herself who, lying dead in a boat, brought her confession to the knight in a letter.

Living, they called me the Maid of Avalon.

While Rose-Mary was drowning herself very simply and sincerely for love of him, Richard

was haunting the *salon* of Madame d'Hays. Widowed after a few months of marriage, she had, at little expense, acquired a freedom equally precious to herself and her adorers. Richard admired in Madame d'Hays "that marvellous harmony of features, colouring, looks, movements and tone of voice that made the young woman an exceptional being, a dream above and beyond the idea of beauty." And Madame d'Hays did not look unkindly on Richard. Coming back from the Bois in her landau she acknowledged his bow with a pretty smile; they went a great deal to the theatre together; they talked of Shelley and the pre-Raphaelites. So well, indeed, that Richard fell in love with her. He would, as usual, have applied himself painstakingly to the adventure, had not the death of his daughter recalled him sharply to the solitude of his home and Helen in tears. Little Jeanne has died of inflammation of the lungs, but it is her mother's misery and her father's indifference which have slowly exhausted this frail and ardent nature. Little Jeanne is dead; a few months pass by, and the garden in which she plucked flowers blossoms once more. Richard, thinking of the child, who was his own, murmurs:

"What delicious recollections she has left us!"

And he adds:

"Are not these recollections worth the reality?" Horrible speech! He who forgives Nature for the death of a child is outside the human race. He must be partly a monster. No doubt it is terrible to think that children will grow into men, that is, into something pitiable and odious. But one does not think of it. For in loving them, educating them and wishing them to live we follow the

reasons of the heart, which are the great, true, and only reasons.

Richard Noral is a miserable creature, who makes a mess of marriage and adultery, and seeks for Cleopatra. But what would you have done with Cleopatra, you fool, if you had met her? You are neither exquisite Cæsar, nor rough Antony, to intoxicate yourself with this living cup, and you are not the sort of man to lose a kingdom for a kiss. Look at your friend Baïlac. He is always happy. He does not search for Cleopatra, and he finds her in all women. He's always in love, and his wife never worries him. The clever fellow has foreseen everything; she is always enceinte. Your friend Baïlac is like Henry IV; he loves duchesses and servant-maids. What he asks of woman is woman, and not the infinite, the impossible, the unknown, God, everything, and literature. He behaves badly, I admit it; he behaves very badly; but not for nothing. He's a bad egg, but not a fool. He loves without wishing to, without thinking about it, with ingenuous ardour, quite naturally; and that clothes him with a sort of innocence.

You think him a brute because he does not understand Rossetti's sonnets; but be careful lest, when all is said and done, he has not more imagination than you have. He knows how to discover the native beauty of things. You, you want a ready-made ideal, a Pia, not as she really was in her poor mortal life, but such as the art of a courteous poet and an exquisite painter have made her. You want poetic shades, and harmonious phantoms. What else do you seek? And why did you trouble Rose-Mary?

In calling you an egoist, people flatter you. Had you been merely an egoist you would have been only half bad. Egoism adapts itself to a kind of love and passion; in refined natures it desires, for its satisfaction, pure forms animated by beautiful thoughts. It is sensual; its peaceful dreams softly caress the universe. But you, you are less than an egoist: you are incapable. And if women love you, I am rather surprised. They ought to guess that you rob them shamefully.

It is a novelty of these days to claim the right to passion, as it has been always to claim the right to happiness. I have at hand a little book of the last century called *De l'Amour*, which amuses me hugely, as it is written with extraordinary simplicity. The author, M. de Sevelinges, who was a cavalry officer, would have you understand that true love is only for officers. "A warrior," he says, "has great advantages in love. He is also more inclined thereto than other men. Beautiful law of Nature!"

M. de Sevelinges is amusing. But he rightly enough adds that it is well that love, passionate love, should be rare. He bases his argument on the fact that "its powerful effect is always to detach men from their surroundings, to isolate them, and make them independent of any connections which it has not itself formed," and he concludes that, "a civilized society which was composed of lovers would inevitably relapse into poverty and barbarism." I advise Richard Noral to study the maxims of M. de Sevelinges; they are not lacking in philosophy. Nevertheless one should resign oneself to forgo love, when one feels its impossibility.

Then what is to be done? you ask. Good Lord, cultivate your garden, till the soil, play the flute, hide yourself, and live all the same! Remember Sieyès' words, and remember that it is still something to have lived under that perpetual Terror which is human destiny. And again the incomparable M. de Sevelinges would say: "If I take away passion, I at least leave you peace and pleasure. Is that nothing?"

Without speaking of *Adolphe*, we have already met more than one hero of romance for vainly seeking passion. In a very fine book, *Crime d'amour*, M. Paul Bourget has shown us the Baron de Querne, who seduces an honest woman only in order to throw her into despair. M. de Querne has a suspicious mind and an arid heart; he is abominably hard. Without any profit to himself, he destroys the happiness of the woman who loves him. But it is his business; he is a professional seducer; moreover he does not fall into slushy sentiment, or give himself up to that absurd ravaging of lives which makes Richard Noral altogether odious, and rather ridiculous. I see there is still a moral in M. Édouard Rod's book, and it is that all is vanity to vain men, and a lie to those who lie to themselves.

"We shall have adultery and cigarettes," said Théophile Gautier in the age of red waistcoats. M. Édouard Rod leaves us only the cigarettes.

So his book, in its very despondency, warns us to fear egoism as the worst of evils. It teaches purity of heart and simplicity. It calls to mind this little verse of the *Imitation*: "When anyone seeks himself, love is stifled in him."

There is much talent in this bitter story. One

cannot overpraise the sobriety of the telling, the alternately grateful and powerful rapidity of the scenes, and the elegant precision of the style. I must even praise the cold and affected touch which perfectly fits the subject.

M. Édouard Rod's methods of art and composition are very superior to those, now almost abandoned, of the naturalistic school. In a short preface to *Les trois cœurs* the young author describes himself as an Intuitivist. I have no objection. In any case, he is a thousand miles apart from the Naturalists. The new school, including the old pupils of the Master of Médan, appears to be entering upon a kind of idealism, of which M. Hennique has recently given us a pleasing and peculiar example. M. Édouard Rod believes that he can indicate the principal causes of this unexpected phenomenon. He finds them in the exoticism in which we are steeped, and notably in the powerful suggestions exercised over the younger generation by the music of Wagner, English poetry and Russian romances. These indeed are the causes whose action, already perceptible in the work of M. Paul Bourget, progresses to exaggeration in the *éthopées* of M. Joséphin Péladan. A clever critic, M. Gabriel Sarrazin, was in a position to say: "At the present moment our literature is flooded by exotic infiltration. Our thought becomes more and more composite. While the people and the middle class remain imperturbably faithful to our Gallic and classical traditions, and continue to appreciate wit, animation and rhetoric, many of our writers are making a collection of all human conceptions. With the keen, refined aroma of ideas, and the swift, penetrating, ironic, and, in a word, French imagina-

tion, they combine the heavy, morbid perfume of heady theories and imaginings transplanted from other lands.”\* Let us not too greatly deplore these importations; literatures, like nations, live by exchange.

\* *Poètes modernes de l'Angleterre*, p. 4.



## J. H. ROSNY \*



WHAT is this symbolic insect whose hidden and dreadful work is described by M. Rosny? What is this white ant of the intelligence, which eats into hearts and brains as the Arab *karia* eats the most precious woods? What is this neuropteran of thought, whose production has been favoured by naturalism; which attacks literary minds, and fills them with its voracious colonies? It is the obsession of the little fact; the minute noting of infinitely small detail; the depraved taste for the mean and low; the dissemination of brief sensations; the swarming of small ideas, and the stirring up of filthy thoughts. The younger school is a prey to this scourge; it is mangled, body and soul, by the termite's mandibles. In his anatomical plates M. J. H. Rosny shows us a victim consumed to the marrow, whose inmost being, riddled by the galleries of the horrible white ant, is nothing but a foul mud, mixed with eggs and larvæ, and remnants of flies' wings. The subject has a name; Servaise (Noel), thirty years of age, a Naturalist by profession. The author has been pleased to personify in Noel Servaise the school formed fifteen years ago at the *soirées* of Médan,

\* *Le Termite, roman de mœurs littéraires*, 1 vol.

and now dispersed along all the roads of the mind. His hero is an imaginary emulator of M. Huysmans, to whom he bears some resemblance, owing to his morose honesty of mind, as well as a narrow but sincere artistic sense. M. Rosny tells us that Noel Servaise, being absolutely lacking in the faculty of abstraction, has no philosophy. And he adds,

“ A delicate, sensitive system, a rapid perception of the little acts of life, a retraction of the soul which instinctively classifies the phenomena of life, without defining or generalizing them, a horror of mathematics and syllogisms, a surprising faculty for seizing on the blemishes of men and things ; such were his characteristics. . . . Acute in analysis, an observer, an experimentalist in the details of artistic problems or social conditions, he would by vague intuition attain to a conception equivalent to the reasoned concepts of a generalizer. When he took to literature his anti-metaphysical mind and tendency toward disparagement were instantly checked by exact thinking and classification. He found it absolutely right that all art should depend upon the observation of contemporary life, and the record of infinitesimal events. The moment of his advent coincided with the exhaustion of the method.” He is an up-to-date Naturalist, a contemporary of M. Paul Bonnetain, and probably one of the signatories of the decree by which M. Zola was deposed for the crime of high treason, as was Charles I. In short, he belongs to the group of neo-Naturalists.

“ Mostly very middle class ”—it is M. Rosny speaking—“ but for that very reason nourishing an exaggerated hatred of that same class, they held prettiness in horror. It seemed artistic to hyper-

bolize defects; there was a shame attached to the very least social or human optimism, a shame easily aggravated by the confusion of narrow minds—and the Naturalists of 1880 to 1884 were peculiarly narrow—between the art of the bourgeois moralists, and that which might result from a philosophic comprehension of the modern.”

You will, also, not be very surprised that Noel Servaise did not quite understand *Le Bilateral*, and M. Rosny's works in general, which are full of philosophy, in which the abstract mingles with the concrete, and the general with the particular. Besides, Noel Servaise is a sick man. He has articular rheumatism of the shoulder, stone in the liver, a “cancer of the soul,” and corns on his feet. Lovesick and timid, “a long dismal face, . . . short, thick-set, lacking grace, with only one good point, his frank and tender eyes,” he dreams of the cerise dress and heliotrope scent of Madame Chavailles.

This infinitely sweet lady is the legitimate wife of Chavailles the painter, who deserves all that happens to him, for he is a hard, peevish banterer, and addicted to genre painting. He has a “sulphurous brassy face,” eyes like a “greedy dog,” and a voice like “flint.” Noel Servaise loves Madame Chavailles, and considers where he will tell her so, whether it shall be “in a drawing-room, in the street, by the sea, or under the trees.” The termite working at him. One summer evening he is walking with her in an enchanted forest. A charm enfolds and penetrates him; all at once, to the sound of the croaking frogs, he thinks of Madame Chavailles' digestive apparatus, and all his desires are routed. The termite! the termite! Noel Servaise, it is said, has “a bituminous soul,” and I can believe

it. Timid and awkward, irresolute, instinctively fearing the satisfaction of his desires, he would stop short at dreaming, and Madame Chavailles would sin with him only in thought; as M. Rosny neatly expresses it, she would commit only "imponderable faults," if there were not in the lady a passive genius of sex, a divine abandon, and a faculty for loving which makes her more like the feminine symbols of the antique theogonies than a Parisienne of Paul Bourget's time. She gives herself with magnificent tranquillity; she is, quite naturally, the oblivion of ills, and the end of troubles. One must go back to the union of Khaos and Gaia to find an instance of so simple a love. No, Madame Chavailles has not a trace of vice! With a little encouragement I should classify her as a kind of saint. He takes her as one picks a ripe fruit, and in her arms, says M. Rosny, he tastes "the black intoxication, the faint savour of the tomb, without which he does not reach the height of passion." But the very next day he returns to Paris, fearful of lost time, and of this touch of humanity which has penetrated his literary life. The termite, the termite! Would you like to know the two really great events in the life of Noel Servaise? They were the publication of a typical novel at Tresse's, and the first performance, at the Théâtre Libre, of a naturalistic play, in which M. Antoine, with his usual talent, played the part of a ridiculous and contemptible old man.

As the publication of the book drew near, what uneasiness, anguish, fear and hope he endured!

"What longings for the peace of Europe, for the health of the German Emperor! If only Boulanger keeps quiet, and if only the Balkans hold their peace!"

The book appears, and no one takes the slightest notice of it. It is only one more novel.

The first performance at the Théâtre Libre is not announced as an event. The unhappy author, squatting in a sort of hen-coop, in the wings, gets scared: "the mystery of the beings who will applaud or condemn is like a sword thrust into his bosom. . . . A rush of blood deafens him, with intervals of absolute vacuity and cardiac immobility, which quickly change into waves of emotion, vertigo and hallucination."

The applause is feeble. He is "let down" lightly. Servaise gradually lapses into a "gelatinous moroseness."

Gentle Madame Chavailles becomes a widow, but the man of letters does not pay much attention to this accident; it is not literature, it is only life. The termite accomplishes his work, and there is nothing left of the unfortunate Servaise.

About thirty years ago, in *Charles Demailly*, the MM. Goncourt made a study of literary neurosis, a complete description of book-sickness. In comparing their pathology with that of M. Rosny one is shocked by the progress of the malady. Together with his disordered mind and distracted nerves, Charles Demailly retained something of the charming and figurative extravagance of a Gérard de Nerval. Noel Servaise is steeped in imbecility. Yet he is not a fool. He has a certain amount of native cunning.

There are portraits in *Le termite*, and, like *Le Grand Cyrus*, it is a novel with a key. One cannot work by this method without being exposed to certain dangers, and without raising protests, which may be well founded. Let us state at once that M. Rosny, who is an upright man, has not in-

served a single particular in his portraits, or an allusion in his scenes, which might, I will not say, cause scandal, but even excite malicious curiosity. The most easily recognized portraits in the book are those of MM. Edmond de Goncourt, Émile Zola, Alphonse Daudet, and J. H. Rosny himself, which are depicted under the names of Fombreux, Rolla, Guadet, and Myron.

M. de Goncourt is sketched with a few strokes in the midst of the Japanese collection in his artistic house. The writer shows him "with his big head, his Lorraine face, his silky white hair . . . his fine, nervous, unseeing eyes." The sketch is rapid, drawn with clear, accurate lines. But why does M. Rosny add: "He walked about the room with long heavy strides, his thick jacket *full of pachydermatous folds*, which displayed a considerable degree of tactile and meditative beauty." This curious phrase gives me an opportunity of pointing out M. Rosny's terrible defects; he lacks taste, proportion, and clarity.

He exaggerates. His vision is continually complicated, troubled, and obscured. A quilted lounge-coat looks to him like an elephant's skin. Then metaphysics gets mixed up with it, a metaphysics of hallucination, and he talks of tactile beauty, which, as a plain matter of fact, is perfectly incomprehensible! As for the rest, as for M. de Goncourt, the moral entity, M. Rosny does not enlighten us greatly. He merely tells us that the author of *Faustin* is not disposed to admire everything written by those who protest against his methods, and that he has in particular little liking for M. Rosny's scientific terminology. I do not find that difficult to believe. He feels compromised and overwhelmed by the new-comers, and this

feeling adds perhaps a little bitterness to the fatal melancholy of age and celebrity.

Moreover, men must be taken as they are, and what is inevitable in their passions and prejudices must be recognized. The masters of an art are never of opinion that the forms created by them have been well employed by their successors.

Thinking of Victor Hugo, Chateaubriand said in his old age: "I have always succeeded in avoiding harshness, with which they reproach my disciples." Would M. de Goncourt have been altogether wrong in blaming, in his turn, the harshness of certain young writers?

As for M. Zola (Rolla), it must be agreed that M. Rosny has not flattered him.

Through the slowly opening door there appeared a bulky, morose-looking man. After a few words of greeting, he sat down on the edge of a chair, with his belly resting on his thighs. Myron watched him, attracted toward his personality, although judging him to be an egoist.

An egoistic sulker, and full of malevolence! At every remark "an invincible force causes him to depreciate." Like M. de Goncourt, he thinks that M. Rosny is sometimes incomprehensible, and frightfully tortuous. M. Rosny smiles to hear such reproaches in the mouth of a writer "full of bombast and trickery," but not lacking in genius. Apart from that, an accomplished man. "*Le songe (Le rêve)*, his treatment for getting down his weight, the Cross of the Legion of Honour, the Academy, all this is fundamentally part of the same collapse of the individuality . . . the funny thing is to watch him calling out the whole time: "I am obstinate . . . an opinionated man."

It is true that it is only a conversation in a

drinking-bar that M. Rosny is indifferently relating. It is not he, but one of M. Zola's friends who speaks thus. That explains everything.

The portrait of M. Alphonse Daudet is treated in another manner; here one is conscious of a profound sympathy, and of the three it is neither the least true nor the least full of life. It bears witness to a great knowledge of the model. I will quote it entire, with regrets for the heavier passages and the oddities which here and there mar the scholarly, spontaneous drawing:

The two short-sighted eyes, with a glance lacking in perspective, blind at a yard's distance, become human as one approaches them, become, gradually, the beautiful eyes of a seer, of microscopic power. In the mobile physiognomy, at this moment rigid, Myron reads Gaudet's characteristics. He knows how each wrinkle radiates at a joke, or in sympathy; how the features stand out and, as it were, accompany the words. He perceives Gaudet's sudden awakening to the chilliness of a stupid conversation, his beautiful departure, the communicative electric impulses in which he forgets the tortures, the weariness, the melancholy of a life of affliction. Full of a whimsical youth which no illness can kill, he scales the ladders of analysis and observation. He is never confined, like the literary masses, to pinchbeck or scurrilous formulæ, but seizing a portrait or a recollection, a page written in days gone by, Tacitus or Montaigne, music, or the nature of a subject, illuminating everything with some individual facet of his character, with a flush of enthusiasm.

This is truly our Alphonse Daudet, with his evergreen soul, full of light and song.

We have already said that M. Rosny himself is put before us under the name of Myron.

A bitter disputant, full of confidence before the old masters, he appeared a presumptuous as well as a tiresome and emphatic repeater of arguments; he was at the same time tolerant and pig-headed. He repelled Servaise, by reason of his involved style, prophetic poses, at every point at which an exuberant nature may clash with a sober and depreciative one.



M. Rosny knows himself well, and gives a fair and just account of the impression which he produces. It is true that he is very fond of argument, and that in these intellectual disputes he betrays the pleasant obstinacy of a Vaudois and a Camisard. He has a peaceful and radiant countenance with that inward look, those feverish lips which our latter-day artists give to the martyrs of thought when they portray a John Huss or a Savonarola being led to the stake.

Whatever anyone may say, M. Rosny is not vain. Neither is he proud. He knows nothing of arrogance, and if I did not fear protests, I should say that he has no vanity. He does not admire himself, but he has an infinite respect for that portion of the divine wisdom which nature has placed in him, and if he is full of himself it is due to stoic virtue. He is a man of great integrity, but difficult to improve.

What is admirable in him is his lofty sentiment, the freedom of his mind, his breadth of view, his sudden illuminations, his reading of character, and that violent determination to be just, which makes injustice itself a virtue. *Le termite* is full of excellent ideas on art and literature. Thus, for instance, "a spacious idea conceives beauty in organization, and not in reconstruction." This maxim is so beautiful, true and fruitful, that I seem to see issuing from it a complete æsthetic, replete with wisdom. But I admit that I cannot do with his encumbered style—his own word—where every sentence is like a furniture-removal van. This style is not only encumbered, it is confused, and sometimes singularly turbid. M. Rosny's trouble is wanting to say too much. He forces the language. Will he allow me to compare him to certain

astronomers, who, urged by a splendid spirit of inquiry, endeavour to obtain from their telescopes magnifications which the instrument cannot give? The speculum which is turned upon the Moon, Mars, or Saturn merely reflects vague, uncertain forms in which the baffled eye loses itself.

M. Zola—he tells us himself—said to him one day :

“ You write very fine books, but you abuse the language, and as I grow older my dislike of such things increases ; I am reaching absolute lucidity and ease of style. Oh, I know that I myself have absorbed some of the romantic poison ! We must revert to French lucidity.”

M. de Goncourt—he also tells us—spoke to him in the same sense :

“ I have read your books ; they are very good. But you exaggerate your descriptions and then, these terms . . . I begin to ask myself whether supreme talent may not consist of writing very simply about very complicated matters.”

M. Rosny is no man to listen to these timid counsels. He will never give up. At the very stake, he would not deny the entelechies, pachyderms, luminosities, causalities, quadrangles, and all those strangely heavy words with which his style is obstructed. I assure you that he is the personification of John Huss ; he is of the stuff that martyrs are made of. He will never give way on a single point. It's a pity. He understands a great many things ; he so well understands nature and life, physics and metaphysics ! Ah, if only he could acquire that little nothing which is everything—taste !

## FRANÇOIS COPPÉE \*



FRANÇOIS COPPÉE is a born poet; verse is his mother-tongue. He speaks it with charming facility. But—and all poets are not thus endowed—he also writes, when he wishes, an easy, laughing, limpid prose. I would willingly believe that it was journalism that trained him as a writer of prose. He was for a time a collaborator of mine, and his happy period with *La Patrie* is not forgotten, when he replaced M. Édouard Fournier as dramatic critic. Journalism is not such a bad school of style as people make out. I have no knowledge of any fine talent being spoilt therein, and, on the contrary, I have seen some minds gain a suppleness and vivacity which was lacking in their earlier work. One learns to avoid the obscure, strained style into which the most artistic writers so often relapse when they write far removed from the public. Journalism, in fact, is like those baths in running water, from which we emerge all the more alert and agile.

However it may be with the singer of *Les Humbles*, and however he may have developed his talent for prose, one must, whilst recognizing that his primary place is in poetry, give him also a niche

\* *Toute une jeunesse*, 1 vol.

in the charmed circle of our story-tellers, between M. Catulle Mendès and M. André Theuriet, who, like himself, are both poets and story-tellers.

His recent novel, *Henriette*, is not yet forgotten ; it is worked out with graceful simplicity, and he touches us by showing the work-girl's bunch of violets laid on the grave of the son of the family.

He now gives us a more extensive work ; *Toute une jeunesse* ; a kind of analytical novel, in which the author has been pleased to express only the purest and simplest sentiments. The title would incline one to think that it was an autobiography and a confession ; and when it appeared in an illustrated magazine the illustrations were not calculated to turn us away from this idea, for the illustrator had given the hero of the book a likeness to M. Coppée himself. As a matter of fact, the author of *Intimités* has in no wise told his own story in this book. This youth is not his youth. It is sufficient to glance at M. François Coppée's biography to be sure of it. A highly esteemed writer, M. de Lescure, has, with a multitude of detail, related the life, beautiful in its simplicity, of M. François Coppée. This work, enriched with unpublished fragments and documents, less resembles the meagre biographies which we in France generally consecrate to our illustrious contemporaries than those ample, copious lives by which the English make known their celebrated men. Let anyone read these sympathetic pages, and he will be convinced that the adventures—very simple, by the way—of young Amédée Violette, the hero of *Toute une jeunesse*, have no connection with M. François Coppée's real existence. Amédée Violette, the son of an inferior employé in a ministry,

loses his mother while still quite a child. It is known that Mme Coppée saw the first glimmer of her son's celebrity. Friends of the good old days will remember, in that modest house in the Rue Rousselet, the joy beaming from the suffering face of that sympathetic woman, on the morrow of *Le passant*. They remember, not without emotion, the poet's mother, of the same delicate build as her son, pale and slender, sitting bowed beside the fire, held fast to her arm-chair by the nervous malady which made her daily look smaller, without effacing the smile of her eyes and the adorable grace of her devastated face. With her tongue half paralysed by this mysterious illness, she seemed to murmur, "I can die." She died, leaving in her place a second self. . . . This is enough to show that M. François Coppée has not lent his own recollections to his hero, and that we are dealing with pure fiction, when the modest and unhappy love affairs of Amédée Violette are unfolded.

Without telling her so, the young man loves Maria, the daughter of an engraver, half artist and half workman, a pretty and intelligent girl, who, having become an orphan, copies pastels in the Louvre for a livelihood, and has allowed herself to be seduced in a casual sort of way by the handsome Maurice, whose natural function is to be beloved of all women. On Amédée's urgent representations the handsome Maurice marries her, after which he fulfils his function by betraying her with women of the streets. He would have continued to do so, had he not assumed the cap of the mobiles in 1870, placed in his heart "like a flower in his rifle-barrel, the resolution to die bravely," and done his duty at Champigny, where he fell gloriously on the field

of honour. It is only the bad eggs who have luck right up to the end.

Maurice dies in Amédée's arms, bequeathing to him Maria and the son he has given her. Amédée marries Maria, but she does not love him. She still loves Maurice, and the recollection of the dead man fills her peaceful heart.

Amédée asks nothing more of love; expects no more of life. One autumn evening, overwhelmed by monotonous boredom, he lets his silvered temples fall between his hands, and meditates: happiness is a dream, youth but a spark. The art of living is to forget life. The leaves fall! the leaves fall!

But imaginary as he is, and involved in imaginary adventures, Amédée Violette feels life as M. François Coppée felt it, when a child and a young man. The author does not conceal the fact, and the hero, according to his own statement, resembled him as the pensive child of Blunderstone, David Copperfield, resembles Dickens. So that, while fiction if taken literally, *Toute une jeunesse* is true in spirit, and it is not indiscreet to recognize in this young man, "brown, with blue eyes, and an ardent and melancholy expression," the happy but soon saddened author of *Le reliquaire* and *Le passant*. And how avoid applying to the author himself what he says about Amédée, who, having learnt literature among the romantics, and having for some time followed the beaten track, suddenly finds an unexplored path, his own medium of expression?

He had, some time before, thrown into the fire his first verses, clumsy imitations of favourite masters, and his 1830 drama, in which two lovers sang a passionate duet under the gallows. He

found his way back to truth and simplicity by the scholars' way, the longest. Inclination and necessity simultaneously compelled him to express plainly and sincerely what he saw before his eyes, to display what he could of the humble ideals found among the ordinary people amid whom he had lived, against the melancholy landscapes of the Parisian suburbs where his youth had been spent ; in short, to paint after nature.

M. François Coppée has not distorted his literary beginnings so far as to prevent our seeing certain likenesses therein. His first encounters with the Parnassians are described, and in Paul Sillery it is easy to recognize one whom he describes as an exquisite poet and an excellent comrade. I know M. Catulle Mendès to be of all men the most attached to letters in the whole of Paris, the greatest stranger to envy, as also to mean ambitions. Still, one must not judge the long-haired poets of 1868 by comparison with the rather black, satirical, and much too vague portraits which are to be found in *Toute une jeunesse*. If one were tempted to do so, M. Coppée would be the first to say :

“Take care ! I have not put everything into this story, in which I sought only to explain a soul. Not in a psychological novel, but in my unrestrained everyday conversation, in my many newspaper articles, in the notices which I wrote for Lemerre's anthology, will it be seen whether I have not always paid tribute to my old companions in arms, Léon Dierx, Louis de Ricard, José-Maria de Heredia, and to their frankness and loyalty. No, they were certainly never envious. I shall never cut myself off from the poets amid whom I grew up, and it shall not be said that I denied either Stéphane Mallarmé or Paul Verlaine.”

That is what M. François Coppée would reply to

anyone who made the mistake of believing that he had forgotten the charming hours on Parnassus and the subtle conversations of his coterie.

Once more M. François Coppée gives us a "true" book, in which his "feeling" for life is vividly presented. He feels things as a poet and a Parisian. The whole of the first part of his *David Copperfield* expresses so deep and delicate an appreciation of our old faubourgs that however little of a Parisian one may be one is conscious of a kind of mystical tenderness, and one hears the very stones speaking. I am a Parisian, heart and soul, and I tell you truly that I cannot without deep emotion read these simple, unaffected sentences, in which the poet recalls the urban landscapes of his and our childhood: the following, for example:

To the right and the left he saw the Rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs unfolding itself in a gracious curve; one of the most peaceful streets of the Luxembourg quarter, a street then hardly half built; where the boughs of the trees overhung the wooden fences of the gardens; so quiet and full of silence that the solitary passer-by could hear the cage-birds singing.

It is with an indescribable pleasure that I follow the walks of the father and child, who wandered "on fine evenings amid the solitudes."

They followed the beautiful outer boulevards of other days, where there were elms dating from Louis XIV, ditches full of weeds, and ruined palisades which permitted a view, through their breaches, of market-gardens, where the melon bell-glasses shone in the rays of the setting sun. . . . In this way they went far, far beyond the Barrière d'Enfer. . . . In these suburban deserts there were no more houses, but occasional tumble-down ruins, all, or nearly all, one story high. Sometimes a sinister-looking cabaret, painted the colour of wine-lees, or perhaps, at the junction of two deeply-rutted roads, under some acacias, a café garden with



its arbours and its sign, a little wind-mill at the end of a pole, turning in the cool evening breeze. It was almost country. The grass, now less dusty, invaded the side-walks, and even crossed the road between the broken paving-stones. On the top of the low walls a poppy flourished here and there. There were few or no people passing, except some very poor folk ; a good woman in a peasant's bonnet, dragging a weeping child, a workman with his tools, a belated pensioner, and sometimes, in the middle of the road, a flock of exhausted sheep, bleating desperately, bitten in the legs by the dogs, on their way to the slaughter-house. The father and son walked straight on until it grew quite dark under the trees. They then returned, their faces whipped by the keener air, while in the distant avenue, at great intervals, the old street lamps on brackets, the lanterns of the Terror, shone like yellow stars in the green twilight sky.

Dear Coppée ! Every one of these words, whose meaning, or rather whose mysterious meaning I understand so well, gives me a thrill, and by this enchantment I am carried away to the delightful depths of my earliest recollections. Would I might tarry there ! What greater praise can I give your book than to tell of the dreams it has afforded me ?

In those days, my dear Coppée, we were two very good and intelligent little boys. Let me blend my brotherly recollections with your own. I was brought up on the Quays, where old books blend with the landscape. The Seine, which flowed before me, charmed me by the grace natural to water, the origin of things and the source of life. I ingenuously admired the delightful miracle of the stream, which carries boats and reflects the sky by day, and by night is covered with jewels and luminous flowers.

I used to wish that this beautiful water might be ever the same, for I loved it. My mother used to tell me that rivers flow to the sea, and that the flow of the Seine is unending ; but I rejected this

idea as very depressing. In that I lacked the scientific spirit, but I nourished a dear illusion, for in the midst of life's evils nothing is sadder than the perpetual flux of all things.

And so, thanks to your book, my dear Coppée, I see myself once more as a little child, watching the boats pass from the Quai Voltaire, and breathing in life with delight ; and that is why I say it is an excellent book.

## THE IDEAS OF GUSTAVE FLAUBERT\*



GREAT deal has been said about Flaubert, with reference to the production of the opera, *Salammbô*. Flaubert is interesting to the curious, and for that there is sufficient reason; it is that Flaubert is very interesting. He was a good but violent man, absurd but full of genius, who contained within himself all possible contrasts. He knew how to be always dramatic in a life that had no catastrophes, no ups and downs; he played the comedy of life as a melodrama, and was, in his individual manner, *Tragikôtatos*, as Aristotle said. If he saw *Salammbô* as an opera he would be more *Tragikôtatos* than ever to-day. At this horrible sight what lightning would flash from his eyes! What froth would issue from his mouth! What a cry from his bosom! It would for him be the bitter cup, the reed sceptre, and the crown of thorns, the nailed hands and wounded side.

This is hardly enough, and he would consider such terms as inadequate to express his sufferings. It is almost an argument against the immortality

\* This article was written with reference to a very remarkable study by M. Henry L'Aujol in the *Revue bleue*.

of the soul that he has not appeared in the night to MM. Reyer and du Locle.

It is at least true that the dead return very seldom, since the cavern of Dungul, which communicated with the other world, has been closed. Otherwise our Flaubert would certainly have returned to curse MM. du Locle and Reyer.

He was, when alive, an excellent man, but he formed a strange idea of Life. I find a very timely study of the character of this poor great writer in the *Revue bleue*, under the signature of Henry Laujol. His is not an unknown name in literature. It is that of a story-teller and critic, to whom we owe some notable articles on our novelists and poets, and also some stories, scattered through the reviews, which might well be collected into a volume. I am assured that Henry Laujol is a pseudonym behind which is hidden a very amiable official of the Republic, who, owing to his position at the Ministry, has been able to do more than one good turn to letters. I affirm nothing, relying on this point on M. Georges d'Heilly, who, it is known, has imposed on himself the delicate task of unveiling the pseudonyms of contemporary literature. What would lead me to think that it is true is that, in all the work signed Henry Laujol, there is mingled, with the cult of art, a respect for the realities of life, which betrays the man of experience. He possesses a sense of the average necessities of existence which is often lacking in the mere man of letters. This was to be seen in a story, told in the happiest manner, in which he compelled Don Juan to confess that happiness exists only in marriage, and the regular conduct of life. It is true that Don Juan made this admission in his sad old age,

and it is also true that Don Juan spoke thus because, generally speaking, what we call happiness is something that we have not experienced.

To-day M. Henry Laujol's philosophy shows still better in this remarkable essay, in which he strives to confound the poet's solitary pride, and to instruct the princes of the mind to despise no one. He opposes domestic work to works of art, and warmly concludes :

To work out one's destiny successfully, that also is a masterpiece. To struggle, hope, will, love, get married, have children, and call them if need be, Totor : how, in the eyes of the Eternal, is this more foolish than to put black on white, crumple paper, and fight whole nights against an adjective? Without reckoning that one suffers a thousand deaths at this sterile game, and thereby discounts one's share of Hell.

"Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of thy life." It was no bourgeois who said that ; it was Ecclesiastes, a man of letters, almost a romantic.

That is well said. Flaubert was truly lacking in grace to laugh at people who called their son Totor, he who called Madame X. his sultana, which was quite as ridiculous. Flaubert was wrong in thinking that "quite candidly, outside art, there is nothing here below but ignominy." And if he did spend a week in avoiding an assonance, as he boasted, he had no right to despise the obscure work of the bulk of men. But to regard their work as equal to his, to estimate at the same value the work that each does for himself, and that which one alone does for all ; to balance, as M. Laujol seems to do, the feeding of a child against the birth of a poem—that resolves itself into proclaiming the emptiness of beauty, genius, and thought, the negation of everything, and is proffering the hand

to the Russian apostle who professes that it is better to make shoes than books. As for Ecclesiastes, whom you have so imprudently quoted, be careful; he was a great sceptic, and his counsel is not so moral as it sounds. Orientals must be distrusted in matters of the domestic affections.

But I am wrong to quarrel with M. Henry Laujol, who did not write the lines I have quoted in cold blood; Flaubert had exasperated him, and I am not surprised. Flaubert's ideas are enough to drive any ordinary man mad. They are so absurd and contradictory, and anyone who attempted to reconcile even three of them would soon be holding his temples firmly in both hands to prevent his head from bursting. Flaubert's thought is eruptive and cataclysmic. The great man had the logic of an earthquake. He mistrusted it a little, and as he was not at all simple-minded he posed as being even more volcanic than he really was; he aided the natural convulsions with fireworks, so that his innate extravagance owed something to art, just like those wild places where the innkeepers improve the view.

Greatness is always astonishing. That of the vagaries which Flaubert piled up in his letters and conversation is prodigious. The Goncourts collected some remarks of his which will cause unending surprise. It is first necessary to know what Flaubert was like: a Northern giant, with child-like cheeks and a huge moustache, a big pirate's body, and blue ingenuous eyes. As for his mind, it was truly a strange agglomeration. Long ago it was said that man is many-sided. Flaubert was many-sided, but more; he was dislocated, and his component parts tended unceasingly to separate. When I was a

child there was shown at the Théâtre Séraphin a perfect model, symbolic of Flaubert's soul. It was a little hussar who came along smoking his pipe. His arms detached themselves, and danced on their own account, whilst the rest of the body went on dancing. Then his legs went off, each to its own side, without his appearing to perceive it; the head and the body separated in turn, and the very head disappeared into the astrachan cap, whence some frogs escaped. This figure expresses perfectly the heroic lack of harmony which reigned over all Flaubert's moral and intellectual faculties, and when it was granted to me to see and hear him in his little room in the Rue Murillo, gesticulating, shouting, and dressed like a corsair, I could not refrain from thinking of the little hussar in the Théâtre Séraphin. It was wrong, I admit. Anyhow, the great and complete admiration which I felt for his work remained undiminished thereby. It has since grown greater, and the unchangeable beauty permeating all the pages of *Madame Bovary* daily enchants me more completely. But the man who wrote that book so surely, and with such an infallible hand, was an abyss of uncertainty and error.

In this there is something humiliating to our petty wisdom: this man, who possessed the secret of infinite words, was not intelligent. On hearing him pour forth, with a roaring voice, feeble aphorisms and obscene theories which every line he had ever written rose up to deny, one was stupefied and said: "This is the scapegoat of romantic follies, the chosen animal which bears the signs of genius."

He was that. He was still the broad-backed giant, the great St. Christopher, who, painfully supporting himself by an uprooted oak, carried

literature from the romantic to the naturalistic bank, without knowing what he carried, or whence he came or whither he was going.

One of his grandfathers had married a Canadian woman, and Gustave Flaubert flattered himself that Indian blood flowed in his veins. It is a fact that he was descended from the Natchez, but it was through Chateaubriand. He was romantic in his soul. At college he slept with a dagger under his pillow. As a young man he stopped his tilbury before Casimir Delavigne's country house, and stood on the seat to shout vulgar abuse through the railings. In a letter to one of his earliest friends he acclaimed Nero as "the culminating character of the ancient world." The placid lover of a bluestocking, he wore the shoes of Antony with an ill grace. "I came very near to killing her," he said twenty years afterwards. "As I approached her, I had an hallucination. I heard the benches of the Assize Court crack beneath me."

He assuredly owes his most magnificent absurdities to Romanticism. But he adds thereto from sources of his own.

The Goncourts noted in their journal these confused dissertations, these theses in absolute opposition to the nature of his talent, which he uttered with a voice of thunder; these "show opinions," these obscure and complicated theories of "pure beauty," a beauty of all eternity, into the definition of which he plunged like a buffalo into a lake covered with tall grasses. All this certainly betrays a great innocence. M. Henry Laujol has correctly observed, in the essay to which I have referred, that Flaubert's most pitiable error is to have believed that Art and Life are incom-



patible, and that in order to write one must renounce all the joys of life.

“A thinker”—he says—and what is an artist if not a threefold thinker!—“must have neither religion, nor mother-country, nor even any social convictions. . . . To take sides in anything, to enter into any corporation, or partnership, or shop, even to assume a title of any sort, is dishonouring and debasing. . . . You shall paint wine, love, woman, and glory on condition, my good man, that you are neither drunkard nor lover, neither husband nor cuckold. Involved in life, one sees it ill; one suffers or enjoys it too much. In my opinion the artist is a monstrosity, something outside of nature.”

There lies his mistake. He does not understand that poetry must be born of life, naturally, just as trees, flowers, and fruits spring from the ground, from the bare soil in view of the sky. We suffer only for our faults. He suffered cruelly for his. “His misfortunes occurred, rightly,” says our critic, “because he insisted upon seeing, in literature, not man’s best servant, but some cruel Moloch, greedy of burnt offerings.”

A spoilt child, later on an elderly child (adds M. Laujol), but always a child! Flaubert was destined to retain, as a viaticum, all his college theories on the absolute excellency of the man of letters, on the antagonism between the writer and the rest of humanity, on the earth regarded as an evil place, etc. All these arrogant shams had first appeared to him as dogmas, and he always retained for them his early devotion. A childish conception of duty lingered in his intelligence, where, in spite of illuminating flashes, there always reigned a kind of night.

He had also a rage for impersonal art. He would say: “An artist should work so as to compel belief from yet unborn posterity.” This mania inspired

him with some disastrous theories. But as a matter of fact there was no great harm done. One resists in vain ; one can only give of oneself, and all our work is only ourselves, because it knows none other but ourselves. It is in vain that Flaubert cries that he is absent from his work. He threw himself into it completely armed, as Decius into the chasm.

On looking into them it will be seen that Flaubert's ideas were not really his own. He had appropriated them in all directions, only reserving to himself the task of obscuring and confusing them.

Théophile Gautier, Baudelaire, and Louis Bouilhet thought much as he did. In this respect the Goncourts' journal is very instructive. One sees by what an abyss we are divided from the old masters, we who have learnt to read in the books of Darwin, Spencer, and Taine. But as great an abyss is yawning between us and the rising generation. Those who come after us will laugh at our methods and analyses. They do not understand us, and if we on our side are not careful we shall no longer know what it is that they wish to say. In this century ideas flit past with terrifying rapidity. The naturalism whose birth we saw is already dying, and it seems as though symbolism is ready to rejoin it in the bosom of the eternal Maia.

In this melancholy flux of states of mind and modes of thought the works of the old Flaubert stand erect and respected. That is sufficient reason for us to forgive the author the incoherences and contradictions so abundantly revealed by his letters and familiar conversations. Amid these contradictions there is one which we must bless and

admire: Flaubert, who believed in nothing on earth, and asked more bitterly even than Ecclesiastes: "What profit hath a man of all his labour?" Flaubert was the most strenuous of literary workers. He worked fourteen hours a day. Losing much time in obtaining information and documents—which he did very badly, as he was lacking in critical faculty and in method—devoting long afternoons to what M. Henry Laujol describes so well as "his roaring melancholy," sweating, blowing, gasping, giving himself infinite trouble, and bending over a table that huge frame intended for the fresh air of woodland, sea, and mountain, threatened by apoplexy, long before he was struck down by it, he combined, in the accomplishment of his work, the obstinacy of a frenzied scribe and the disinterested zeal of the great monastic scholars with the instinctive ardour of the artist and the bee.

Why, since he believed, hoped and desired nothing, did he abandon himself to such a heavy task? At all events he reconciled this antinomy when, at the height of his glory, he made this sad avowal: "After all, work is the best way of cheating life."

He was unhappy. If it was all a mistake, and if he was the victim of his false ideas, he none the less experienced real tortures. Let us avoid imitating the Abbé Bournisien, who denied the sufferings of Emma because she suffered from neither cold nor hunger. One man may not feel the iron teeth which bite into his flesh; another is worried by a swan's-down pillow. Flaubert, like the Princess of the Renaissance, "carried more than his burden of the boredom common to all well-born creatures."

He found some satisfaction in bellowing pitiable

maxims. Do not let us be too sorry for him. It is true that he had literary ideas which were absolutely untenable. He was one of those brave captains who cannot discuss war, but who win battles.

## PAUL VERLAINE



**A**S in 1780, there is this year also a poet in hospital. But to-day—and it was not so at the Hôtel-Dieu, in the time of Gilbert—the bed has white curtains, and the guest is a real poet. His name is Paul Verlaine. He is no pale and melancholy young man, but an old vagabond, tired after thirty years' wandering along the roads.

To see him you would think he was a village sorcerer. With his bald head, bronzed and battered like an old pot, his small, glittering, slanting eyes, his flat face and inflated nostrils, he looks, with his short, sparse, harsh beard, like a Socrates without philosophy, and lacking in self-command.

His appearance surprises and shocks. His air is at once wild and wheedling, savage and familiar. A natural Socrates, or better still, a faun or satyr, a being half beast and half god, which alarms one like some natural force unsubmissive to any known law. Oh, yes, he is a vagabond, an old vagabond of the roads and faubourgs!

Once upon a time he was one of ourselves. He was brought up in pleasant obscurity, by a poor widow of great distinction, in the heart of the peaceful Batignolles. Like the rest of us, he studied in some *lycée*, and, like the rest, he took his bachelor's degree after having studied the classics sufficiently

to misunderstand them. And since education leads to everything, he entered one of the offices of the municipality. At that time Baron Haussmann, without knowing it, was collecting long-haired poets and little journalists on a large scale, in the offices of the Prefecture. *Les châtiments* was there read aloud, and Manet's painting praised. Paul Verlaine copied out his *Poèmes saturniens* on the office paper. I do not say that to find fault with him for so doing. In his first youth he lived like François Coppée, Albert Mérat, Léon Valade, and so many other poets, a prisoner of the desk, who went into the country on Sundays. This modest, monotonous existence, favourable to dreams and patient work upon verses, was that of the bulk of the Parnassians. Alone, or almost alone of this coterie, M. Jose-Maria de Heredia, although deprived of a great part of the treasure of his ancestors, the *conquistadores*, cut a figure as a young man of fashion, and smoked good cigars. His ties had as much distinction as his sonnets. We all sincerely despised the benefits of fortune. We loved only Glory, although we wished it to be discreet, and almost concealed. Paul Verlaine, in company with Catulle Mendès, Léon Dierz, and François Coppée, was a Parnassian from the very beginning. We advanced, I know not why, a claim to impassivity. M. Xavier de Ricard, the leading philosopher of the school, maintained ardently that Art must be of ice, and we never even perceived that this teacher of impassivity never wrote a single verse which was not a violent expression of his political, social, or religious passions. His wide apostolic forehead, flaming eyes, ascetic thinness and generous eloquence did not undeceive us. They were great days, those

days when we were lacking in common sense ! Since then M. de Ricard, irritated by the coldness of northern Frenchmen, has retired to the neighbourhood of Montpellier, and from his hermitage at Mas-du-Diable he discharges over Languedoc the revolutionary ardour which consumes him. Verlaine as much as anybody posed as being impassive. He sincerely reckoned himself among those who "chisel words like goblets," and he reckoned on reducing the Philistine to silence by his triumphant question :

Est-elle marbre ou non, la Vénus de Milo ?

"Is she of marble or not, the Venus of Milo ?" No doubt she is of marble. But, you, poor sick child, shaken by painful rigors, are none the less condemned to sing like a trembling leaf, and you will never know aught of life and the world, other than the troubles of your flesh and blood.

Leave the symbolic marble, my friend, my unhappy friend ; your destiny is written. You will never leave the obscure world of sensation, and, tearing yourself in the shades, we shall hear your strange voice moaning and crying from below, and you will astonish us in turn by your ingenuous cynicism and your genuine repentance. *I nunc anima anceps. . . .*

No, the *Poèmes saturniens*, published in 1867, on the same day as François Coppée's *Reliquaire*, certainly never foreshadowed the most singular, monstrous, mystical, complicated, simple, nervous, eccentric, and undoubtedly most inspired and truest of contemporary poets. Still, through these manufactured poems, and in spite of the manner of the school, one divined a kind of strange, unhappy and tormented genius. The connoisseurs had noted it,

and they say that M. Zola asked which would go farthest, Paul Verlaine or François Coppée.

*Fêtes galantes* appeared in the following year. It was only a slim volume. But Paul Verlaine had already shown himself therein in his perturbing candour, and something of his slight, awkward and inexpressible charm. What are these *fêtes galantes*? They were held in Watteau's Cythera. But though folk still go in couples to the woods in the evening, the laurels are cut, as the song says, and the magic grasses which have grown in their place exhale a mortal languor.

Verlaine, who is one of those musicians who play false by refinement, has put many discords in these minuet airs, and his violin sometimes scrapes horribly; but all at once some note tugs at your heart-strings. The wicked fiddler has stolen your soul. He steals it, for instance, in playing *Clair de lune* :

Votre âme est un paysage choisi  
Que vont charmant masques et bergamasques  
Jouant du luth, et dansant, et quasi  
Tristes sous leurs déguisements fantasques.

Tout en chantant sur le mode mineur  
L'amour vainqueur, et la vie opportune,  
Ils n'ont pas l'air de croire à leur bonheur,  
Et leur chanson se mêle au clair de lune,

Au clair calme de lune triste et beau,  
Qui fait rêver les oiseaux dans les arbres,  
Et sangloter d'extase les jets d'eau,  
Les grands jets d'eau sveltes parmi les marbres.\*

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\* Your soul is a favourite landscape  
Where pass charming masks and bergamasks  
Playing the lute, and dancing, and half  
Sad beneath their fantastic disguises.



The accent is new, peculiar, and profound.

Our poet was heard once more, but this time barely heard, when, on the eve of the war, too near those terrible days, he issued *La bonne chanson*—some very simple, obscure, and infinitely sweet verses. He was then engaged, and the most tender and chaste of fiancés. Satyrs and fauns must sing thus when they are very young, when they have drunk milk, and the forest wakes in dawn and dew.

Suddenly Paul Verlaine disappeared. There happened to the poet of *Fêtes galantes* what happened to the companion of Vau-de-Vire, of whom the plaint tells. Nothing further was heard of him. For fifteen years he kept silence; after which it was learnt that the penitent Verlaine was publishing a volume of religious poetry with a Catholic publishing-house. What had happened in these fifteen years? I know not, and what does anybody know? The true history of François Villon is ill known. And Verlaine much resembles Villon: they are two "bad hats," to whom it was granted to say the sweetest things in the world. As for those fifteen years, we must adhere to the legend which states that our poet was a great sinner, and, to speak in the manner of the greatly regretted Jules Tellier, "one of those whom dreams have led to

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While they sing in a minor key,  
Of Love the victor, and fortunate life,  
They do not seem to believe in their good fortune,  
And their song mingles with the light of the moon,

With the light of the moon, sad and lovely,  
Which sets the birds dreaming in the trees  
And makes the fountains sob with ecstasy,  
The tall fountains amid the marble statues.

sensual folly." Legend speaks. It further says that the "bad hat" was punished for his misdemeanours, and that he expiated them painfully. It has been sought to give some verisimilitude to the legend by quoting these penitent stanzas, full of delightful candour :

Le ciel est par-dessus le toit  
Si bleu, si calme !  
Un arbre, par-dessus le toit  
Berce sa palme.

La cloche dans le ciel qu'on voit  
Doucement tinte ;  
Un oiseau sur l'arbre qu'on voit  
Chante son plainte.

Mon Dieu, mon Dieu, la vie est là,  
Simple et tranquille !  
Cette paisible rumeur-là  
Vient de la ville.

Qu'as-tu fait, ô toi que voilà  
Pleurant sans cesse,  
Dis, qu'as tu fait, toi que voilà  
De ta jeunesse ? \*

\* The sky is up above the roof  
So blue, so calm !  
A tree, above the roof,  
Waves its boughs.

The bell in the sky one sees  
Gently strikes ;  
A bird on the tree one sees  
Sings his song.

My God, my God, Life is there  
Simple and calm !  
That peaceful hum  
Comes from the town.

Doubtless it is but a legend, but it will prevail. It must. This detestable and charming poet's verses would lose their value and meaning if they came not from the dense atmosphere "lacking all light" where the Florentine saw carnal sinners who subordinated reason to lust.

*Que la ragion sommettono al talento.*

Moreover, the fault must be real for the repentance to be genuine. In his repentance Paul Verlaine returned to the God of his baptism and of his first communion with the completest candour. He was entirely sentimental. He never reflected nor argued.

No human thought, no intelligence ever troubled his idea of God. We have seen that he was a faun. Those who have read the Lives of the Saints know how easily the fauns, who are very simple, allowed themselves to be converted to Christianity by the Apostles to the Gentiles. Paul Verlaine wrote the most Christian verses we have in France. I am not the first to make that discovery. M. Jules Lemaître used to say that a certain strophe in *Sagesse* recalled in its accent a verse of the *Imitation*. The seventeenth century, to be sure, left us some beautiful spiritual poetry. Corneille, Brébeuf, and Godeau were inspired by the *Imitation* and the Psalms. But they wrote in the Louis XIII style, which was too proud, and even rather swaggering and hectoring. Like Polyeuctus in the time of the Cardinal, these painted poems wore a feathered hat, gloves with ruffles, and a long cape raised by a rapier like a

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What have you done, O you who are there,  
Weeping unceasingly?  
What have you done, O you who are there,  
With your youth?

cock's tail. Verlaine was naturally humble ; mystical poetry surged up from his heart, and he found once again the accents of a St. Francis, a St. Theresa.

Je ne veux plus aimer que ma mère Marie.

Car, comme j'étais faible et bien méchant encore  
Aux mains lâches, les yeux éblouis des chemins,  
Elle baissa mes yeux, et me joignit les mains  
Et m'enseigna les mots par lesquels on adore.\*

Or again these unrhymed lines, like those pious sighs of whose sweetness the mystics boast :

O mon Dieu, vous m'avez blessé d'amour  
Et la blessure est encore vibrante ;  
O mon Dieu, vous m'avez blessé d'amour.

Voici mon front qui n'a pu que rougir,  
Pour l'escabeau de vos pieds adorables,  
Voici mon front qui n'a pu que rougir.

Voici mes mains qui n'ont pas travaillé,  
Pour les charbons ardents et l'encens rare,  
Voici mes mains qui n'ont point travaillé.

Voici mon cœur qui n'a battu qu'en vain,  
Pour palpiter aux ronces du calvaire,  
Voici mon cœur qui n'a battu qu'en vain.

Voici mes pieds, frivoles voyageurs,  
Pour accourir au cri de votre grâce,  
Voici mes pieds, frivoles voyageurs.

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\* I wish to love none other now than my mother Mary

For when I was feeble, and still very wicked,  
With idle hands, and eyes dazzled by the road,  
She lowered my eyes, and joined my hands,  
And taught me the words by which to adore.

Voici mes yeux, lumineuses d'erreur,  
 Pour être éteints aux pleurs de la prière,  
 Voici mes yeux, lumineuses d'erreur.\*

This conversion was truly sincere, but not enduring. Like the dog of Holy Scripture, he returned to his vomit. Once more his relapse inspired him with exquisite candour. What, then, did he do? As sincere in sin as in repentance, he accepted the alternatives with cynical innocence. He resigned himself to taste in turn the pleasures of crime and the horrors of despair. Even more, he so to speak tasted them together: he kept the affairs of his soul in two separate compartments. Hence the curious collection of verse entitled

\* Oh my God, you have wounded me with love  
 And the wound is still tingling ;  
 Oh my God, you have wounded me with love.

Here is my forehead which cannot but blush,  
 As a stool for your adorable feet,  
 Here is my forehead which cannot but blush.

Here are my hands which have not worked,  
 For burning coals and rare incense,  
 Here are my hands which have not worked.

Here is my heart which has beaten only in vain,  
 To throb against the briars of Calvary.  
 Here is my heart which has beaten only in vain.

Here are my feet, vain travellers,  
 To run to the cry of your mercy,  
 Here are my feet, vain travellers.

Here are mine eyes, lights of error,  
 To be quenched by the tears of prayer,  
 Here are mine eyes, lights of error.

*Parallèlement.* It is doubtless perverse, but of such artless perversity that it almost seems pardonable.

And then, this poet must not be judged like an ordinary man. He has rights which we have not, for he is at once greater and smaller than we are. He has no conscience, and is a poet such as is not met with once in a hundred years. M. Jules Lemaître judged him well when he said: "He is a barbarian, a savage, a child . . . only this child has music in his soul, and on certain days he hears voices heard by none before him."

You say he is mad? I agree. And if I did not think so, I should not have written what I have. He is certainly mad. But remember that this lunatic has created a new art, and there is a chance that some day it will be said of him, as it is now said of François Villon, with whom he may be well compared: "He was the greatest poet of his time."

In a story recently translated by M. E. Jaubert, Count Tolstoi tells us the history of a poor, drunken, wandering musician, who, with his violin, expresses all that can be imagined of heaven. After having wandered throughout a whole winter's night, the wretched man falls dying in the snow. Then a voice says to him: "You are the best and the happiest of men." Were I a Russian, at least if I were a Russian saint and prophet, I feel that after reading *Sagesse* I should say to-day to the poor poet lying in a hospital bed: "You fell, but you confessed your fault. You were unhappy, but you never lied. Poor Samaritan, between your childish babble and your invalid's hiccoughs, it has been granted you to utter a few heavenly words. We are Pharisees. You are the best and the happiest of men."

## DIALOGUES OF THE LIVING

### LA BÊTE HUMAINE

#### *Characters.*

The Master of the House.	A Professor.
A Magistrate.	An Idealistic Novelist.
A Naturalistic Novelist.	A Critic.
A Philosopher.	An Engineer.
An Academician.	A Man of the World.

In the smoking-room.

THE MASTER OF THE HOUSE.

Anisette, or liqueur brandy ?

A MAGISTRATE.

Liqueur brandy, please. Have you read *La Bête Humaine* ?

THE MASTER OF THE HOUSE.

*La Bête Humaine*, the novel we have had to wait for? You remember: M. Émile Zola had still fifty pages to write when chance compelled him to take his place in a jury. He was very much put out, and filled the papers with his lamentations.

THE MAGISTRATE.

He even gave vent to the idea that the function of jurymen should be optional. Wherein he showed his ignorance of the principles of the law.

## A NATURALISTIC NOVELIST.

And what is still graver, he thereby betrayed his profound lack of curiosity, his contempt for the human document, of which he had formerly recommended the use. He has no longer the least wish to express the truth, to cut life into slices, big slices, as he used to say. He denies us, the traitor, and we deny him. There is nothing further in common between us. Not wish to be a juryman! . . . There is no better place than the jury-box whence to observe the grounds of society, the true base of human nature. What a chance for a Naturalist, to be a juryman! Zola a Naturalist, never!

## THE MASTER OF THE HOUSE.

Never is saying a good deal. . . . Anisette, curaçoa or liqueur brandy? For, anyhow, he is head of the Naturalistic school.

## A PHILOSOPHER.

Oh, that means nothing. It is rare for a master to belong so much as his disciples to the school he founded. . . . Anisette, please.

## THE NATURALISTIC NOVELIST.

Excuse me, let us avoid muddling the dates. Flaubert and the Goncourts created naturalism.

## AN ACADEMICIAN.

It appears to me, gentlemen, that you are very ungrateful to Champfleury.



## THE PHILOSOPHER.

Champfleury was a forerunner, and forerunners disappear inevitably before those whom they proclaim. Otherwise they would not be forerunners, but Messiahs. Besides, Champfleury wrote abominably.

## THE ACADEMICIAN.

Oh, I know nothing about him.

## THE MASTER OF THE HOUSE.

I have not yet read the whole of *La Bête Humaine*. Here it is on the table . . . there . . . that little yellow book. It seems to me that it is . . . how shall I express it?

## A PROFESSOR.

It is awfully dull.

## THE MASTER OF THE HOUSE.

As a matter of fact, I also found . . .

## AN IDEALIST.

I know no more interesting book. It is sublime!

## THE MASTER OF THE HOUSE.

Yes, from certain points of view. But there are some deliberate brutalities, shocking obscenities.

## THE PHILOSOPHER.

Now, gentlemen, let us be frank, and if possible, sincere with ourselves. Do M. Zola's brutalities

really shock you so much as you say? I doubt it. For after all, as soon as we have dined we leave the women alone, and take refuge here in the smoking-room, where we maintain an infinitely coarser conversation than anything M. Zola can print.

THE MASTER OF THE HOUSE.

It is not the same thing.

THE ACADEMICIAN.

Here we relax our minds.

A CRITIC.

There are two distinct subjects in *La Bête Humaine*: a famous case, and a monograph on railways.

AN ENGINEER.

Personally, I prefer the case. What M. Zola says about the courts is profoundly true.

THE MAGISTRATE.

I prefer him when he talks about the railways.

THE CRITIC.

But what a queer idea, thus to weld these two novels together. The one is an innocent work apparently suited to teach the rising generation how the railways are run. One might think that M. Zola had been inspired by Jules Verne. Every scene betrays a methodical popularizer. The train stopped in the snow, the meeting with the truck on the level crossing, causing the train to run off the rails, the

fight of the engine-driver and stoker in the cab, while the train is running at full speed ; these are all instructive episodes. I do not fear to say it ; this is Verne, and of the very best.

What pedagogic cares and maternal ruses to teach young folks the difference between the express engine with two big coupled wheels and the little tender engine with three low wheels ; to initiate them in the management of turn-tables, indicators, and signals ; to explain the action of points, and call their attention to the locomotive demanding the right of way by whistling ! No friend of childhood, not even M. Guillemin, would have catalogued with more commendable patience the various parts of the engine, the cylinders, hand gear, throttle-valve, connecting rods, regulator, and exhaust pipes ; the two side platforms, the slide-valves with their eccentrics, the cylinder grease-cups, the sand-box and whistle rods, the hand-wheels of the injector and the reversing-gear.

#### THE IDEALIST.

That is rather analytical, and M. Émile Zola loves enumeration. In that he resembles Homer. But do you think he still recalls Verne and Guillemin when he speaks of "the logic and exactitude of which the beauty of metal creatures consists" ? When he makes a living being of the engine Lison, built by Jacques Lantier, when he shows her so beautiful in her eager, supple youth, then attacked in a snow storm by an obscure, deep-seated malady, as though consumptive, and finally dying a violent death, ripped open and giving up her soul, is he then nothing more than a popularizer of science ? No,

this man is a poet. His great, simple genius creates symbols. He is a maker of new myths. The Greeks created the dryad; he created Lison; these two creations balance one another; both are immortal. He is the great singer of the day.

#### A MAN OF THE WORLD.

Hum! and is Mouquette in *Germinal* lyrical?

#### THE IDEALIST.

Certainly. He made a symbol of Mouquette's back. I tell you he is a poet.

#### THE NATURALIST.

You are hard on him, but he deserves it.

#### THE CRITIC.

(Who has not heard a word, and has been turning over the leaves of the little yellow book.)  
Gentlemen, listen to this page. (He reads.)

"The sub-inspector raised his lantern, for the driver to ask permission to proceed. There were two whistle-blasts, and near the signal-box the red light was replaced by a white one. Standing by the guard's van, the guard awaited the order to start, which he transmitted. The driver once more gave a long blast, opened the regulator and started the engine. They were off. The movement was at first unnoticeable; then the train rolled on. It passed under the Pont de l'Europe, and forged on toward the Batignolles tunnel."

Was ever anything more plainly didactic, and does not this page read to you as if it had been torn out of a volume of the *Bibliothèque des merveilles*, founded by the late lamented Charton? Let us be

just ; platitude and innocence cannot be pushed farther. As we were saying a little while ago, M. Zola has given us a novel suitable for the schools. By some extraordinary aberration, a sort of madness, he has mingled with these childish scenes a story of crime and lewdness. One meets therein an infamous old man, polluting little girls, an unpunished prisoner, a criminal young woman, horribly bland, and a monster who, associating in his mind the idea of murder with that of voluptuousness, cannot refrain from murdering the women he loves. Its most frightful feature is the calm of the individuals who peacefully bear their crimes, as an apple tree its fruit. I do not say that this is false. On the contrary, I believe that some men are naturally and simply criminal, with a sort of candour ; but the juxtaposition of these two stories is very queer.

#### THE MAN OF THE WORLD.

The man who kills women exists. I knew a bald and perfectly correct young Englishman, who regretted that in Paris there were no houses where . . .

#### THE PHILOSOPHER.

Certainly that exists . . . everything exists. But M. Zola's sadic engine-driver analyses himself far too much. He feels himself carried away, says M. Zola, "by the heredity of violence, the need of murder, which, in the primeval forest, hurled beast against beast." He asks himself whether his monstrous ideas do not come from "the evil that women have done to the race, from the hatred heaped up from male to male, ever since the first betrayal in the depths of their caverns." He seems

to have studied anthropology and prehistoric archaeology, to have read Darwin, Maudsley, Lombroso, and Henri Joly; and followed the proceedings of the last criminal congress. It is only too clear that M. Zola thought for him.

#### THE MASTER OF THE HOUSE.

You know that, in order to describe an engine-driver's sensations, M. Zola travelled on an engine from Paris to Mantes. He was even sketched on the journey.

#### THE PHILOSOPHER.

As a matter of fact, he rode on an engine. He was astonished and communicated his astonishment to the driver and stoker of his book.

#### THE NATURALIST.

I do not defend Zola, who, as Rosny said, is a terrible trickster. Still, one could not study the life of a fireman by renting a villa on Lake Como.

#### THE PHILOSOPHER.

To see as others do, it is not sufficient to see what they see. Zola saw what the engine-driver saw, but he did not see it as the engine-driver did.

#### THE NATURALIST.

Then you deny observation?

#### THE ACADEMICIAN.

These cigars are excellent. . . . It is said that M. Zola has put into his story *Gabrielle* the woman

Fenayron, whose manners were so gentle, and who betrayed her lover so readily ; she held his feet while he was being smothered.

THE MASTER OF THE HOUSE.

Delilah !

THE MAN OF THE WORLD.

It is in the sex. The hen partridge is used to snare the cock. They call her a decoy-bird.

THE CRITIC.

M. Zola's Gabrielle is called Sévérine. Hers is a well-drawn character, and this dainty criminal, so quiet and gentle, with periwinkle blue eyes, exhaling sympathy, may be reckoned one of the master's most peculiar creations.

THE PHILOSOPHER.

In *La Bête Humaine* there is also an incidental character cleverly delineated ; that of M. Camy-Lamotte, general secretary of the Ministry of Justice in 1870 ; a political judge, who believes that to strive to be just is infinitely weary, to labour in vain ; whose only virtue is an elegant correctness, and who values nothing beyond grace and artifice.

THE MAGISTRATE.

M. Zola does not know the magistracy. If he had sought information . . .

THE PHILOSOPHER.

Well ?

## THE MAGISTRATE.

I should have naturally refused it. But I know better than he the vices of our judicial organization. I affirm that an examining magistrate like his Denizet does not exist.

## THE IDEALIST.

All the same, this example of the stupidity of intelligent people, this judge who sees logic everywhere, who will admit no mistakes of reasoning in his prisoners, and who inspires the stupefied accused with this overwhelming thought—"What is the good of telling the truth, since a lie is logical?"—is wonderful, and true to life.

## THE MASTER OF THE HOUSE.

This novel of Zola's appears to me to be depressing.

## THE CRITIC.

It is true there is a lot of crime in it. Out of ten principal characters, six die a violent death, and two go to penal servitude. That is not the actual proportion.

## THE MAGISTRATE.

No, that is not the proportion.

## THE CRITIC.

One day M. Alexandre Dumas was finding fault with a friend for putting only rogues on the stage. And he added with a sort of grim gaiety—"You are wrong. There is a certain proportion of honest



people to be found in any section of Society. For instance, there are two of us here, and there is at least one honest man." I say in my turn, there are ten of us in this smoking-room. There ought to be five or six honest men amongst us. That is about half. The reason that honest people win in life is that they are the more numerous. They do not, however, win by much—or always. They form a very small majority. M. Zola has mistaken the actual proportion. It is not that likeable individuals are not to be met with in his books; there are two—a quarryman, called Cabuche, an old offender, who has killed a man. But you misunderstand M. Zola's realism if you think this quarryman to be an ordinary quarryman; he is a rustic demi-god, a Hercules of the woods and caves, a giant with a sometimes heavy hand, but whose heart is that of a child, and his soul full of ideal love. The beautiful Flora also is sympathetic. She derailed a train and caused the horrible death of nine persons, but it was in a splendid transport of jealousy. Flora is in charge of one of the Company's gates; she is also a mountain nymph, an amazon, etc., an august symbol of virgin nature, and the subterranean forces of the Earth.

#### THE ROMANTIC IDEALIST.

I told you that M. Zola was a great idealist.

#### THE MASTER OF THE HOUSE.

Gentlemen, if you have done smoking. . . . The ladies are complaining of your absence.

(They rise.)

THE ACADEMICIAN (standing up, aside to the Professor).

I admit that I haven't read a page of Zola. There are several of us at the Academy in the same position. We are overwhelmed with work: what with commissions, and the Dictionary. . . . We have no time to read.

THE PROFESSOR.

Then how do you form an idea of the candidate's merits?

THE ACADEMICIAN.

Oh, Lord! Everything gets known in time; we nearly always succeed in getting a rough decision. For instance, some one told me that M. Zola had bad manners. Well, it is not true. He came to see me; and he behaved very well.

## NEW DIALOGUES OF THE DEAD

A WAGER.

*Characters.*

Menippus—a cynic philosopher.

Saint-Évremond.

Aspasia.

Mademoiselle Aïssé.

Barbey d'Aurévilly.

A little Cousin of

M. Nisard.

A grove in the Elysian fields.

MENIPPUS.

As M. Ernest Renan has revealed to human beings, in the theatre of Bacchus, the spirit Camillus daily brings us the Earth's novelties. This morning he brought us a novel by Victor Cherbuliez called *Une Gageure*.

SAINT-ÉVREMOND.

I shall not fail to read it to the Duchesse de Mazarin. M. Cherbuliez is a man of infinite art, who has greatly exercised the faculty of understanding. Philosophy, the liberal arts, natural science, mechanical art, the industries, the policing of cities and the government of peoples, there is nothing outside his domain.

## ASPASIA.

It is true that in respect of a horse by Phidias he showed that he understood more about veterinary work and farriery than Xenophon himself, who all the same was a good cavalry officer, and to whose wife I gave lessons in domestic economy.

## SAINT-ÉVREMOND.

Your Xenophon, Madame, was a very fine man, but, between ourselves, he was but a middling thinker. He was unacquainted with men's various manners. M. Cherbuliez knows them. He is very intelligent.

## MADEMOISELLE AÏSSÉ.

But at the expense of his heart.

## SAINT-ÉVREMOND.

It is true that we only develop one faculty at the expense of another. A poet whom I love, because I read him when I was young, said :

It is an order of the gods, which is never departed from,  
To sell us very dear the great blessings they confer on us.

## MADEMOISELLE AÏSSÉ.

There is nothing in the world to be preferred to sentiment. The heart is a source of wit, but wit is not a source of heart.

## ASPASIA.

Ah, my dear little girl, how innocent you are ! I had power over men only because I was a musician and geometrician.

MENIPPUS.

And because you were beautiful, O Milesian, and because you looked at men with those dogs' eyes, to which the comic poets of Athens refer.

ASPASIA.

Be quiet, Menippus. I was beautiful in so far that my body was harmonious and rhythmic like my soul. Harmony is everything, and outside of geometry there is nothing in the universe.

SAINT-ÉVREMOND.

It is certainly a fine thing to embrace the universe with a mathematical mind. But the subtle mind is also necessary. And it is the rarest kind of mind. This French writer of whom we were speaking has a subtle mind.

MENIPPUS.

Cherbuliez? It is true that he is subtle. He measures flickers of the eye, and weighs sighs; he is supreme at embroidering a spider's web.

BARBEY D'AURÉVILLY TO MENIPPUS.

Sir, when you were alive, you were dressed in an old miller's sack, and you slept in a jar amidst the frogs of Ismenus. I am not paying you a compliment, sir. But that is more decent than to keep one's skull warm with a Greek cap in an ordinary room. Understand that M. Cherbuliez does not know how to wear his clothes. I met him one day on the bridge of the four statues. He was dressed, like a professor, in a neutral coloured overcoat.

Moreover, he is a Swiss, like Jean-Jacques. How can you expect him to be able to write ?

SAINT-ÉVREMOND.

I believe, on the contrary, that the right-thinking man makes a point of being indistinguishable from the rest of the company by his clothes. But that is of little importance. As for being a Swiss, it is a disgrace which is forgotten owing to his mind and talents.

BARBEY D'AURÉVILLY.

Sir, it is a crime.

THE LITTLE COUSIN OF M. NISARD.

But Jean-Jacques had some merits. . . .

BARBEY D'AURÉVILLY.

Sir, the only merit I recognize in him is that he sometimes dressed as an Armenian. I despair of M. Cherbuliez ever doing so much. He wears spectacles. I do not like that. A man must be slightly contaminated by Spinozism to wear spectacles.

THE LITTLE COUSIN OF M. NISARD.

Would it not be rather because he was short-sighted? I would willingly believe it, merely from reading him. Menippus spoke the truth when he said he was subtle. The ideas he draws from the heads of his characters are very seemly, and in the best possible style. They are dressed like marchionesses : dresses with trains, low necks, powder, a

touch of rouge, a killing beauty-spot, nothing lacking ; they are charming, and as high as your thumb. Sometimes they wear short skirts, and dance with a studied voluptuousness ; it is a Lilliputian ballet. On other occasions, in feathered felt hats like musketeers, they roll their eyes terribly, touch the moon with the points of their moustaches, and raise their cloaks, like a cock's tail, with a rapier ; it is a Lilliputian army.

SAINT-ÉVREMOND.

All that is agreeable, and very pleasant. Our brains are all full of pigmies of different kinds, and characters who laugh and cry, go to war, or fly off to love. And it takes a deal of wit to catch these pigmies of our soul as they fly, to describe them, understand their ridiculous importance, and unravel their queer succession. That is man. Our machinery consists of an infinity of little pieces. And a great mind is, after all, nothing but a well-regulated ant-heap.

ASPASIA.

This new novel, called *Une Gageure*. What is the wager in question ?

THE LITTLE COUSIN.

Madam, I read it in the Review in which it first appeared, and can satisfy your curiosity. The Duchesse d'Armanches bet the Comte de Louvaigue that the Comtesse de Louvaigue would never be the wife of her husband.

MENIPPUS.

She bet, and cheated.

THE LITTLE COUSIN.

Well, yes. She cheated.

ASPASIA.

Then you know the story, Menippus ?

MENIPPUS.

No. I never read. But I have lived long enough to know that a woman cannot play without cheating. In your time, Aspasia, tales were told of women's tricks, in your own country, and they were called "Milesian tales." The Duchesse d'Armanches cheated. Anyhow, did she win ?

THE LITTLE COUSIN.

She lost.

MENIPPUS.

Then there was no excuse for her.

SAINT-ÉVREMOND.

I am curious to know all about this business. Why was not Mme de Louvaigue her husband's wife ?

THE LITTLE COUSIN.

Because she did not wish to be.

SAINT-ÉVREMOND.

And why did she not so wish ? Was she a prude, and pious in advance of her time ?

Ten years ago, in this sojourning place of the just, I read the story of Baroness Fuster. She refused



the entry of her room to her husband, an old soldier, tired of running about the world, and anxious to taste domestic joys. The Baroness, no longer very young, had retained a beauty of which her husband became suddenly aware. But she was ruled by one Father Phalippou, to whom she gave much money for works of piety, and he, in return, led her in the paths of perfection. She made great progress, and the very idea that her husband might lead her back into worldly ways filled her with horror. Father Phalippou encouraged her resistance, and as a prize for her reconquered chastity conferred upon her the title of Canoness, besides a great number of benefits of a mystical and spiritual order. But the husband, who was a good Christian, and much richer than his wife, having paid Father Phalippou a great deal more money than had the Baroness, the holy man considered that after all marriage was a sacrament, that a woman is guilty of sinful pride in refusing to humiliate herself as in duty bound, and that the delicacy of the flesh must be overcome. He ordered the Baroness to give her husband access to her room.

In vain did she weep, and allege that she was a canoness. Father Phalippou was unshakable.

“Madame,” he said, “you must climb your Calvary.”

This story was told by M. Ferdinand Fabre, who well knows the monks, whose kind has little varied since the reign of Louis the Great. Tell me, is there a Father Phalippou in Mme de Louvaigue’s scruples?

#### THE LITTLE COUSIN.

No. The lady merely based her refusal on her own will, and personal ideas.

SAINT-ÉVREMOND

M. de Louvaigue was not attractive ?

THE LITTLE COUSIN.

Yes, he was very attractive and a very gallant man.

MENIPPUS.

Have you not guessed that this woman bangs the door in her husband's face to excite him ?

ASPASIA.

I am a Greek, and consequently not in touch with affairs of the heart, which do not assume much importance with us. But I should be more inclined to believe that she did not love him and preferred some one else.

MADemoiselle AÏSSÉ.

Or perhaps she thought herself not enough loved ?

THE LITTLE COUSIN.

Madam, you have guessed right.

MENIPPUS.

And people are interested in that silly story ! It is a striking proof of human wretchedness !

SAINT-ÉVREMOND.

Remember, Menippus, that in life men have only two interests ; hunger and love. It is little. But the regretful recollection pursues us into the Elysian Fields.

## MADEMOISELLE AÏSSÉ.

M. Cherbuliez is what is nowadays called a diplomatist; he treats affairs of the heart as ambassadors treat the affairs of empires: he goes the longest way round, and is amused by difficulties. That is what annoys me.

Affairs of the heart are really very simple. I shall never be aught but a savage, and shall never understand M. Cherbuliez' heroines. They are always looking for and never finding themselves. Besides, he does not feel true love; but I forgive him his dry heart, for he said once—"Women have no need to be beautiful all the days of their life. It is enough that they should have moments which they cannot forget, and whose return they await."

## BARBEY D'AURÉVILLY.

M. Cherbuliez is a Genevese, and the clockmaker of the passions: he winds up hearts, regulates the sentiments, and replaces the main-spring when it is broken.

## THE LITTLE COUSIN.

That is cleverly said. But we must agree that no one has exhibited the marionettes like this Academician. He pulls the strings with marvellous dexterity. But, if he sometimes allows them to be seen, it is purely because he wishes it. And how pretty, active, and well dressed his dolls are!

## SAINT-ÉVREMOND.

Is not exhibiting marionettes playing the human comedy? What are human beings but dolls pulled

by invisible strings? And what are we, who wander under these myrtles, but the shades of dolls?

MADEMOISELLE AÏSSÉ.

If we have suffered, we are not dolls. M. Cherbuliez does not know that mankind suffers, and that is why the great scholar is an ignorant man.

SAINT-ÉVREMOND.

Do you not see, madame, that he is a courteous gentleman, and that, if he neither roars nor laments, it is because he is in good company. We have turned the world into a reception. To do so, it has been necessary to contract it a little. We have excluded thence savage animals, and people who are too crude. But, believe me, as thus arranged the world is a more inhabitable place. For my part, I am infinitely obliged to Mme de Rambouillet for having imported refinement into it. When I was young and alive I inconsiderately blamed Racine for not introducing elephants into his Alexander. I now repent it; I no longer wish to see monsters, unless they be beautiful.

THE LITTLE COUSIN.

Note also that M. Cherbuliez is a great scoffer who, like your M. Fagon, knows that much must be forgiven to Nature. He is a philosopher who hides the sad nothingness of man and life under heaps of flowers, sometimes fantastic ones, such as orchids.

In *Une Gageure* there is a Chinese pavilion where the beautiful ladies and their lovers come in turn to meet, quarrel, love, suffer, fear and hope. They dance like moths round a flame; and above them

on a marble column reigns a statue of Buddha in gilded copper. Seated with crossed legs, one hand on his knee and the other raised to bless, the divine master dreams in his impassive benevolence. "His long eyes and delicately modelled cheeks," says the story-teller, "express an ineffable mildness, and his small woman's mouth, full of compassion, which attempts to smile, seems to wish peace to all creatures." It seems to me that this Buddha bears a rather sublime likeness to M. Cherbuliez. Unless we look for this clever man's philosophy in the verses of a little book which he reads much, and is fond of quoting, the work of the Christian Buddha, *The Imitation of Jesus Christ*.

## MENIPPUS.

All this only confirms me in the opinion that I did well to live in an old amphora, with frogs for company, by the fountain of Dirce.

## A DAY AT VERSAILLES \*



WOULD wish to make you acquainted with the author of this Marie-Antoinette, so sumptuously published by Goupil, with the charming portrait by Jeaninet as a frontispiece. M. Pierre de Nolhac is a scholar, and a very young one. It is difficult for the public to visualize scholarship allied with youth. It thinks that, in order to know what is what, it is not too much to have studied for a lifetime; that deep reading is the business of old men, and that an ample white beard is as necessary to the conformation of a real doctor as a gown and a square cap. This would be perfectly correct if knowledge consisted of amassing facts, and if it were only a matter of stuffing one's brains. But it is not so, and what constitutes a scholar, in addition to a kind of natural genius, without which nothing is possible, is method, and method only, which proceeds to research by strict operations. Its art consists much less of knowledge than of making investigations.

\* *A propos de la Reine Marie-Antoinette*, par Pierre de Nolhac; illustrations d'après les originaux contemporains, 1 vol. in 4°. Boussod et Valadon, Éditeurs. (Consult also: *Le Canzonière de Pétrarque*, *La Bibliothèque de Salvio Orsini*, *Le dernier amour de Ronsard*, *Lettres de Joachim du Bellay*, *Erasme en Italie*, *Lettres de la reine de Navarre*, *Petites Notes sur l'art italien*, *Paysages d'Auvergne*, etc., par Pierre de Nolhac.)

Like the rest of the world, he is ignorant, but he possesses the means of learning that which he does not know. And that is what divides him from us, who know not how to control our feeble knowledge, who suffer from all sorts of illusions, and who float from lie to lie. After reflection one is persuaded that science, which exacts a rigorous, inflexible and un pitying mind, is better suited to young than to old men, all the more in that experience is unnecessary; and little as we may think that it demands ardour, passion, sacrifice and devotion, no one will doubt but that it is better served by the faithful, twenty-five years of age, than by academicians loaded with years and honours, who would willingly have the Polymnia of their youth sleep by their side. Young scholars are also interesting to talk to. I know of several who are fitted to inspire a pleasant confidence in the intellectual destinies of France.

To every day its task. To-day I will endeavour to make you acquainted with M. Pierre de Nolhac, who, after having taken his place beside M. Louis Havet, in the new School of History and Philology, makes his mark before the public in publishing a book which proceeds from science in method, and in execution from art. I refer to *La Reine Marie-Antoinette*. To know M. Pierre de Nolhac the best thing is to go and see him. And we shall then perhaps meet some of the scholars of his generation, who will in conversation reveal something of the thought and soul of learned youth.

I will therefore tell you about the day I passed, last autumn, at his house and in his company. On leaving the École de Rome, and whilst he was a lecturer at the Hautes-Études, M. Pierre de

Nolhac was attached to the National Museums ; and the State, not generally far-sighted in these matters, could not have made a better choice, nor have appointed a more vigilant guardian for the preservation of our artistic treasures. He is lodged by the Republic in a wing of the Palace of Versailles, and it is there that he pursues his studies in a great light and a profound silence. He has made his study in a vast white *salon*, whose sole wealth is an antique bust on the chimney-piece, and, reflected in the glass, a woman's head, mutilated but pure, one of those marbles which, whilst not expressing perfect beauty, at least make us think about it. On the walls are some souvenirs of Italy. In the midst of the room is a large table loaded with books and papers, the mass of which indicates the scholar's varied researches. I saw there a statement of the lodgings of Versailles under Louis XVI, side by side with a manuscript of Quintilian annotated by Petrarch.

To be successful, one should surprise M. de Nolhac, as I did, brooding over these papers, like the spirit of God upon the waters. He looks very young, with round, smiling cheeks, an expression of innocent guile and restless modesty. His abundant and rebellious black hair, into which one sees his two hands plunged at difficult moments, during active meditation, reminds me, I know not why, of Traddles, David Copperfield's friend, who was so keen and so occupied in keeping his ideas in his head with his ten fingers. M. de Nolhac wears light blue spectacles behind which one conjectures large, gentle, wondering eyes. If one did not know him to be the equal of the most learned, he might easily be mistaken for a village bridegroom, or a



young schoolmaster such as is met with in comic opera.

Knowing him as I do, I find on his study table and book-shelves the subjects of his studies, the names which he has marked with his imprint as with a wax seal. He has attached himself to the humanists, scholars, and poets of the Renaissance. He has breathed the still perfumed flower, which has been drying for so many centuries in the manuscripts of men like Boccaccio, Petrarch, the Estiennes, the Aldi, Erasmus and du Bellay, and our Ronsard and Rabelais, who loved the dead tongues with a fervent love, and found in antique dust the spark of eternal beauty. He has found in some dark corner the *Canzonière*, written in Petrarch's own hand. He has unearthed some unpublished letters of Joachim du Bellay, and some scattered pages of that queen with a charming name, "the Marguerite of princesses, who was by her grace, wit, and nobility of heart, the pearl of the Renaissance." He has reconstituted the Library formed by Cardinal Farnese in the magnificent palace now occupied by our Embassy and School of Fine Arts near the Quirinal. He has followed Erasmus through Italy during the tenth year of the great sixteenth century which changed the world. He has accompanied him to Venice, to the printer Aldus Manucus, to Bologna, and Rome, then "the quietest dwelling of the Muses." Antique manuscripts were there being deciphered with a pious ardour, and the divine spirit of Plato was upon the Cardinals. All the preachers praised Christ in the language of Cicero, and the most Ciceronian was the most admired. He was called Ingherami, librarian of the Vatican, and was surnamed Fedro,

because in a performance of Seneca's *Hippolytus*, given at Cardinal Riario's palace, he played the part of the amorous queen. That is a little point which describes a state of society better than all political annals. Happy M. de Nolhac, who sees simultaneously our modern life with its wide horizons, and this exquisite one of the old humanists bent over delicious parchments! How painstakingly does he penetrate the secrets of the past; how he excavates by little trenches, digging in a good spot! Each discovery yields an excellent little pamphlet.

These scholars have the happy art of limiting their subjects in order to exhaust them. In their wisdom they do what is possible, which we do not, we who wish to know everything and at once. They only ask plain questions, and resign themselves to know little in order to know something. And that is why the spirit of peace is upon them.

"Come on," said M. de Nolhac, as he rose from his table, "let us leave the old humanists, and this Tomaso Ingherami, who amuses you so much because he preserved manuscripts, preached sermons, and played Phèdre. I want to take you to the Petit Trianon. If you wish, we will still discuss archæology, but it shall be pleasant and easy. I have closely studied the château, park, and hamlet: it formed a chapter of my book on Marie-Antoinette. After studying the Renaissance at Rome, I am studying the period of Louis XVI at Versailles. Could I do better?"

No! One must follow the circumstances, employ the forces which surround us, in a word do what lies to be done. In this sense, Goethe was not mistaken in saying that all works of the mind should be work realized in action.

So talking, we walked along. It was a pale autumn day; the crackle of the dead leaves mingled with the sound of our voices, as we spoke of the shadows of the past.

My guide spoke of Marie-Antoinette with his usual benevolence, with the sympathy of a painter for a long-studied model, and the respect inspired in generous hearts by the majesty of suffering. The widow of Louis XVI drank deep of a bitterer cup than that which the Man-god himself put away from his lips. He doubtless also appreciated the radiant grace which she showed in prosperity, as well as her constancy, when she was transfigured by the touch of misfortune. He praised her for having been a tender and irreproachable mother, and it was in maternity that Marie-Antoinette first showed her virtue. To see her sympathetically one must, like Madame Vigée-Lebrun, surround her with her children, in a caressing familiarity, where one feels the influence of Rousseau, and of the philosophy of Nature. For at that time a poor, infirm, solitary and melancholy old man had worked a change in souls; his genius ruled the century rather than kings and queens. And, unconscious of the fact, Marie-Antoinette at the Trianon was a pupil of Rousseau. One can still praise her for a certain delicacy of heart, and the modest sentiments, so rare at Court, which she never lost, and smile respectfully at what the Prince de Ligne called the Queen's white soul. M. de Nolhac loves this praise, and delights to say that it was with this white soul that Marie-Antoinette loved M. de Fersen, who was no doubt more lovable than Louis XVI.

But M. de Nolhac would not be the scholar he is, did he not recognize that his heroine was pitiably

frivolous, ignorant, imprudent, light-headed and extravagant, and that as Queen of France she had an anti-French policy. If to be giddy-headed can be criminal, that is her crime.

“The Austrian,” the name given her by the people in its hatred: had not she deserved it? Was she not Austrian when she favoured Joseph II against Frederick in the Bavarian business? Was she not Austrian to the point of treason when she upheld the pretensions of Joseph II to Maestricht, and the opening of the Scheldt? On this point M. de Nolhac speaks clearly.

“All the traditions of French policy demanded that the Cabinet of Versailles should lend its support to the Dutch. The Queen alone was in opposition, and used all her power to prevent it. She besieged the King, made him break engagements, intrigued with ministers, delayed the couriers in order that those of Mercy should get ahead of them, and gave the Emperor a forewarning of the intentions of France. This manœuvring went on for eighteen months. . . .”

But here we have arrived at the Petit Trianon; here are the four Corinthian columns, and five big bays of the front, surmounted by the little square attic windows, and the balustrades of the Italian terrace.

My guide said:

“This palace, a witness of things past, is already old for us. Let us hope that it may be preserved as a work of Art and History. The old Humanists of the Renaissance, who, with zealous hearts, were busily occupied in searching for, and collecting manuscripts, had but the love for Art which they had for Letters: indifferent to the monuments

of antique architecture, they allowed the remains of the temples and theatres to perish under their eyes. Cardinal Raffaello Riario, a man with a mind open to beauty, and a lover of antiquity, allowed the arch of Gordian to be demolished, in order to obtain thence the hewn stone for his palace."

"You are right, my dear Nolhac, and you understand infinitely more of matters than did your Cardinal Riario, or even Erasmus of Rotterdam whose voyage in Italy you have narrated. We have been born in an age when people understand the most varied subjects. Respect for the past is the only religion left us, and it is the bond of modern minds. It is remarkable, my dear friend, that the Paris Municipal Council, which is not conservative in politics, is so at least in so far as old stones and recollections are concerned. It respects ruins, and places inscriptions with touching care on the site of destroyed monuments. Old Mortality exercised no greater care in regard to the tombstones of village cemeteries.

"At Palermo, M. Renan saw some archæologists of a detestable school, the school of Viollet-le-Duc, who wished to destroy some wood-work in a bad style, in order to renovate the Cathedral in pure Norman style. He dissuaded them. 'Let us destroy nothing,' he said. 'Only thus shall we be sure of never passing for Vandals.' He was right, and so are you. But how can we live without destruction, since life is destruction, and we only exist on the dust of the dead?"

Meanwhile we visited the apartments, and M. de Nolhac said :

"This was never the Queen's bed. The room was not carpeted thus in 1788."

And he continued, destroying legends, a kind of destruction which he regards as permissible. But I see a new generation arising, mystical and spiritual, which will not allow it. Then my guide led me to the village.

“Desertion has laid its hand upon it,” he said; “one should make haste to see it.”

And we made haste.

“Is this, my guide, the rustic dwelling of the white-bearded hermit, who ruled the village?”

“Alas, dear friend, the hermit never existed.”

“Then this is not a hermitage?”

“It is the hen-house.”

That day M. de Nolhac had to dinner two friends as learned as himself, M. Jean Psichari, the Hellenist, and M. Frédérick Plessis, the Latinist.

After dinner the three scholars set themselves to reciting verses, for they were all poets. M. Frédérick Plessis first delivered a sonnet addressed to his native Brittany.

Bretagne, ce que j'aime en toi, mon cher pays,  
Ce n'est pas seulement la grâce avec la force,  
Le sol âpre, et les fleurs douces, la rude écorce  
Des chênes et la molle épaisseur des taillis ;

Ni, qu'au brusque tournant d'une côte sauvage,  
S'ouvre un golfe où des pins se mirent dans l'azur ;  
Ou qu'un frais vallon vert, à midi même obscur,  
Pende au versant d'un mont que le soleil ravage.

Ce n'est pas l'Atlantique, et ton ciel tempéré,  
Les chemins creux courant sur un talus doré,  
Les vergers clos d'épine, et qu'empourpre la pomme :  
C'est que, sur ta falaise ou ta grève souvent,  
Déjà triste et blessé lorsque j'étais enfant,  
J'ai passé tout un jour sans voir paraître un homme.\*

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\* Brittany, what I love in you, my dear country,  
Is not alone your grace joined with strength,

M. Jean Psichari, a Greek by birth like André Chénier, but who has made France his adopted country, and Brittany the land of his choice, then recited three strophes inspired by a woman's words, heard by him alone :

Sous nos cieux qu'enveloppe une éternelle brume  
Parfois un rocher perce au loin les flots amers,  
Le sommet couronné de floraisons d'écume,  
Si bien qu'il semble un lis éclos parmi les mers.

Ami, tel est l'amour chez une âme bretonne ;  
Résistant, c'est le roc dans la vague planté.  
L'impassible granit écoute l'eau qui tonne,  
Et l'ouragan le berce en un songe enchanté.

Que d'autres femmes soient mouvantes comme l'onde ;  
Les gouffres à nos pieds vainement s'ouvriront :  
La fleur de notre amour, lorsque l'Océan gronde,  
S'épanouit sur notre front.\*

The rugged soil, sweet flowers and rough bark  
Of oaks, and soft thickness of the copses ;

Nor, the bay that suddenly opens at a turn of the wild coast,  
Where pines are mirrored in the blue,  
Nor the fresh green valley, dark even at midday,  
Hanging on the slope of a mountain ravaged by the sun.

It is not the Atlantic, and your temperate sky,  
The sunk roads winding along a golden slope,  
The thorn-fenced orchards, wherein the apples are turning  
crimson :

It is that often on your cliff or shore,  
Already sad and wounded when a child,  
I have passed a whole day without the sight of man.

\* Under our skies enveloped by an everlasting mist,  
Sometimes a distant rock pierces the salt waves,  
Its head enwreathed by flowers of foam,  
So that it seems a lily blooming amidst the seas.

Last, our host, speaking in his turn, recited some stanzas inspired by the beautiful Lake of Nemi, on the banks of which M. Renan placed the scene of one of his philosophic dramas :

Sur la montagne, où sont les antiques débris  
D'Albe, et l'humble berceau des fondateurs de ville,  
Nous allions tout un jour en récitant Virgile,  
Et, graves, nous marchions dans les genêts fleuris.

Sur la mousse et les fleurs, cherchant la trace humaine,  
Au désert de la plaine, au silence des bois,  
Nous demandions les murs qui virent autrefois  
Les premiers rois courbés sous la force romaine.

Nous eûmes pour abri ta colline, ô Némi !  
Quand le soir descendit sur la route indécise,  
Nous écoutâmes naître, et venir dans la brise  
Le murmure à nos pieds de ton lac endormi.

Les voix du jour mourant se taisaient une à une,  
Et l'ombre grandissait aux flancs du mont Latin.  
De mystérieux cors sonnaient dans le lointain ;  
Les flots légers fuyaient aux clartés de la lune.

La lune qui montait au front du ciel changeant,  
Sous les feuillages noirs dressait de blancs portiques,  
Et nous vîmes alors, ainsi qu'aux jours antiques  
Diane se pencher sur le miroir d'argent.\*

Such, friend, is love in a Breton soul ;  
Enduring, it is the rock planted in the waves.  
The impassible granite hears the thundering sea,  
The tempest lulls it in a magical dream.

Let other women be as unstable as the wave ;  
The gulfs at our feet will open in vain ;  
The flower of our love, while the ocean roars,  
Will bloom on our brows.

- \* On the mountain, where lie the ancient remains  
Of Alba, and the humble cradle of the City's founders,  
Reciting Virgil, we wandered a whole day,  
And gravely walked amidst the flowering broom.



With these verses ended that beautiful day, a day of sound scholarship and gay science. Was there ever a time when scholars were as lovable as to-day? I do not believe it.

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Under moss and flowers, looking for human traces,  
In the deserted plain, the silent woods,  
We sought the walls which a foretime saw,  
The first kings bowed beneath the power of Rome.

We had your hill for shelter, O Nemi !  
When evening fell on the faintly-marked road,  
We heard born, and travelling on the breeze,  
The murmur at our feet of your sleeping lake.

The voices of the dying day fell silent one by one,  
The shadow lengthened on the flank of Monte Latino ;  
In the distance there sounded mysterious horns ;  
The light waves fled in the beams of the moon.

The moon, climbing the brow of the changing sky,  
Under the black foliage raised up white porticoes,  
And we saw then, as in the days of old,  
Diana bending over the silver mirror.

## AUGUSTE VACQUERIE \*



ANKY, thin, with large features and a rough beard, he recalls the busts of ancient philosophers—Antisthenes, Aristippus, Xenocrates, etc. — with which the collectors of the seventeenth century decorated their galleries and libraries. Resembling them, he has a meditative air, spontaneous and kindly : on seeing him, one divines that his speech, like that of Diogenes and Menippus, will possess the mordant power and the symmetry of clean-cut maxims. Owing to an expression of satirical good-nature he also bears a likeness to the hermits one sees in the vignettes of Eisen and Gravelot. Better still, he is the village soothsayer ; he has all his rustic perspicacity. I met him one day in a park, under the shadow of a horn-beam, beneath an old Faun who, smiling on his block of mossy stone, was playing a flute. Philosopher, recluse, and rustic demi-god—Auguste Vacquerie has a touch of them all. I would like to show him to you talking to his friends in the evening. He speaks without movement or gesture. He seems a stranger to what he says. His great face, furrowed by an ascetic smile, wears an inattentive expression ; only the eye, black and lively, is animated. His voice is drawling and monotonous. But as it flows his speech

\* *Futura*, 1 vol. in 8°.

awakes strange, coloured images, expands into combinations both eccentric and exact, and abounds in geometric fantasies which are one of the original features of this precise poet's mind. He is the simplest person in the world, and loves retirement. Something in his quiet person reveals a lover of gardens and pictures, a connoisseur, with an intelligent affection for beautiful things.

Strong and hard-working, he believes that work makes life often happy, and always endurable. For over forty years he worked as a journalist with admirable punctuality. He began, under the monarchy of July, on the *Globe*, and on Girardin's *La Presse*. In 1848 he directed *l'Événement*, which, suppressed by the Republic, became *l'Avènement du peuple*. On December 2nd the paper died a violent death. M. Auguste Vacquerie and his five assistants were imprisoned. After twenty years of voluntary exile and compulsory silence, in 1869, M. Vacquerie founded *Le Rappel* with M. Paul Meurice, his co-disciple, collaborator, and friend. Since then he has been confined every day of his life from two o'clock in the afternoon until one o'clock in the morning, in his office in the Rue de Valois, inhaling the odour of wet paper and greasy ink so dear to the humanists of the Renaissance, and which Erasmus preferred to the perfume of roses and jasmine. He loves it: he loves the bales of paper, the compositor's case, the ink-rollers, and the presses which as they revolve make the walls of the old houses tremble. For, with Rabelais, he firmly believes that printing was invented "by divine suggestion" and for men's happiness. At the office of *Le Rappel* he is a hundred-eyed master. He sees everything, and the hand

that wrote the leading article does not disdain to correct miscellaneous news. M. Auguste Vacquerie, who devotes himself whole-heartedly to all his enterprises, has the trick of endowing his innumerable articles with the accent, the style, the stamp of his mind. They possess a precious and brilliant finish; the style is precise, exact, and symmetrical. I do not here refer to the doctrine, about which there is much to say. I wish to put aside all question of politics, and consider only the philosophy; for Mr. Vacquerie has one. He is above all things logical. Like the devil, he is a great logician, and when he is in the wrong he argues best. The printed characters, to which in his new poem he attributes marvellous virtues, are for him little lead soldiers which he manœuvres with the exactitude that the Emperor employed in moving his grenadiers. The lines of his copy have the martial precision of Caran d'Ache's silhouettes. Battles are not won without stratagems. M. Auguste Vacquerie is familiar with all the tricks of war to which it is possible to resort in the battles of the mind. He is well aware that the good ordering of arguments supplements their number and quality. He is a great strategist of phrases. Following the example of Napoleon and Franconi, he fears not to mislead as to the number of his effectives, by making the same troops pass over the ground several times. But let us hasten to add that it is not by his innocent astuteness or his peculiar subtlety that M. Auguste Vacquerie has achieved, and maintained, his place in the front ranks of journalism.

If M. Vacquerie is a quibbler and wrangler, he argues, like old Corneille, his countryman, in a proud and lofty fashion, with the obstinacy of a

powerful and superior mind which will never surrender or relax its grip.

The editor of *Le Rappel* has not usurped the high opinion which his friends and adversaries rival one another in bestowing on him. He has a big heart, inspired by zeal for the good and beautiful; he is sincere and courteous; he makes even his hatreds respected, for he is one of those for whom hatred is only the reverse of love. Finally, he possesses that most precious and necessary quality in a man who writes for a newspaper—that is to say, who gives himself daily. He is human. That word expresses everything. Without a broad humanity one cannot influence men. A great journalist is all things to all men; his heart must be wide open. If it is, a few faults will be forgiven him. One is quite content that he should be only a man, if he is truly a man.

It was with literary criticism that Auguste Vacquerie began the journalistic career which he was to honour so abundantly. What he was in the beginning, he has always remained. It is characteristic of him never to relinquish anything. He has the gentleness of men who never give way; obstinacy is the foundation of his talent, as of his character. To-day he still signs articles on bibliography, and follows the literary movement with as much interest as he did forty years ago. But to indicate, even briefly, his conception of poetry and art, his beginnings in the world of letters must be recalled. On leaving college he dedicated to the great poet of *Les rayons* and *Les ombres* an admiration and friendship which the dread power of fifty years of human life has been unable to shake. When admitted to the coterie he found there a college

friend, Paul Meurice, to whom he addressed a few years ago the following verses in recollection of happy hours in the Place Royale :

Ce fut man bienvenue et mon bouquet de fête  
 De le trouver logé dans le même poète.  
 Notre amitié nacquit de l'admiration.  
 Et nous vécûmes là, d'art et d'affection,  
 Habitants du granit hautain, deux hirondelles,  
 Et nous nous en allions dans l'espace, fidèles,  
 Et libres, comprenant dès notre premier pas,  
 Qu'on n'imitait Hugo, qu'en ne l'imitant pas.\*

It is true that Meurice and Vacquerie retained, beside the Master, the independence of their talents and their minds. A close tie soon increased the friendship between the famous poet and the budding one. We know that Charles Vacquerie, the brother of Auguste, married Léopoldine, Victor Hugo's daughter ; and also that Charles Vacquerie perished tragically with his young wife at Villequier, near Caudebec. Victor Hugo and Auguste Vacquerie were drawn together in this double mourning. They became attached to one another by powerful sympathies. In his articles Auguste Vacquerie expressed with conviction what might be described as the æsthetics of the Place Royale. Into this he put all his strength, wit, and geometry. The trouble is that it is a fighting doctrine, admirably adapted by its

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\* It was my welcome and my birthday present  
 To find you living in the same poet.  
 Our friendship was born of admiration.  
 And there we lived, on art and affection,  
 Dwellers in the lofty granite, two swallows,  
 And we launched ourselves into space, loyal  
 And free, understanding, from our first steps,  
 That Hugo can only be imitated by not imitating him.

violence and partiality to battle, but absolutely lacking in the serenity that follows victory. Fundamentally, the æsthetics of the Place Royale was purely polemical. That is why it was so pleasing to old Granier de Cassagnac, and to M. Auguste Vacquerie, who, each in his own camp, loved the fray. Old Granier, then young, used to call Racine *vieille savate*—an old duffer. M. Vacquerie called him *un pieu*—a stick—which is perhaps even more severe.

Shakespeare is an oak,  
Racine a stick.

I know very well that this implies, fundamentally, that Victor Hugo's dramas possess merits unknown to the tragedies of François Ponsard; and nothing could be truer. But this turn of thought surprises us, who have seen the triumph of Romanticism and the rather dull pacification of the empire of letters. We should do ill to imitate it. We have not the right to be unjust; we are passionless. Our perennial coldness condemns us to a perpetual wisdom, and it must be admitted that it is an onerous obligation. And since we are condemned to a life-sentence of reason, let us excuse our fathers' faults; they were younger than ourselves. Speaking for myself, who retain a tender and loyal admiration for Racine, and who love him with all my heart and soul, perhaps even with my flesh and blood, as his Josabeth blamed herself for loving the infant king, I who, knowing him by heart, and still re-reading him, ask him almost daily the secret of accurate thought and limpid speech—I, who regard him as divine, feel inclined to congratulate M. Auguste Vacquerie for having called him a stick; I feel inclined to say to the old critic of the

Place Royale : " You have done well. You fought, and like all who fought, you were persuaded of the righteousness of your cause. Besides, in attacking Racine, you had more wit, poetic sense, style and genius than those who defended him in your day. I feel convinced that you were wrong ; but you were mistaken like the sound literary man that you are, and your mistakes were lovable ; your folly was superb. You have all the Muses on your side. Did not your precise enemy, Ponsard, who was a worthy man, write to you at that time : ' Life is on your side, and your side only, with its passion, anger, generosity, and love of art ; in short, everything that is summed up in the word Life.' Finally, the Racine whom you called a stick is a Racine whom you imagined and constructed for the express purpose of knocking down ; a Turk's head in a periwig. It was not the real Racine, not the greatest delineator of the soul, the modernist who, before Jean-Jacques, and your great friend, George Sand, revealed to the world the poetry of passion and the romanticism of the emotions. No, it was not the true Racine, my own Racine. What matters it then, if yours was a stick ? He was one. I admit it. Let us be friends."

And if you, the aged master, grown white under the writer's harness, reply that Racine as I conceive, see, and love him, is still a stick, I will say that I still have this precious advantage over you, that I can enjoy both his art and your own, and reconcile you both, at least in my own mind.

It is not, old lion, so difficult as you think, simultaneously to enjoy *Les Plaideurs* and *Tragaldabas*. For that, it is sufficient to have been born on the morrow of your great battles.



*Tragaldabas* is the pearl of picaresque comedies, the flower of dramatic fantasy, the radiancy of gay poetry; it is wit, and joy; it is the rarest thing of all, grace exploding with laughter. Besides, the author of *Funérailles de l'honneur*, *Jean Baudry*, and *Formosa*, is a master of the theatre. The journalist I showed you just now shut up in his editorial office, the critic of *Profils et Grimaces*, the beloved disciple, the son of the thunder, is a dramatist of the school of Corneille, of precise originality and severe sublimity. The poem which he has given us to-day was promised and awaited for more than twenty years. In literary circles, towards the end of the Empire, there was talk of Vacquerie's *Faust*. He worked on it during his exile in Jersey, and sent fragments to friends in Paris. "You, my verses, will go back to the mother-country, and you will go without me." Michelet, I think it was, who received the poem ending with the line:

Et je serai sujet de Choléra premier.

Michelet answered:

"I have never read anything which has so uplifted my heart. Its crescendo is sublime."

But M. Auguste Vacquerie has been always extraordinarily slow in publishing his work: *Tragaldabas*, the wonderful *Tragaldabas*, remained for thirty years celebrated and unpublished; which reminds me that the good Glatigny, who was a wandering comedian and lyric poet, despairing of ever possessing the work in volume form, learnt it by heart from some old and undiscoverable paper, which he had borrowed for a few hours. He recited the poem to his friends seated in a circle,

and was in this way the last of the bards. *Faust*, so long awaited, has at last appeared under the title of *Futura*. It is a great symbolic poem in which the characters, Faust, Futura, the Soldier, the Emperor, and the Arch-priest express general ideas. It had already been observed that in M. Vacquerie's dramas we hear Ideas speaking through the mouths of Don Jorge, Jean Baudry, and Louis Bertheau. To sum up, the moralist is dominant in M. Vacquerie, and makes the unity of his work.

*Futura* is a broadly, fully, and abundantly optimistic poem, and concludes with the approaching and final triumph of Good, and the reign of God upon Earth. It is the *Pater* paraphrased by a republican of 1848.

Last year, when speaking of a novel by M. Paul Meurice, we remarked how robust a faith in their Ideal had the men of that generation. *Futura* takes us back to the period of which J. J. Weiss has summed up the beliefs in a magnificent page:

"In those days," he says, "the French soul and mind were full of enthusiasm, faith, tenderness, and love. A dream of Liberty and Justice had taken possession of the nation: all saw before them long hopes and vast thoughts, and bathed in the ideal and ideology; the right to happiness was affirmed for all and sundry." Happy, thrice happy M. Auguste Vacquerie! He has remained faithful to the dream of his youth. He has retained all his hopes. As in the vanished days of Louis Blanc, Pierre Leroux, Proudhon, and Lamennais, with stout heart he awaits the advent of Justice, and the time when all men shall be brothers. His *Faust* has torn up all agreements with the Devil, unless the Devil be the friend of Man, the new Prometheus,

the inspirer of all Truth, the genius of the Arts : in fact, the Satan whom Proudhon, in his burning eloquence, called his heart's beloved.

Like his predecessor, the new Faust marries Helen of Argos with the white arms, Helen "whose serene soul is like the calm sea," Helen the beautiful. But she does not give him Euphorion, the child who seals the reconciliation between antique beauty and the modern ideal. That is an invention which M. Auguste Vacquerie leaves to Goethe, and in fact there is nothing left for Euphorion to do in this world ; his task is accomplished. No ! the union of the new Faust and Helen gives birth to the virgin Futura.

It is from her that shall come the salvation of the world ; she is Justice and Pity. At her birth she says :

La pitié fait ma chair et mon sang de tous ceux  
 Qui sont désespérés sous la splendeur des cieux.  
 J'ai dans l'âme un écho douloureux qui répète  
 Le cri du matelot brisé par la tempête,  
 L'adieu de l'exilé, le râle du mourant,  
 Tous les gémissements de ce monde souffrant.\*

Who, then, is this new Faust who has introduced into the world this virgin Messiah, this Redeemer of Humanity ? Cannot you guess ? He is Free Thought. By a legitimate identification, for which Maximilian de Klinger had given a precedent in

\* Because of pity, those are my flesh and blood  
 Who despair beneath the splendour of the heavens.  
 There is in my soul a mournful echo which repeats  
 The cry of the sailor broken by the storm,  
 The exile's farewell, the rattle in the throat of the dying,  
 And all the groans of this suffering Earth.

a tale as despondent as the poem *Futura* is consoling, M. Vacquerie combines, in a single individual, Dr. Faustus and the goldsmith Johannes Fust, who, in partnership with Gutenberg, published the Psautier of Mayence in 1457. For M. Vacquerie the supernatural power with which *Faust* is armed, with its virtue, its invincible charms, and its magic, is the printed word. The movable type is the sign under which we shall conquer Evil.

I hope it may be so. Where would our trade be, if we were assured of the contrary? How should I have the courage to add useless line to useless line, if I did not believe that the effort might, in the long run, be productive of good?

In *Futura* we have rediscovered the Christ of 1848, whom Ary Scheffer painted with so little colour and so much feeling; the humanitarian Christ whom one sees in M. Leconte de Lisle's *Agonie d'un saint*, and old Glaize's *Pilori*. In our opinion *Futura* did not come too late, and perhaps M. Vacquerie has not lost by waiting. It is said that our youth, like St. Paul's Athenians, is religious, but knows not what to worship. M. André Maurel makes this statement in *La Revue bleue*. Who knows whether it may not make a god to its liking by combining the rather too philosophic Christ of M. Vacquerie with the rather too mystical Christ of M. Edouard Haraucourt? This justice must be done to M. Vacquerie, that his tolerance is broad, and that in laying the foundation of humanity's happiness he demands no one's death. It is something new when a reformer does not begin by suppressing one generation of men for the encouragement of their successors.

A breath of kindness blows through this great

poem. I should be sorry for those who are not touched by the gentle majesty of that final scene, in which, in the open air, stands a table at which the hosts of the hapless are seated, a laden table whose ends extend beyond the range of our vision. If this imagery seems the dream of another age, I am sorry for our own.

## OCTAVE FEUILLET\*



**D**URING the naturalistic Terror, M. Octave Feuillet was not content to live, like Sieyès; he continued to write. It was thought that we should never see the close of that troubled period. It was believed that the rule of literary demagoguery would never come to an end, that the Committee of Public Safety, directed by M. Émile Zola, and the Revolutionary Tribunal presided over by M. Paul Alexis, would operate for ever. On all the monuments of Art we read "Naturalism or Death!" And we thought that this device was eternal. All at once there came the 9th Thermidor, which we had not expected. Great days always arrive unexpectedly. They are not foreshadowed by public excitement. The 9th Thermidor which overthrew the tyranny of M. Zola was the work of the Five. They published their manifesto. And M. Zola fell to the ground, struck down by those who had obeyed him blindly the day before. M. Paul Bonnetain played the part of another Billaud-Varennes in this business. M. Zola may console himself by saying that leaders generally fall thus, under the blows of those who have backed and supported them. The Five were highly compromised under the naturalistic

\* *Honneur d'artiste*, 1 vol. in -18.

rule. They freed themselves by a decisive stroke. One of them, M. Rosny, represented a strict literary Dantonism. By this I mean scientific methods and a certain spirit of tolerance. The other four were Jacobins, that is, pure Zolaists. But even before this great day the public taste, by inclining towards *L'Abbé Constantin*, had demonstrated the fragility of the system. By speaking the language of emotion with graceful simplicity M. Ludovic Halévy had gained every one's sympathy. At heart the public was indifferent; it is always so, and only wishes to be amused and interested. Good society was hostile to Naturalism, but, as usual, with pitiable frivolity. Finally, when Naturalism was abased, every one longed to have shared in its defeat. It is true that the literary press had now and again dealt it blows. Only—and this is a great lesson—the *émigrés*, that is, the critics, who, like M. de Pontmartin (a gallant man for that matter, and near his end) dated their articles from Coblenz, had no share in the act of liberation.

In short, the naturalistic Terror is vanquished. Every one is free to write as he wishes, even in a well-bred manner, should he feel so inclined.

M. Octave Feuillet had lived through the tempest unperturbed, apparently without perceiving anything, and now and again even showing a certain consideration for M. Zola. He would readily admit: "None the less, he is very powerful. . . ." He remained the agreeable novelist that he had always been. In reading his latest work, so charming and worthy of praise, I used to admire the peaceful course of his fine talent, which is always uniform, varying as it proceeds only like the bank of a river. But it would be a great mistake to suppose that I

wish to revive the quarrels of the schools over M. Octave Feuillet's new novel, and to contrast *Honneur d'artiste* with some work conceived in another frame of mind. It would be a poor way of honouring a talent which seeks to raise us above professional squabbles. M. Octave Feuillet's mind possesses a delicacy, a discretion, and a noble modesty which must find its reward in the admiration which it inspires. And further, I have neither wish nor need to decry anyone for the benefit of a writer who stands out from the rest by his singular purity, his exquisite refinement, and his graceful lucidity.

So I see no reason to take the field at this juncture. If, as it appears, dogmatic Naturalism—the Terror, as we have called it—is vanquished, let us think how to consolidate our victory. Let us be wise. It is folly to continue the war when we have triumphed. Above all, let us not be unjust; this would be foolish and mistaken. Let us recognize that during its harsh and heavy tyranny Naturalism accomplished great things. Its crime was the wish to stand alone, the pretension to exclude aught but itself, insanely to prepare the ruin of Idealism, *dementes ruinas*. But its reign has left stupendous monuments. Some of the works which it has erected on our soil seem indestructible. It would take one of those literary *émigrés* to whom we lately referred to deny the beauty of an epic romance such as *Germinal*. If it be true that we have triumphed over formal Naturalism, let us remember that the first duty of the conquerors is to respect, defend and protect the patrimony of the conquered, and let us honour ourselves by defending against insult the masterpieces of M. Zola's school.

I formerly expressed, in strong terms, my horror



of the attempts committed by Naturalism upon the majesty of Nature, the modesty of the soul, and the beauty of form; I publicly execrated these outrages on all that makes life sweet. "Even," I said, "if grace, elegance and taste are only frail images modelled by the hand of man, we must none the less respect these delicate idols; they are the most precious thing we have in the world, and if, during the short hour of life allotted to us, we have to move unendingly amid intangible appearances, is it not better to see in these appearances symbols and allegories, is it not better to lend them a sympathetic soul and a human countenance? Men have done so since they have dreamt and sung; that is, since they have been men. They will do so always, in spite of M. Zola and his æsthetic theories; they will always seek in unknowable Nature the image of their desires, and the form of their dreams. And our general conception of the universe will always be mythological."

Thus we spoke, and we still do so. But it cannot be that, in the battles of Naturalism, the Truth is all on one side, and Error on the other. This only happens in Milton's heavenly battles. The human conflict is always confused, and one never knows exactly in this world against whom one is fighting, and what for. To begin with, M. Zola, who declared such a violent war on Idealism, is himself sometimes a great idealist; he uses symbols, and is a poet. And his work remains in part erect amid the ruin of his doctrines.

However, all roads which lead to Beauty are obscure; the ways of art are full of mystery, and it is hardly wiser to overthrow doctrines than to erect them. These are but vain amusements, occasions of

hatred, and dangerous opportunities for pride. Poets lose their innocence thereby, and critics their kindness.

We must therefore recognize the fact that Idealism and Naturalism correspond with two different sorts of temperaments, which Nature produces, and will continue to produce, and never will one of them succeed in unfolding itself to the exclusion of the other.

M. Zola's great mistake, since one must always revert to that terrible man, was that he believed his manner of perception to be the best, and consequently the only right one. He was dogmatic, and was always seeking to impose a realistic orthodoxy. This it was that irritated us all, and prompted his friends to cast off his yoke,

Pride destroyed the Lucifer of Médan. I feel certain that even to-day, abandoned by his whole army, sitting alone with his genius, and biting his knuckles, he still dreams of domination by Naturalism. But how is it that he does not see that one is born a naturalist or an idealist as one is born dark or fair; that, after all, this diversity has its charm, and that the only thing which matters is that one should remain what one is? To cast off one's nature is the unforgivable crime; it is certain damnation; it is a compact with the devil.

M. Octave Feuillet has remained what he always was. He has not sold his soul to any devil. In his new novel he shows himself faithful to the exquisite and absolutely French art which he has exercised with pleasing authority for the last thirty years; that art of composition and deduction by which even the mere story-teller derives from Fénelon and Malebranche, and all the great classics who founded

our literature on reason and good taste. It has been denied that it was necessary, or even good, to compose thus. In our day some have held that the novel should be lacking in composition and arrangement. In this respect I have heard Flaubert express pitiable ideas with magnificent enthusiasm. He used to say that we ought to cut off slices of life. This does not mean very much. If we think it well over, art consists in arrangement, and of nothing else. The only possible reply is that a good arrangement is not perceptible, that it may be taken for Nature herself. But what Flaubert did not grasp was that we can conceive Nature and things only by the way in which we arrange them. The names which we give to the world, to the cosmos, prove that we represent it to ourselves in its ordering, and that, to our minds, the universe is none other than an arrangement, an order, a composition.

To speak in the academic style of the seventeenth century, we will say that M. Octave Feuillet "has all the qualities of his art," composition, ordering, and a discretion and proportion which permit him to say all things, and make all things understood. He has also audacity, and a vigorous touch. In *Honneur d'artiste* we have found, once more, this penetrating touch, and the rapid strides when the story gathers itself up like a blood horse leaping a hedge.

These conversations, to be faithful to their title, should remain in the midst of life and things, rather than bury themselves in the pages of a book, be it never so seductive. I only half regret this. There is something painful in dissecting a novel, in exhibiting the skeleton of a tragedy. I shall not analyse the book on whose margins I write these

reflections with an idle hand. I shall not tell you how Mlle de Sardonne rejoined, in the hell of those damned by love, her adorable sisters, Julia de Trécœur, Blanche de Chelles, and Julie de Cambre. I shall not tell you to what point the painter Jacques Fabrice carries the idea of Honour. But when you have read *Honneur d'artiste*, read once more M. de Maupassant's *Fort comme la mort*. I think you will enjoy comparing the two artists, the two painters, Jacques Fabrice and Olivier Bertin, who both die the victims of a cruel love. The contrast between the two natures is striking. M. Octave Feuillet delights in showing us a hero; M. de Maupassant, on the other hand, takes care that his painter shall never be a hero. For the rest, M. de Maupassant's novel is a masterpiece of its kind.

One word more, which I shall all but whisper: Certain episodes in *Honneur d'artiste* have a savour for which more than one lady reader will be secretly greedy. There is, for instance, an "up to date" marriage of a rather spicy taste. The husband goes to spend his wedding night at the club, and with a hussy. No one is awaiting his return. Madame has gone out. She comes back at eight o'clock in the morning, without offering any explanation. The husband does not insist on one: it would be *bourgeois* so to do. But he conceives a deep admiration for his wife. He thinks her a clever woman.

"*Épatant*," he says to himself.

And on his lips it was the highest possible praise.

There is also the episode of the young girls, whose conversation among themselves is enough to make a monkey blush. If I am not mistaken the phrase is M. Feuillet's own, in a former work.

I have now reached the end of my chat. I have

hardly said a word of what I intended to say. That would not have mattered much, had I only put a little order into my ideas, but I fear that I have only muddled some things. To speak from the fullness of one's heart is not everything. One must also have a little method.

Some day we will return to the subject of M. Octave Feuillet's work. We will investigate the influence of the master on contemporary storytellers, and we shall find at once two direct disciples of great distinction, viz. M. Duruy, and M. Rabusson. In a delightful book that has just appeared (*Les romanciers d'aujourd'hui*) M. le Goffic points out that M. Rabusson derives from M. Octave Feuillet, but his opinions are the contrary of those of the master. This is true. M. Feuillet describes the world with a tender indulgence and a graceful idealism. M. Rabusson, on the contrary, is a worldling who speaks much evil of the world.

These points must be emphasized. And I have no time to do so. I deserve the reproach levelled by Perrin Dandin at poor Citron's lawyer.

Il dit fort posément ce dont on a que faire  
Et court le grand galop quand il est à son fait.\*

30th December, 1890.

Octave Feuillet was still alive when this article was written. Perhaps I may be permitted to reproduce here what I wrote in *Le Temps* of 31st December, 1890, on receiving the news of his death.

Octave Feuillet died yesterday. A pure and sensitive heart has ceased to beat. All who knew him were aware that he possessed

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\* He states very gravely what has to be done,  
And is off at a gallop when it comes to the point.

a shrewd kindness, an ingenious benevolence, and that his cordiality was touched with grace. I had the opportunity of judging that he was a gallant gentleman who wore his opinions with the best of taste. On the verge of old age, he preserved certain youthful characteristics which make his loss all the more cruel. He had retained from his prime a delightful manner and the gift of pleasing. He had long been stricken with illness. Born with an excessively nervous system, and sensitive to the point of being unable to endure a railway journey, his health was seriously affected in later years : but nervous maladies make such capricious progress, and present such sudden remissions, are so strange in character, and so incalculable, that people have often ceased to fear them when they are actually becoming more acute. Octave Feuillet's death was a cruel surprise. As for myself, I find it difficult to throw off the mournful astonishment into which it has plunged me, in order to perform my duty by describing in a few words the loss sustained by literature.

We have often referred here to the talent of Octave Feuillet. We have pointed out his art of composition, his understanding of method, and his skill in preparation. In this he was the last of the classics. He possessed secrets which to-day are lost. Some may be regretted, particularly the unity of tone, which he preserved in a masterly fashion, and which gives an incomparable harmony to his novels.

There is no need for us to recall his skill in depicting character, and hinting at situations. He had taste, a sense of proportion and tact ; he was unique in being able to say anything without shocking anyone.

His art has been followed by a new one, an art which has established its position by numerous works. This is certainly not the moment to compare one form of art with another. Each generation pours its thought into the mould which best suits it. It is necessary to understand the manifestations of the most diverse arts ; if Naturalism arrived, it was because it had to do so, and the critic has no duty but to explain it.

For the same reason, the Idealism of Octave Feuillet which followed on Romanticism must also be admitted. Octave Feuillet's portion was to be the poet of the Second Empire. Now that his creations are slipping back into the past, their style and character can be more readily grasped. Julia de Trécœur, Blanche de Chelles, Julie de Cambre are all, in their fashion, true ; they are women of 1855. They had the biting, brusque, uneasy, agitated, impassioned character of their period ; there had been a great outburst of

sensuality and of life to excess. In their refined senses lay the beginnings of neurosis.

Octave Feuillet was the exquisite revealer of a brutal, vain, and sensual world. He combined audacity and decision with grace; and he knew how to draw with a stroke the disordered mind, the debauched body. This classic writer shows us the end of a world.

He is truthful, sometimes truthful to the point of cruelty. But he is a poet; he has the poet's indulgence; he embellishes all that he touches without disfiguring it. He lovingly displays all that is left of charm and elegance, in a society without art, and where passion itself lacks eloquence. He adorns his heroes and heroines. Is he wrong? Are they any the less real for that? No, certainly not! Nature has her beauty in all times, even in sick and feverish societies. This beauty the poet discovers and reveals to us.

Feuillet's poetry is that of the Second Empire. His style is the good style of the period of Napoleon III. When the crinoline, like the pannier, possesses the charm of the past, Julia de Trécœur will form part of the eternal ideal of mankind.

It must be noted that this recorder of fashionable weaknesses and elect passions, this painter of life adorned by luxury, was a lonely man. For a great part of his peaceful life he lived hidden in his little hilly town of Saint-Lô, in company with that excellent wife who mourns him to-day, and who by her character as well as by the charm of just expression (as will perhaps one day be made known) was worthy to share the life of this gallant writer and gentleman.

## BUDDHISM



WITHOUT believing for a moment that Europe is ready to embrace the doctrine of Nirvana, we must recognize that Buddhism, now that it is better known, has a singular attraction for free and curious minds, and that the charm of Sakya-Muni works readily on an unprejudiced heart. And it is, if one thinks of it, wonderful that this spring of morality, which gushed from the foot of the Himalayas before the blooming of the Hellenic genius, should have preserved its fruitful purity, its delicious freshness ; and that the Sage of Kapilavastu should be still the best of counsellors and the sweetest consoler of our old suffering humanity.

Buddhism is hardly a religion ; it has neither cosmogony, nor gods, nor properly speaking a worship. It is a system of morality, and the most beautiful of all ; it is a philosophy which is in agreement with the most daring speculations of the modern spirit. It has conquered Thibet, Burmah, Nepal, Cambodia, Annam, China, and Japan without spilling one drop of blood. It has been unable to maintain itself in the Indies, except in Ceylon, but it still numbers four hundred million of the faithful in Asia. If one reflects, its fortune in Europe during the last sixty years has been no less extraordinary. It was barely known when it inspired



the most powerful of modern German philosophers with a doctrine whose ingenious solidity is uncontroverted. It is well known that Schopenhauer built his theory of the will on the basis of the Buddhistic philosophy. The great pessimist, who kept a golden Buddha in his modest bedroom, did not deny this.

The progress of comparative philology and of the science of religions has greatly advanced our knowledge of Buddhism. It must also be recognized that, during the last few years, the group of Theosophists, whose opinions are so peculiar, have largely contributed to the propagation in France and England of Sakya-Muni's precepts. Meanwhile the arch-priest of the Southern Church in Ceylon, Sumangala, offered a most favourable reception to modern science. This old man, with his light bronze-coloured face, draped majestically in his yellow robe, read Herbert Spencer's works as he chewed betel-nut.

Buddhism, in its universal benevolence, is kind to Science, and Sumangala was pleased to place Darwin and Littré among his saints, as having shown, like the ascetics of the jungle, zeal of heart, good will, and contempt for the riches of this world. By the way, the Southern Church, ruled by Sumangala, is more rationalistic and liberal than the Northern one, of which the apostolic seat is in Thibet. It is credible enough that on close examination the two communions are disfigured by mean practices and gross superstitions, but, if we consider only its spirit, Buddhism is wholly compact of wisdom, love and pity.

On the 1st May, 1890, while an agitation, happily restricted, but which revealed by its universality a new force, and one to be reckoned with, was raising the dust of capitals in the spring sunshine, chance

directed me into the peaceful halls of the Musée Guimet, and there, alone among the gods of Asia, in the shadow and silence of meditation, but still aware of the things of our own day, from which it is not permitted to anyone to detach himself, I reflected on the harsh necessities of life, the law of toil, and the sufferings of existence ; halting before a statue of the antique sage whose voice is still heard to-day by more than four hundred millions of human beings, I admit that I felt tempted to pray to him as to a god, and to demand the secret of the proper conduct of life, for which governments and peoples search in vain. It seemed as though the kindly ascetic, eternally young, seated cross-legged on the lotus of purity, with his right hand raised in admonition, answered in these two words : "Pity and resignation." His whole history, true or legendary, but in any case beautiful, spoke for him ; it said :

"Son of a King, nourished in magnificent palaces, in flowering gardens, where, under gushing fountains, peacocks displayed their many-eyed tails on the lawns, and where the world's miseries were hidden from me by high walls, my heart was overcome by sadness, for one thought filled my mind. And when my women, covered with perfumes, played music and danced, my harem changed before my eyes into a charnel-house, and I said, 'I am in a cemetery.'

"Now, having four times emerged from my garden, I met an old man, and felt myself attacked by his decrepitude I met a sick man, and felt that I suffered his illness ; I met a corpse and felt that death was in me ; I met an ascetic, and feeling that he had gained internal peace, I resolved to gain it by following his example. One night, while the whole palace slept, I cast a last glance on my sleeping

wife and child, and mounting my white horse I fled into the jungle, in order to meditate on human suffering, its innumerable causes, and the means whereby to avoid it.

“On this subject I inquired of two famous recluses who taught me that man may acquire wisdom by bodily torture. But I knew that they lacked wisdom, and I was so much weakened after a long fast that the shepherds of Mount Gaya said: ‘Look at the hermit, he is black and blue, the colour of the madjoura fish.’ My pupils shone in the hollow sockets of my eyes, orbital cavities like the reflections of two stars at the bottom of a well; I was on the point of death without having attained the knowledge that I sought. This is why, coming down to the shores of Lake Nuirandjana, I ate a mess of milk and honey offered me by a young girl. Thus strengthened, I sat that evening at the foot of the Buddhi tree, and passed the night in meditation. Towards dawn my understanding opened like the white flower of the lotus, and I realized that all our miseries arise from desire, which deceives us regarding the true nature of things, and that if we had a true knowledge of the Universe it would appear that there is naught to be desired, and thus there would be an end of our woes. From that day forward I busied myself in killing desire within me, and in teaching men how to kill it in their hearts. I taught equality and simplicity; I said: ‘It is neither plaited hair, nor wealth, nor both which make the Brahmin. He in whom are joined Truth and Justice is a Brahmin.’

“I said further: ‘Be without pride and arrogance; be kind. Destroy the passions, which are the weapons of death, as an elephant destroys a reed

hut. One can no more sate oneself with all the objects of desire than one can quench one's thirst with all the waters of the sea. Wisdom is what satisfies the soul. Be without pride, hatred, and hypocrisy. Be tolerant with the intolerant, gentle with the violent and detached from all things amidst those who are attached to all things. Do always what you would others should do. Do evil to no man.'

"This it was that I taught to rich and poor, for five and forty years, after which I deserved to enter into the blessed repose which I now enjoy for ever."

And the golden idol, with raised finger, smiling, his beautiful eyes open, fell silent.

Alas! If he ever existed, which I believe, Sakya-Muni was the best of men. "He was a Saint," exclaimed Marco Polo on learning his story. Yes, he was both Sage and Saint. But his wisdom was not made for the active races of Europe, for these human families so strong in the sense of life. The sovereign remedy which he offers for universal evil is unsuited to our temperament. He invites us to renunciation, and we desire action; he teaches us to desire nothing, and in us desire is stronger than life. Finally, as a reward for our efforts, he promises us Nirvana, absolute rest, and the mere idea of this rest fills us with horror. Sakya-Muni came not for us; by him we shall not be saved. He is none the less the friend and counsellor of the best and wisest. To those who know how to listen to him he offers great and solemn lessons, and if he does not aid us to resolve the social question, the value of his words may cure more than one hidden wound, and soften more than one private sorrow.

Before leaving the Musée Guimet, I obtained

permission to enter the beautiful Rotunda where the books are. I turned over a few: *The Histoire des religions de l'Inde*, by M. L. de Milloué, M. Guimet's learned collaborator: the *Histoire de la littérature hindoue*, by Jean Lahor, a pseudonym which conceals a learned and philosophical poet, and a few others.

Amidst several Buddhistic legends, I read a beautiful story which I crave permission to tell you, not as it is written, unfortunately, but as I was able to carry it in my mind. I am full of it, and I feel compelled to relate it.

#### THE STORY OF THE COURTESAN VASAVADATTA, AND THE MERCHANT OUPAGOUPTA

At Matura in Bengal there was a courtesan of great beauty, named Vasavadatta, who having once met young Oupagoupta, the son of a rich merchant in the town, fell violently in love with him. She sent her maid to say that she would be pleased to receive him at her home. But Oupagoupta would not go. He was chaste, kind and full of pity; he was learned; he observed the law, and lived according to the rule of Buddha. For this reason, he despised the woman's love.

Now, it happened, a little later, that Vasavadatta, having committed some crime, was condemned to have her hands, feet, ears and nose cut off. She was taken to a cemetery, where the sentence was carried out, and Vasavadatta was left on the spot where she had suffered her punishment. She still lived.

Her maid, who loved her, remained by her side, and drove away the flies with a fan, in order that

the victim might die in peace. While she was accomplishing this pious work, she saw a man approaching, not with an air of curiosity, but composedly, and dressed as a visitor full of deference. Indeed, a child was holding an umbrella above his head. Recognizing the young Oupagoupta, the maid collected her mistress's scattered members and hid them hastily under her mantle.

Approaching Vasavadatta, the merchant's son stopped and silently contemplated her whose beauty had lately shone like a pearl in the city. Meanwhile the courtesan, recognizing him she loved, said with her last breath :

“Oupagoupta, Oupagoupta ! When my body, adorned with golden rings and gossamer stuffs, was as sweet as the lotus flower, I unhappily awaited you in vain. While I inspired desire, you came not. Oupagoupta, Oupagoupta ! Why come you now, when my bleeding and mutilated flesh is nothing more than an object of horror and disgust ? ”

Oupagoupta replied with gentle sweetness :

“Sister Vasavadatta, in those fleeting days when you seemed beautiful my senses were not deceived by vain appearances. With the eye of meditation I already saw you as you appear to-day. I knew that your beautiful body was but a vessel of corruption. I tell you in truth, sister, that for him who sees and understands, you have lost nothing. Therefore be without regret. Deplore not the shadows of the joys and pleasures which are escaping you, and allow the evil dream of life to fade away. Say to yourself that the pleasures of this world are but as the reflection of the moon upon the water. Your misfortune arises from desiring too much ; desire nothing, be kind to yourself, and you shall be

greater than the gods. Oh, long no more for life ; one lives only by wishing to do so ; and you see plainly, sister, that life is evil. I love thee : believe me, sister Vasavadatta, and consent to rest.”

The courtesan heard his words, and knowing that they were true she died without desire, and departed holy from this world of illusion.

## THE SONGS OF THE CHAT-NOIR



TWO years ago a most gracious hostess invited the Chat-Noir to her house, for the amusement of a very great philosopher, a venerable and beloved master, a sage whom nothing can turn away from the contemplation of the eternal verities, and who smilingly endures the agonies of gout. The master, sitting peacefully in his arm-chair, was resting his pensive, powerful head on his chest, when, on the stroke of ten, the Chat-Noir, represented by two correct young gentlemen, one tall and the other short, entered the room in polite silence. The first was MacNab, since dead, who left a brother plunged in the study of magic arts. The second was Jules Jouy, the voluble and passionate singer. When he was alive, MacNab had a lanky and lugubrious appearance. With dejected countenance he used to make sinister remarks in a dismal tone. When he opened his mouth his jaw appeared to detach itself as from a dead man's head, without noise or effort ; his eyes emerged gradually from their sockets, and as he extended his enormous hands, they inspired a mysterious horror. It was his way of being funny : it was excellent, but it was necessary to be prepared for it. That night he sang grisly couplets about the guillotine, undertakers and skeletons, and finished



up with a ballad whose title it is impossible for me to transcribe, and in which he discovers the image of death in a situation where under ordinary circumstances one would least seek it. I can say no more. M. Jules Jouy, small, short, with a pointed beard, quick and incisive, exhibited an entirely different character. He spoke only of the living. But, good Heavens! how he treated them. Everyone knows that M. Jules Jouy writes political songs, and in what manner he writes them. At that time the public was much interested in the parliamentary and judicial incidents preceding the retirement of President Grévy. You will guess on whom M. Jules Jouy then displayed his satiric genius, which he has since so fully exercised in combatting Boulangism. When M. Jules Jouy sings his own songs not a single atom of spite is lost.

From the depth of his arm-chair, where he rested in the familiar attitude which Ingres gave old Bertin in a famous canvas, our master the great sage and scholar swayed his head and listened without saying a word. Half a century of austere studies and deep meditation had ill prepared him for that sort of poetry. When it was all over he paid some compliments to the artists, but only out of pure politeness, for he was the politest man in the world. He had not really appreciated this style of wit. Moreover, he was shocked by certain irreverent remarks. He belongs to a generation wherein the sentiment of veneration was much more highly developed than in our own. His hostess noticed this, and in order to efface the painful impression she arranged a few days later for our sage to hear a very celebrated café-concert singer, whose inspiration, like her beauty, was perfectly wholesome and innocent.

This time our sage smiled, and admitted that the young gentlemen of the other evening, charming as they were, had been wrong to jest at respectable things, such as public authority, love and death. He was right, perfectly right. But it must also be said that a song is not a canticle, and that in all times vaudeville writers have always laughed at everything.

In their own way the singers of the Chat-Noir have plenty of talent, and they are resuscitating the *Chanson*. There is the Caveau, I know, and the Lice Chansonnière. I do not wish to depreciate them. I feel sure that they are very witty. But this wit is not the wit of the day.

The Caveau is venerable. Think! it was founded in 1729 by Gallet, Piron, Crébillon fils, Collé and Panard, who met together at Landelle's wineshop, in the Carrefour Buci. It is true that this first society was quickly dispersed. The second Caveau, inaugurated in 1759 by Marmontel, Suard, Lanoue, and Boissy, was dissolved a little before the Revolution. In 1806 Armand Gouffé and the bookseller Capelle established the modern Caveau, under the presidency of Désaugiers, in the restaurant kept by Balaine, in the Rue Montorgueil, at the corner of the Rue Mandar; Capelle published the company's works.

Publishing a number monthly, and a volume yearly, he paid his table expenses, and made some profit besides. I have obtained these facts from a book by M. Henri Avenel, called *Chansons et chansonniers*. After a further dissolution the Caveau was once more reconstituted in 1834, at Champeaux's eating-house, in the Place de la Bourse, and has given its dinners without interruption. There is singing

at dessert. Judging from one of the members whom I have the pleasure of knowing, M. Émile Bourdelin, author of some very pretty verses about Robinson Crusoe, it is a very delightful society.

A very charming society, but not one composed of young people, and song has not been rejuvenated thereby. The Caveau may be regarded as the French Academy of Song.

La Lice Chansonnière has also its merits. One of its supporters informs me that the most advanced opinions are expressed therein, whilst the Caveau is rather reactionary. Do you see? . . . To sum up, the Lice and Caveau are respectable folk who do not get talked about, whilst the Chat-Noir school makes a great stir in the world. M. Jules Jouy, to whom we referred earlier, is almost popular. And it is right that he should be so; he possesses ardour, dash, and, with a very mixed language, wit and eloquence. I do not care for him when he tends to the sublime. But in irony he is splendid. Remember the *Perquisition* and the *Manifestations boulangistes*, to the air of the *Légende de Saint Nicolas*:

Ils étaient trois petits garçons  
Qui passaient, chantant des chansons.\*

Withal, not in the least bit modern, and even retaining in his wit and style a reminiscence of the patriotic songsters. Be not deceived; he is more of a descendant than he fancies of the virtuosi of the pavement who in February, 1848, on the morrow of the people's victory, sang popular refrains, and begged for the wounded.

\* They were three little boys  
Singing songs as they passed.

Vers l'avenir que nos chefs nous conduisent,  
 Que voulons nous ? Des travaux et du pain ;  
 Que nos enfants à l'école s'instruisent,  
 Que nos vieillards ne tendent plus la main.

Moins arriérés qu'en l'an quatre-vingt-treize,  
 Sachons unir la justice et les lois.  
 Salut, salut, République française,  
 Je puis mourir, je t'ai vue une fois.\*

This verse, if you please, is by Gustave Leroy. It is the third of a song that went the rounds of France, to the air of *Vive Paris!* M. Jules Jouy has plenty of wit. But in him I see another Gustave Leroy. The true moderns are Aristide Bruant, Victor Meusy, and Léon Xanrof. With them Song has donned an air it had not previously, a vulgar audacity, a proud carriage of the outer boulevards which testifies to the progress of civilization. It speaks the slang of the suburbs. In the eighteenth century it spoke, through Vadé, the language of the fish-markets :

Qui veut savoir l'histoire entière  
 De m'am'zelle Manon la couturière  
 Et de monsieur son cher amant,  
 Qui l'ammait zamicablement ?

Ce jeune homme, t'un beau dimanche,  
 Qu'il buvait son d'mi-s'tier à Croix Blanche

- 
- \* Towards the future where our chiefs lead,  
 What ask we ? Work and bread ;  
 That our children may learn at school,  
 That our old folk may not beg.

Less backward than in '93,  
 Let us learn to unite Justice with the laws.  
 Hail, hail, Republic of France,  
 I can die now once I've seen you.

Fut accueilli par des farauds,  
Qui racollent z'en magnièr' de crocs.

L'un d'eux lui dit, "Voulez vous boire  
À la santé du roi couvert de gloire!"  
"À sa santé?" dit-il, "zoui-dà;  
Il mérite bien cet honneur là."

On n'eût pas plutôt dit la chose,  
Qu'un racoleur l'y dit et l'y propose,  
En lui disant en abrégé  
Qu'avec eux t'il est z'engagé.

Sachant cela, Manon z'habille  
S'en va tout droit de chez monsieur d'Merville  
Pour lui raconter z'en pleurant  
Le malheur de son accident.\*

\* Who'd care to know the whole story  
Of Miss Manon, the sempstress,  
And of her dear lover,  
Who truly loved her?

This young man, one fine Sunday  
At White Cross was drinking a glass of wine  
When he was addressed by some swells,  
Who were recruiting on the sly.

One said to him, "Will you drink  
To the health of the King covered with glory!"  
"To his health?" said he, "why certainly;  
He has well earned that honour."

No sooner was the thing said,  
Than a recruiter explained  
And told him very shortly  
That he had enlisted.

On learning this, Manon dressed,  
And went straight to M. Merville  
To tell him, as she wept  
The cause of her misfortune.

This is the atmosphere of the markets, which still allowed of a certain delicacy, a touch of sentiment. But to-day the language of the markets is dead. Our new Vadés sing in slang. Slang is expressive, but only fit to express the worst instincts, and paint the lowest morals. For this it is incomparable, as one will be persuaded by the following simple verses which M. Aristide Bruant ascribes to a person whose condition and character it is superfluous to define :

Alle a pus d'daron pus d'daronne  
 Alle a pus personne,  
 Alle a que moi,  
 Au lieu d'sout'nir ses père et mère  
 A soutient son frère,  
 Et pis, quoi ? \*

M. Lorédan Larchey opportunely informs us, in his Slang Dictionary, that *daron* and *daronne* mean father and mother.

M. Aristide Bruant, who under his great hat and cloak looks like an insurgent, is not, I fancy, faithful to the Chat-Noir. I believe he has even opened a rival cabaret. But he remains one of the Slang School, and that is enough to classify him. He has composed a magnificent cynical series of songs of the faubourgs : *A Batignolles, A la Villette, A Montparnasse, A St. Lazare, A la Roquette, A Montrouge, A la Bastille, A Grenelle, A la Chapelle.*

\* She has no father or mother  
 She has no one left  
 No one but me.  
 Instead of supporting her father and mother,  
 She supports her brother.  
 What could be worse ?

M. Meusy talks Parisian slang ; but his characters are nearer to Society than those of M. Aristide Bruant. One of them wisely says :

N'écout' pas ces bons apôtres  
 Qui veul'nt reviser la loi ;  
 Puisque c'est pour en fair' d'autre. . . .  
 On s'demand' pourquoi.\*

Another of M. Meusy's characters proceeds to classify the parties :

Y a l'parti d'monsieur Joffrin,  
 Y sont un.

Y a l'parti des anarches',  
 Y sont dix.

Y a l'parti de l'Intransigent,  
 Y sont cent.

Y a l'parti de Reinach Joseph,  
 Y sont b'sef.

Y a l'parti d'ceux qui n'en ont pas  
 Et y sont des tas.†

\* Do not listen to these good Apostles  
 Who wish to revise the law ;  
 Since it is only to make another. . . .  
 One asks oneself why.

† There's the party of M. Joffrin,  
 They are one.

There's the party of the Anarchists,  
 They are ten.

There's the party of the Intransigent,  
 They are a hundred.

There's the party of Joseph Reinach,  
 They are many.

There's the party of those who have none,  
 They are heaps and heaps.

I admire Victor Meusy's muse, but I admit my weakness for that of Leon Xanrof. M. Léon Xanrof composed the *Ballade du vitriolé*, and for that I owe him infinite thanks. It is a work overbrimming with philosophy, in which one simultaneously admires the concatenation of crime, and the fatality which naught can elude. Never did poems afford more food for meditation.

I give you the opportunity to judge :

C'était sur-le boulevard,  
Il commençait à faire tard,  
Arrive une femme qu'avait l'air  
Tragiqu' comme mam'zelle Weber.

Elle allait dissimulant  
Un litr' dans un papier blanc,  
Et r'gardait les boudinés,  
D'un air féroce sous l'nez.

Soudain ell' s'écri : " C'est lui,  
Le séducteur qui m'a fui !"  
En même temps elle arrosa  
Trois messieurs, très vexés d'ça.\*

\* It was on the boulevard,  
It was getting late,  
There came a woman with an air  
As tragic as Mam'zelle Weber.

As she moved, she hid  
A bottle in white paper,  
And stared into the faces of the passers-by  
With a fierce expression.

Of a sudden she cried, " It is he,  
My seducer who has deserted me."  
And in a moment she sprinkled  
Three gentlemen, much annoyed thereby.



The poet unfolds his lyric drama, dominated by necessity, sovereign of gods and men.

Deux ayant été reconnus  
Par la dam' comme inconnus,  
Furent relachés illico.\*

Why cannot I quote it all! . . . The humiliation of the seducer before the court, and the necessary acquittal of the *vitrioleuse*, and her marriage with an eccentric lord! And the moral? Oh, it is in his moral that M. Xanrof is particularly great, novel and magnificent. In respect of this, meditate upon the song of the *Quatre-z-étudiants*, which is a pure masterpiece. These four students forgot their studies with a young lady of Bullier. When the vacations came round their relations blamed them, and enjoined them to follow their studies strictly on their return. The four students obeyed:

Ils se r'mir'nt à l'étude  
Avec acharnement.  
N'avaient pas l'habitude,  
Sont morts au bout d'un an.†

What a lesson for relations! Does not this story surpass in melancholy the sad adventure of Romeo and Juliet? Is not M. Xanrof a sublime moralist, and the school of the Chat-Noir a great school?

\* Two of them being admitted  
By the lady as unknown,  
Were released on the spot.

† They resumed their studies  
With greatest intensity.  
Not having the habit of it,  
They were dead at the end of a year.

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