A

TABLEAU

OF

FRENCH LITERATURE

DURING

The Eighteenth Century.

BY M. DE BARANTE,

PEER OF FRANCE.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FOURTH EDITION,
AND AUGMENTED BY
A TABLE OF CONTENTS, WITH A NOMENCLATURE OF THE AUTHORS,
CHRONOLOGICALLY ARRANGED.

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PREFACE

TO

THE THIRD EDITION,

WRITTEN IN 1822.

It is now nearly twenty years since the French Institute proposed, as a prize subject, "*A Literary Tableau of the Eighteenth Century.*" Its manifest intention was, that in forming a list of the great names belonging to that era, the competitors should be confined to a strictly critical work. They had, therefore, not only to examine the literary taste of the century just finished, but it was further necessary to compare it, in this respect, with anterior times, and to discover what new forms the powers of thought had adopted.

Thus viewed, the subject became vast and interesting.

The competition remained open for many years: at length, the prize was obtained by two very distinguished writers, (M. Jay and M. Fabre,) who, confining themselves within the terms of the programme, wrote sufficient to prove that they would willingly have extended the picture. In truth, it was hard to confine, to a mere literary discussion, the examination of a host of witnesses in the march of human intellect, at a moment when that march had become so rapid and so fertile in great events.

Without doubt, we may apply here the words of an illustrious academician, spoken the following year, in the bosom of that assembly in which he was about to take his place.

"Other times, other manners. Inheritors of a long succession of peaceable years, our happy forefathers were able to give themselves up to discussions purely academical, which proves no less their talents than their happiness. But we, the unfortunate wreck of a great storm, have no longer that which is necessary to enjoy so perfect a calm. Our ideas have taken a different course. *The man*

has taken place of the academician; and, deprived of the writings of those who could prove its vanity, we only see through this strong conviction the greater evidence of our adversity.

"What! after a revolution, which, in a few years, made us survey the events of many centuries, shall we forbid the writer all moral reflections; shall we prohibit him from examining the serious side of affairs; shall he pass a frivolous life, occupied in grammatical cavils upon rules of syntax, and insignificant sentences of no moment; shall he grow old in the swaddling-clothes of his cradle; shall he never, while he lives, exhibit the brow furrowed by long toil, by grave thoughts, and often by manly griefs, which add to a man's greatness?

"What, then, shall be the important cares that will render his hairs grey?—The miserable anxieties of self-love, and the trifling occupations of childish pastimes." *

The work, of which we give a new edition, was composed at first for the competition; but the author, perceiving that he had not the talent necessary to illustrate such a subject within such confined

* Speech, on the admittance of M. de Chateaubriand.

limits, proposed another plan, and sought to unite literature with the state of society — a point of view which seemed to him the more desirable, inasmuch as literature had never been thus treated before.

Under an absolute government, where each body of the state, every class of the nation, find themselves deprived of their legitimate part in the regulation of public affairs, literature, by constraint, becomes an organ of opinion, an element of the political constitution. In default of regular institutions, literature becomes one. So, under the power of a dominant clergy, trembling before a controversy so glorious and salutary for the church, philosophy, having no further communion with religion, became atheistical.

Thus the interests of society, instead of incorporating and communicating to each other perpetual life—a vigour unceasingly renewed—had been every day undermined and destroyed at their very roots. And as a dreadful decay had been the consequence of the unjust and unreasonable position of things under a government which nothing could enlighten nor improve, literature had been considered the

means whereby its only visible enemy had wrought its ruin.

It was wanting that support that the edifice fell; and yet the disaster was ascribed to that voice which itself had stifled. It is important, therefore, to shew that the course of genius had not been an accidental circumstance, which one can blame or deplore, but that it had reference to the internal constitution of France. The author of this outline discovers in literature only the *symptoms of the common malady*, the signs of dissolution; and will endeavour to consider this peculiar point of a question so extended.

Doubtless, it had been more agreeable and more instructive to settle freely upon the whole question, and to treat historically of the government of France during the eighteenth century: it would have been seeking the evil at its source. If, in pursuing the enquiry, one had had to accuse the guilty, it had certainly been those men who, having disposed of power, had had more influence, and, consequently, more responsibility. If, on the contrary, it were seen that those also had been merely under the yoke of necessity, then it would have

been needful to have shewn equal indulgence to them as to others. But, besides the great talent, experience, and knowledge, which an enterprise so lofty required; it yet would have had something to blame in seeking to paint the vices of an era which had been chastened by so direful a catastrophe. It would have been to disturb the ashes of a ruin yet smoking. Besides, during times of political discord, various interests and opinions take so strong a form, and become so personal, that one can judge but little without offending, and general reflections are sometimes as offensive as though they had been connected with the names of individuals. So despotic power, which, for a time, suppressed party, and suspended contests, would not allow the opportunity of political controversy.

It was another thing when the examination of the literature of the eighteenth century might become a subject for general discussion.

When an open opinion upon politics was interdicted, and even an examination of the rights and interests of the nation in bygone times, was forbidden; it was under the transparent veil of literary polemics that envy, hatred and malice, con-

tinued to manifest themselves. The opinions and interests united with the ancient order, with the freedom taken by absolute power, attacked this literature as the only cause of the Revolution; while, on the contrary, the principles and interests belonging to the new order of things, thinking that liberty was the best token of security to institutions and civil rights, defended this literature with all its power. To carry back the question where it really was, and to discuss both literature and politics, became an act of freedom; it was calling things by their right names, and dispensing a right to be impartial. In shewing that letters had been conformed to the state of society, one could, without injustice, include in the blame those who would not admit such recognition; and, in divesting oneself of a factitious and superstitious respect for the administration which had governed France till the Revolution, and saying frankly that it had been iniquitous and frivolous; one is equally authorized to say that it had been attacked in a manner quite as frivolous and a thousand times more iniquitously. Such was the spirit in which this work was projected. The author was then young, too young, perhaps, for such a sub-

ject. But in reviewing now that which was written in times so different to the present epoch, he may be permitted to say that he experiences great satisfaction in being able to reprint the same statements as then expressed. Above all, there seems to him little difference in the essential character of a passing and transient dominion, whatever be its éclat or its fallacy.

A man with some intelligence, who may have the spirit of his times, with talent that he may display, may serve as a docile instrument, and, having neither power nor interest in change, will not alter his course. When a nation has been so completely dissolved and renewed, it is not in the power of a man's hand or of his own will to reconstitute; for when social order cannot be reestablished but by a new agreement of the citizens among themselves, upon new ideas relative to property; there is neither legislator nor conqueror who can flatter himself to lay the foundation suddenly of that which is perhaps the work of time, viz. civil order without violence, and a calm without oppression. Absolute power, which was for the time established, was then nothing more than a delay,

of the development and regular classification of the real elements of society.

What are the modes, fashions, institutions, manners, ideas, which should form the actual conflict, and compose the moral constitution of civilized people? This was the question that the author put to himself on finishing the work. He could repeat that question now; though in truth it would be vain to expect a prompt solution of so great a difficulty.

Who could hope to see the world on a given day assume a new aspect? It acts not by its knowledge whether more or less right should be granted to the citizen — if more or less security should be taken against the abuses and incapacity of governors; it acts not even by learning whether the remembrances and affections attached to the *ancien regime* shall have a greater share in the government than the remembrances and affections invariably belonging to the present state of things. These are, indeed, formidable difficulties, able to produce again new convulsions and equally prevent the desired dénouement. But, perhaps, there are more fundamental causes, that one cannot

help regarding with an eye of fear. It seems that these may never appear, and that our situation may be unknown and unheard of in the history of the times.

Ever in truth is it to happen that all power, all social pre-eminence (which are the indispensable means to establish order in a nation, even when that order is built upon reason and justice), can suddenly be annihilated and forgotten? Ever is it to happen that the only title to promotion and maintenance may have been real merit, utility, courage, influence; that they may have had to force their way painfully through all the passions of men? Ever is the principle of authority to be seen stripped of all previous sanction, deprived of all precedent, submitting to a daily examination, controlled by every private interest, nor imposing by any illusion? Can the system of power overcome the evil propensities of the human heart; subdue envy which never can bear a superior; silence the clamor of personal interest; furnish employment to the active; food to the imagination; re-assure the suspicious; convince the ignorant as well as the enlightened; and the mass of the population at the same time with the

élite among the citizens? In a word, society being dissolved, can it, knowing the cause, ever recompose itself? Does it contain within itself the germ of social order? Can it there throw forth roots, grow, and become fertile? There have been years when one might have said to oneself sorrowfully, "Is it then despotism which shall solve the problem? Can it be *that* which has subdued us by force, reduced and subjugated the imagination, broken the will, weakened the sentiment, and reduced it to a mere personal interest? Are nations only destined to find an uncertain and precarious calm under their degrading vicissitude? Is order nothing more than the apathy of the people who allow it, — mute spectators pushed onwards like a vile drove by one power or another? And whether revolutions commence in the bosom of the palace, or in the camp of the soldier, do they cease to be calamities? *This* or *that* equally exclude citizens from all direct interference in the discussion of *their* public affairs."

The prosperity and success of the Imperial government were able to create fears, but less again than the state of France, the weariness of spirit, and the superstitious fancy for equality so favour-

able to absolute power. The chief basis of despotism was, above all, the security with which all those who had brought about the Revolution reposed under a dominion created by themselves; and to which they were bound by private rather than general interest.

The restoration came to raise better hopes in those who had little faith in the favours of absolute power. Then a new combination presented itself. One part seeing the re-appearance of the royal family, who, by their name, seemed to call to mind the old state of society, and perceiving, at the same time, that no part of the wreck could be recovered; that it had no means of reunion to place them in their former situation; that manners, ideas, the general current remained the same; many of their illusions were dissipated, many mad hopes vanished; they began to form some idea of the force of things, and to consider the Revolution no more as an accident, or the work of this or that individual. On the other hand, all the pride and interests which had their protection under the new form of things, those who were the involuntary accomplices of an absolute authority, had an indispensable lack of justice, lived

under mistrust and precaution, and implored liberty instead of dwelling in the community with power.

This situation brings us to the trials we have made, during the late years, of a deliberate and popular form of government; and so far as this, in regulations and mechanism, it has not badly succeeded. In spite of the vacillations, more harassing to the thoughtful mind than to the mass of population, France could enjoy peace and a growing prosperity.

But notwithstanding one must say, with a doubt less painful, indeed, than under the preceding government, that nothing yet gives us the idea of firmness nor of that which may be. The forms of a government are nothing, if they are not the expression of the manners, the belief, the confidence of a people. It must have a soul for all material causes, and *that* soul is not yet come to animate our new political machine. That enlightened minds, a certain élite of the nation, have given themselves up to the inquiry, only to surrender themselves to the rational conviction, that free discussion may not be forbidden to any; but that there must be a sort of stamp for the

current opinions, habits, and affections, that may be received on trust throughout the country. That it is imperative that there be authorities and pre-eminences invested with some moral force; but that they may not make daily experiment of the reality of their power.

We are yet far from this moral restoration, and perhaps the present generation is not destined to see its accomplishment; above all, if new troubles come again, there will be a total overthrow of opinions. At this moment, in spite of much noise and vehemence, we are torn by doubts; many there are who try to make converts by the violence of clamour. No one is sure that right forms the basis of his passion. One is so often deceived by men and things, that one would assert one's opinion — "jusqu' au feu exclusivement;" as Montaigne says. It is to this circumstance we owe the repose we are sometimes surprised to enjoy.

Literature again becomes a witness to the state of minds. It waits a new impetus to be given it. It finds out the route it ought to travel. It has no other guide than the mutable decrees of humanity; the observance of detail has lost its credit; it returns no more, when new associations shall have

been created. It is this manner of viewing events and their results, which was at the time a reproach to the author. He was taxed with fatalism. He cannot admit the imputation. All his fatalism consists in his best efforts to find out the union of effects and causes, and the connection of the details with the whole. In this inquiry the idea results, that when communications between men become easy, rapid, and vast, the influence of isolated causes is less; and that general causes are more to be considered. By that, also, individuals are less important, and their actions more unperceived.

One can but conclude, then, that it only depends upon the will or the conduct of some men, "to exercise a decided and lively influence"* upon their nation and times. If they are powerful, and suited to the times, a noble task invites their performance. Knowledge of the times present, skill in its spirit and tendency, has always constituted, and will constitute more than ever the genius of politics. Instead of making use of power, as we have seen, to put in commotion a whole generation,

* See the article from Madame de Staël—Note at the end.

to overstrain its activity and intoxicate its imagination, and give the desire of acquiring more than it can keep; it should unravel calm and reasonable desires, moderate views, protect the salutary principles of the age, and give them force and efficacy; in a word, rule and uphold;—that is all that is possible; then associations shall be formed; power shall be established and remain; opinions shall become sincere and constant.

In effect human nature cannot, at any time, be disinherited of the faculties which have been given to it for justice, truth, religion, humanity; it should only cultivate these, and not excite the passions which are opposed to them. It is for this men try their utmost, who ascribe exclusively the exercise of social virtues to certain forms, to a certain language, to certain reminiscences of such and such association of individuals. Thus making the most respectable names an offensive means,—a vehicle of insult,—an instrument employed for personal interests.

Impartiality, with which an author is reproached, is not then so culpable. "What," it has been said, "can one be impartial between good and evil, be-

tween the just and the unjust ?" But which are the parties who have insolently and absurdly pretended to possess and appropriate exclusively the good and the just, and who will not that we examine even on which side are the right and the wrong ? Which are the authorities who hope to overcome the spirit of revolt, and announce their approach, by exacting obedience, without pointing out the means of obtaining justice ? Are they not precisely those who produced the great seditions of the eighteenth century ? Is it not that which remains a problem ? The philosophers of that century, far from meriting either all the blame or the praise that has been bestowed upon them, only obeyed a common movement, without foreseeing, without even desiring any positive result. It is not useless to show that the edifice, the object of their regrets is fallen a little nearer to its level ; that it has been sapped and shaken by various opinions and various influences ; by those, even, which seemed the most contradictory ; and that there is nothing of life nor solidity to draw from this dispersed wreck. It is not by a culpable indifference nor an apathetical resignation, that it must be said, "*that which is, is ;*"

it is from the deepest conviction that it is better to make efforts to ameliorate a situation by repose and good order, than vainly attempt to hazard all, by overturning every principle at its foundation.

AN

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A TABLEAU

OF

FRENCH LITERATURE.

CHAPTER I.

The end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries have been signalized by events so important, that all human affairs have been changed and renewed. Religion, government, the distribution of kingdoms, have suddenly undergone, (not simple modifications,) but complete and entire revolutions. The ideas of men upon politics, upon morals, upon every thing that can exercise their faculties, have taken another direction. History could not, perhaps, show a similar example of so vast a change, so complete, and, at the same time, so rapid, in any part of the world.

It is a subject well worthy to excite curiosity, to find out the causes of that terrible convulsion with which our nation was first disturbed, and since has propagated.

The movements that overthrow empires may mostly be attributed to the direct and positive influences of the dissensions of the people, to the conquests of a prince, to the talents of a general, to an insupportable weight of tyranny, or the violation of a compact. But in France, the eighteenth century had not been fruitful of events. Among those who had possessed authority, none had shown one of those great characters which change the fate of kingdoms. Until its last years, the century had run its course peaceful enough, without eruptions without extraordinary movements: it was by the progress of opinions, and by the productions of intellect, that it had been remarkable. Writers themselves were proud of that development of the human mind, which had made the principal feature of the era in which they lived. So it is against the French opinions of the eighteenth century, and, above all, against its writings, that accusations have been brought. Among the accusers, it appears to us, that some have allowed themselves to be carried away by a spirit of exaggeration and animosity into a remarkable error. Separating the eighteenth century from all other centuries, they consider that as a cursed era, in which a mischievous talent had inspired writers with opinions that they had spread among the people. They should have said, "Let us be without the works of these writers; all will then be in the same state as in the seventeenth century;"—as if a century could transmit to its

successor an inheritance of mind such as it had received of its ancestor. But it is not so. Opinions must necessarily progress by the union of men in a country, by their habits of communication begetting a certain march of opinion, ideas, argument, which nothing can suspend. It is that which we call the "march of civilization." It brings, sometimes, epochs that are peaceable and virtuous, sometimes criminal and agitated; sometimes glory, sometimes opprobrium; and, according as we are thrown by Providence into one or the other of these times, we reap the good or the evil attached to the period in which we live: on these depend our style, our conceits, our habitual impressions. Nothing can subtract from society this progressive alteration. In this history of human opinions, circumstances are, in a manner, so chained together, that it is impossible to say which had not necessarily resulted from its precedent. Thus, when we begin to blame the state in which the mind of man has been found at a certain moment, the blame ascends from one to another, from effect to cause, without end.

It seems, then, that the human mind may be, in some sort, subject to the empire of necessity; that it may be irrevocably destined to run a determined course, and to accomplish a prescribed revolution, like that of the planets.

The course of this planet brings, one time or another, critical epochs for nations.

For some time, the march of human intellect, at

first slowly and insensibly, then accelerated and rapid, effects no change in the happiness of a people. Literature shines, sciences make rapid strides, arts improve, light is disseminated; then arrives a time in which the belief generally adopted, in which the force of genius find themselves at variance with the existing institutions; then terrible revolutions burst forth; then governments give way; religions totter; manners are lost; a long disorder, a continued agitation, cruelly harass the people. At length, the tempest calms, and peace is re-established. The want of rest renders the spirits docile: they lose the vanity and obstinacy they had attached to their opinions; ungovernable circumstances break the strength of their character; new habits form themselves after the new order of things, and the children sometimes find again a tranquil period, after witnessing the misfortunes which had destroyed their parents. Then commences the sad retrospection to form ideas to become again opposed to institutions, and producing through them new catastrophes. It is thus that civilization, by those alternations more or less united with, more or less fatal to, repose or conflict, conducts nations to their decrepitude.

We have had evidence of one of these fatal crisises; it has burst forth under our sight, in our own country, which has overwhelmed us with long and cruel disasters. When tranquillity has been re-established, each, in his chagrin, has sought

into the cause of past ills. Party spirit, remaining habits of cabal, have mixed with the examination; the sharpness of personal hostility, the ordinary fruits of controversy, has taken place of reason; they have admitted that they have found a consolation even in hatred. Some, proud of that in which others were deceived, forgetting with celerity (or impudence) their own faults, have willingly included in one vast proscription all that belonged to the eighteenth century; the others, engaged by old habits, and finding themselves comprised in that accusation, are bound to defend a time which was theirs. In this way, the question, great and universal as it might be, has become an interminable combat of personal arguments. The eighteenth century has only been a pretext to quarrel. The first, in attacking, have thought to deal out blows to their adversaries; and *these*, on their part, are thought obliged to parry off those blows directed against them individually.

Perhaps those who have not taken any part in past events, who are come too late to take any side, and who have not been engaged in the discords yet ill extinguished, would have more impartiality. This sentiment will carry us back again to more general causes. The era would appear to them as a vast drama, the denouement of which was as inevitable as the commencement and the progress were necessary. They would follow the course of opinions during the era; they would inquire into the mo-

ment of separation; they would note the various steps which had been taken, and the time that had been arraigned. Literature would be, in their view, neither an enterprise by common conspiracy of the literati to overturn established order, nor a noble concert for the benefit of the human species; they would consider it as the expression of society; so would define it to be praiseworthy genius. Applying this idea to the eighteenth century, they would develope it in all its details; they would see, that letters, instead of regulating, as some have said, the thoughts and actions of a people, were very often the result, and immediately consequent upon them; and that they could not change the form or constitution of a government, the habits of society — in a word, the relations subsisting among men, without literature shortly after undergoing a correspondent alteration. They would see how public opinions formed themselves, how writers adopted and developed them, and how the direction in which writers travelled was marked out to them by the age. It was a current which they navigated; their movements hastened its rapidity, but the age gave it the first impulse. Such is the idea they would form of the influence of men on letters.

Thus instead of considering the writings of the eighteenth century as works worthy either of blame or praise, they would view them as having only the symptoms of the universal malady. They would

avoid being accusers or apologists, and endeavour to be historians. Fearing nevertheless to fall into a guilty indifference, they would feel it imperative neither to pardon vice nor infidelity. They would seek out the character and intention of a writer, and would not judge him entirely by the opinions he had professed, since each may find himself the unlucky or innocent follower of circumstances. They would not impute wrong to him who had sought right in the sincerity of his heart; and if they were reproaching the irreligious philosopher with having ascribed the Saint Bartholomew to religion, would not fall into the same error by charging philosophy with the massacres of September.

In adopting this procedure, we are under the necessity to ascend higher than the eighteenth century, and to glance at the times which had preceded, and that are united not only by the course of years, but also by that of the human mind.

From the sixteenth century, in which continued wars had given birth to new and grand events, a certain fermentation had succeeded the movements of the people. Knowledge had spread; the materials of antiquity were brought forward by the scholar, to serve as an example for genius; religions had fought; their contests had ended in making their obervances clearer and more regular, but had thrown into some minds doubts upon dogmas. Notwithstanding, literature and science were yet very little in the constitution of empires. The passions and

interests of princes and nobles, the government of sovereigns — such were the principles of change and revolution. Men of letters lived in the silence and solitude of their closet; they seldom quitted it; their minds inhabited not the real world, neither in the past centuries, nor in those times elevated by metaphysical philosophy. Nothing in their works was common or applicable. The events of the times concerned them not; they took no cognizance of them. The continual réunion of men of leisure, bringing their ideas in common, which is an important means of improvement, was not in the modes of those times; — the opinions of writers could have neither part nor influence in the state.

Persons, whose position called them to exercise political activity, had not, in general, during their busy career, leisure to acquire knowledge, nor to give themselves up to reflection. If, in the church or the magistracy, a few men occupied themselves equally in learning and professional duties, their conduct reflected not that double engagement. Literature having then little to do with the ways of the world, not being an object of habitual communication, ennobled their leisure, but influenced them no more than the rest of the nation.

Such was the character of letters until the domination of Cardinal Richelieu; they gradually extended their domain; were introduced by little and little into the ordinary language; every day more

minds were engaged by them, yet were strangers to the affairs of the people, to their manners, and even to their opinions.

Immediately after the death of Cardinal Richelieu, the nobles desired to throw off constraint. A change sometimes inspires more courage. Besides, the successor of the minister did not possess his ungovernable character; and, as it was not against royalty that they were accustomed to murmur, the security of the throne was by no means attacked. They thought only to overthrow the minister. When the revolt had arrived at the foot of the throne, they bowed with respect and retired. Such was the character of that sedition, which commenced actively, and returned upon itself, because the seditious, being confined to a certain limit, could not go beyond it. There was that of La Fronde in particular, which, working no overthrow, and attacking all, without upsetting, left each man and each class in their places. It was that which contributed speedily and completely to terminate that species of revolution. No one had fallen, no vanity had suffered. There was not, as we have since seen, an insurmountable barrier between the past and the future.

Nevertheless, such a state of disorder and indiscipline must necessarily have left traces in the mind, and must have taught them no longer to respect that which had formerly been the object of their veneration. They had lampooned

a queen and a cardinal; a coadjutor of Paris had compromised his ecclesiastical dignity a thousand ways; princes had ridiculed parliament, and a grandson of Henry IV. had been given up to the public derision. It was not with impunity that such examples were exhibited to the people; although neither enlightened nor reflective, they had blended all things together, and had struck the blow. Nor was it the first time that the people had been called in as auxiliary in the troubles of France; that is, in so far as it required strength, not opinion. More than once they had attacked the grandees of the state and its ministers; often even they had shewn hatred and rage against them, but yet they had not ceased to fear and to respect them. When the factions of La Fronde arose, the princes, the grandees, the nobles, the magistrates, had all lost their strength and their dignity under the iron yoke of Cardinal Richelieu; and when, one after the other, they solicited the aid of the people, it was as equals that they implored them. They learnt by that to reverence royal authority only. From that moment they had no more respect for things, institutions, nor persons; every thing was stripped of power and consideration, excepting the throne only, which seemed the more elevated when not screened by its appendages. During a century and a half following, by degrees, they no longer respected even the throne itself.

To return — The influences of La Fronde did not quickly reach the last ranks of society; — they were not formed in a manner to give a ready currency to their notions. They manifested themselves at first only among the rich and idle classes of the capital.

But here commenced the reign of a king capable of dissipating the appearance of disorder. The grace and dignity, the importance and politeness of a spirit eminently despotic, as if by instinct, without violence, without perversity ; not thinking of resistance, yet requiring in general only such things as were just and reasonable ;—such was the character of a sovereign who was to exercise so great an influence over the nation, and whose reign was to be signalized by a change almost total in the French character. It was not, however, without some trouble that he began to re-fashion the court and France agreeably to his wishes. The great lords maintained for some time a tone of independence and levity ; a degenerated modification of the frank and daring character of their ancestors. Favours and banishment crushed this spirit of opposition, which no more applied itself but to petty intrigues. The parliament was constrained to regard itself no longer as the defender of the rights of the nation ; the court was removed out of Paris, become odious by its revolts ; courtiers were no longer driven from their love and obedience by the society of

men who, removed from the person of their monarch, were not awed by the same illusion. At length the work of Cardinal Richelieu was consumed. The system of government he had established by violence, found itself thenceforward conformed to the new mode of things.

Now let us see whether we do not discover that letters also had changed character during these fluctuations of government and politics.

It seems that in the works published under the reign of Cardinal Richelieu, during the first part of the seventeenth century, we may recognise features of strength and gravity. Writers were not rebels to authority, could not at all pretend to independence ; but, when called upon to obey power, without seeking to please it, the mind preserved the greater part of its freedom. The lives of the literati were recluse and studious. Their imaginations were enlightened by the spectacle of the great events to which they were witnesses. Sometimes they sought the aid of their pen, and the fruits of their lucubrations blended themselves with the interests of the world.

From these circumstances result the boldness of the sentiments, the independence of the ideas, the audacious judgment we remark in all things by Corneille, Mézeray, Balzac, St. Réal, by La mothe-Levayer. Shortly after, and more particularly during the troubles of La Fronde, we find a crowd of writers of another stamp, who

were also quickly to disappear. The levity, mirth, familiarity, often the profundity of Charleval, St. Evremont, of Hamilton, his disciple (although he wrote later), depended also upon the circumstances of that epoch. The Cardinal Retz knew how to preserve in his memoirs the style of the heroes of La Fronde. Pascal, who then began to shine, felt also those influences. Later, when the great Arnaud lived in exile, his friend could not have impressed the provincials with the strength and independence of his character, without shewing equally the joke and the severe satire. Molière, who had lived in the society of many of those men, united, in some sort, vigour of talent, depth of observation, and jest in his style. Racine, younger, but who had frequented the last remains of that school, shews the same traces in his first works; and, without doubt, Britannicus, also dissatisfied with the court and the public already changed, is a result of this first position. He took another route, and happily his genius seems to have lost nothing.

The love of repose and order, the gratitude they owed for these, the new spectacle of a court which had subdued and even seduced the nation, turning their minds another way, made every one think it a glory to contribute to the glory of the monarch. All was destined to please him. The talent of this epoch had inward strength enough for this requisition, to put off only a small part of

its warmth and its originality. The tree whose vegetation is vigorous, grows not less proud and lofty from having undergone some constraint.

But we must observe, all that had made the glory of Louis XIV.—ministers, generals, writers, all had received birth and education at an epoch when his government had not yet taken its own form. Their genius, so to speak, was tempered in a time when the spirit had more vigour and freedom. However this be, that first generation of men, once exhausted, it could never be renewed. The influence of Louis XIV. caused none but such as those to spring up around him. His éclat was clouded when he had lost that noble cortège. Obedience continued to be the same; the sovereign was always surrounded by every appearance of respect; — but love and enthusiasm were no more. He had forgotten that the éclat, and the sentiments with which he had inspired his courtiers at the commencement of his reign, were spread throughout France. At the conclusion, his court observing him closely, was the first to depart from that species of adoration. How, in truth, could young princes and young lords preserve any inward respect for a king who required sanctity of manner, whilst in the face of his kingdom, and in contempt of laws the most sacred, he had raised and acknowledged as his children, the fruits of a two-fold adultery — who thought to verify his love and respect for religion, by driving

away the protestants, and persecuting the last remains of Port Royal; and who blushed not, at last, to exhibit publicly his slavery to a woman, whose mind and character were fitted to govern a convent, but not to rule an empire? However, these contradictions were, so to speak, concealed under an imposing representation; and whilst the evils, which were the fruits of these faults, were supported with a noble resignation, it was yet thought that the new generation, which had not been present at the climax of glory and prosperity of the aged monarch, and who thus were not subjugated by powerful reminiscences, would not be more haughty under that power which had been acknowledged by their fathers. Under the cognizance of the majestic aspect of the king, none dared to infringe the rules he had prescribed. But in his own palace, his children, their favourites, their contemporaries, gave themselves up to those irregularities which they easily concealed from the enfeebled sight of the august old man; then religion and morals by degrees became objects of ridicule. They accustomed themselves to consider as vain those laws which they saw every day comply with the humour of the sovereign, who, however, imagined himself the observer, and required that others should strictly conform themselves to them. Whilst the idle life of the court, and the conversation of women destroyed the grave character that the French had in old times, and had brought on a frivolity, which has since then increased,

and although the exhibition of disorder could but inspire that strong hatred which the honest mind ought to feel, yet it spread a certain indifference for principles; a spirit of scepticism upon those opinions which mankind had till then revered; a habit of enjoying everything; and an unblushing impudence, which, after having existed a long time, during the old age of Louis XIV. and imbittered his last moments, finished, by placing Philippe of Orléans upon the throne.

Nevertheless, there yet were in the court those elevated beings who saw the errors of the king, and knew how to judge him without losing the sentiments of respect and obedience. Fénélon lived in the midst of that society, and there spread his virtuous doctrines; there they could not take occasion to decry morals and religion, because those who professed them knew only to conform themselves to them. In observing the weaknesses and foibles of the world around, and seeing how passions and prejudices triumphed over the best intentions, Fénélon was taught to profess a mild and tolerant virtue; he perceived, likewise, that those who obeyed morals and religion from fear and blind submission, knew not their higher use, and sought to give them a capability which had its source in the love and clearness of persuasion. He thought, since kings were subject to error, and their errors caused the misfortunes of the people, that laws should serve to restrain royal power. He was disgraced and almost perse-

cuted. His pupil, whom he loved to think would make the happiness of France, was, during his life-time, ill received by his grandfather, who found him an animated censurer of his conduct, which was an object of ridicule among the youth of the court, who blamed the faults of the sovereign, only to practise a greater disorder.

Fénélon is not, however, the last, who served the cause of religion and morals by the union of virtue and mildness, happily blended for the good and instruction of his species. Immediately after him, we find a prelate eloquent and respectable, who gave to the precepts of reason and liberty, the authority of the word of God, and who restricted them to the observances of religion and the laws. Such was the character of the sweet eloquence of Massillon. Bossuet had maintained in the pulpit all those doctrines which establish the absolute power of kings and the ministers of religion. He held in contempt the opinions and will of mankind, and required an entire submission to power.

Massillon, who lived, not like Bossuet, under a government noble and commanding, upon which it was the glory of the nation to repose, was not, therefore, inspired by the same means. In exhorting the citizens to obedience, he recalled unceasingly to the mind of the young prince, that he must merit it by respecting the rights of the nation. He placed truth before a king who profited badly by his exalted lessons, and whose conduct was debased by

following a sentiment which began at that time openly to show a contempt for all authority.

His eloquence participated in the character of his opinions. He was not, like Bossuet, powerful by his altitude and energy; by a sort of sharpness and terror which subjugated and discouraged the mind. Massillon seized not the attention by authority and vivid force. The progress of his thoughts was more gradual — he developed them, and by degrees carried the hearer with him; raising himself into a holy fervour, he filled all hearts, and by another course, produced the noblest effects of eloquence. We must observe also, that he used language differently. Bossuet, profoundly versed in the sacred writings, full of an erudition which controversy had rendered necessary, transported into his discourses the language of Scripture with the simplicity and boldness of oriental phrase; and language yielded to the force of his thoughts. Massillon conformed himself more to the timid genius which our language had taken. He had already written much, was habituated to those forms of style consecrated by great success, and could dispose of language as easily as he could assume an individual and original character.

The old age of Louis XIV., and the first years of the eighteenth century, leave us to remark some men, who, by their character and the tenor of their writings, belong rather to those times in which they commenced their career, than to that which

finished it. Among them we must name the Abbé Fleury, who had merited the esteem and patronage of Fénélon. All parties, by common consent, surnamed him the "Judicious Fleury."

The "Eclesiastical History" is an immense work, in which we find more than erudition. It is written with care, and with criticism and fidelity: the number of metaphysical questions, which make a part of the subject, are discussed with clearness and profundity. The picture of the events of the world, that refer to religion, is sketched simply and with commanding touches. In the opinions which accompany that history, the author displays an impartiality which is equally removed from indifference. In his work upon the choice and method of study, he has shown a sense of truth and justice, and a vivid and enlightened love of antiquity, without pedantry or affectation.

Rollin, who lived far from the world, and wholly devoted to the duties of his occupation, wrote with simplicity. He tried to inspire the young with a taste for virtue, and at the same time with a love of letters. He wrote history without dryness or misconstruction — not, as it were, to demonstrate a system, as we have since seen.

More illustrious than these, D'Aguesseau, a citizen, full of virtue and firmness, in the midst of universal corruption, never yielded to the seductions of vice nor to the abuse of power; he occupied his leisure in the study of letters and the sciences, and gave

an exalted model of the conduct that a magistrate of the French monarchy should hold in following the footsteps left of their career by so many virtuous predecessors. We find, in his style, full of gravity and mildness, all the character of his life. He cultivated the sciences accurately, as well as foreign literature; and was one of the first who followed a species of study which a short time afterwards united itself with some new opinions; but his piety and his attachment to the severe duties of a magistrate, held him aloof from that spirit which began to pervade literature as well as to deprave morals.

Thus having spoken of those who remained, so to speak, strangers to that which surrounded them, we are about to enter, without further essay, upon the literature which received so powerfully the influence of vitiated morals and assumed all the character of the times.

CHAPTER II.

The court of Louis XIV., was now changed; it had adopted a new spirit and principles though letters yet continued in the direction heretofore marked out by those illustrious authors who had shone one after the other. Campistron and the imitators of Racine, followed the steps of their master with more or less success, without giving their productions any individual character. Instead of investigating sentiments and ascertaining their own talent, they confined themselves to copy the forms of style of their model.

Comedy had kept more vigour and gaiety. The character, folly, and features, of divers states of society, had yet preserved that degree of prominence which has since been effaced. Reynard and Dancourt exhibited with great felicity of jest and spirit, sometimes even with depth, the debauched manners of their times. Le Sage, their rival in comedy, applied the same species of talent to romance, which thus took, under his hands, quite a new character. It belonged to an author of the

school of Molière to produce Gil Blas; which is, in effect, a comedy, only in another form. It is the picture of the human heart under the aspect of vice and folly; but Le Sage, like Molière, knew how to demonstrate man without dissecting him. Nothing in his works shows analysis; he is one of the first who knew how to paint instead of describing. Later, he was thought more profound because he made a parade of the work of observation and his imagination had lost the power to reproduce living nature.

The comedies of that period are curious to consult as historical monuments and as authentic witnesses of the morals and manners of those times. They show that it was not far to travel from the end of the reign of Louis XIV., to the regency of the Duke of Orleans. It was almost an insensible transition for the genius of the nation; but the difference between the two governments was great and fatal.

Some historians carry us back to that moment. Daniel falsified to the advantage of royal authority, the annals of the nation, and destroyed all the charm which contemporaneous narrators had diffused over the noble souvenirs of ancient France. Forty years before, the spiritual and profound Mézeray had much better preserved the genius of the national character. Vertôt, although less exact, stripped of force and simplicity, succeeded better than Daniel, and knew, at least, how to interest.

In the meantime, out of France were many writers

animated by a peculiar spirit. These were the reformers, exiles by the revocation of the edict of Nantes, who revenged themselves continually for the persecutions they had unjustly suffered, by calumniating the king and the catholic clergy. Their writings, circulating in France, found spirits disposed to discontent, sharpened by the misfortunes of war, and increased by contempt for the authority of the laws.

Among those refugees shone an enlightened individual whose productions will live for a long period, while the other obscure libels have almost as quickly been forgotten. It was Bayle—the boldest and most frigid sceptic of all the philosophers. Ordinarily, writers have made their doubts serve to destroy that which has existed, in order to substitute their own opinion; it has been a weapon they have employed for conquest: with Bayle the doubt was a result, not a means — it was a perfect equilibrium between all opinions — nothing could incline the balance. Party spirit, prejudices, the influence of eloquence, the seductions of the imagination, nothing touched Bayle — nothing could determine him. All opinions appeared to him probable; when he found one ill-defended, he seized upon it, and lent it that aid by which it might be supported. Strange! that he seemed to revel in a sort of incertitude; his soul neither oppressed nor torn by that ignorance upon questions which concern most men, he resorted to them and rejoiced in the inability to

settle them: that which was a serious punishment to many great minds—to many elevated souls, was a sort of pastime to him.

They ascribe a dangerous influence to the philosophy of Bayle; in the first place, the equilibrium of opinions might, it is true, seduce some minds into the belief of its superiority, but the doubt of Bayle is a learned doubt; he banters much more those who reject lightly and without examination, than those who believe with submission. In old times, knowledge caused men to doubt; since, ignorance and frivolity have opened a larger way. It is not in works like those of Bayle, to mislead the vulgar; it has been since, perhaps, that they have become more fatal; the immense erudition that composes them has been a vast arsenal to which incredulity has easily resorted to borrow arms, and has also found the sad example of a continual raillery, that brands with disgrace all the opinions and all the elevated movements of the soul, considering as folly every thing which did not agree with its own cold reasonings. The wit of Bayle is certainly almost always dull and vulgar, it amuses sometimes, precisely because it is imperturbable, and blends itself singularly with the pedantry of a critic; but it has been met with since among men who have given to the jests of Bayle a lightness and a grace arranged for the uses of frivolity, and to procure them universal currency.

While, during some years, literature had followed

the traces of the period of Louis XIV., without producing anything marked or original, some men of talent shewed that they belonged not to the mediocrity of servile imitation; and that to acquire a durable reputation, they must follow the guidance of, and, yet more essential, yield themselves to, their own impulses.

A new tragedy appeared upon the stage, and it was marked, above all, by a new and peculiar character. Crébillon, a stranger to the models of antiquity, having meditated very little upon history, destitute of great or profound thoughts, a writer without correctness or harmony, could sometimes give to the passions a sombre expression, that struck and astonished the mind, without exciting the feelings. He was entirely distant from the art in which Racine triumphed; — that skill which seizes entirely upon the soul, and arrives, by successive shadowings, always full of truth, to the most passionate movements, so conducting the spectator, by a continuous process, to a participation in the feelings and circumstances of the actors. The imitators of Racine, thinking to follow the same course, dissipated passion by a vain loquacity, and meaning to prepare for tragical impressions, only weakened them. Crébillon, who lived in solitude, and had passed his youth far from Paris, rose above them, simply by yielding more to his own talent, which he knew would give a colour to his works; but the genius, that a union of favourable circum-

stances prevented from falling into an insipid imitation, was yet far from being able to equal the great tragedies of the French stage. When the tragedies of Crébillon appeared, they were not otherwise considered, though some of them obtained great success; yet it was not until a long time after, that an effort was made to put this author in the first rank, to oppose a writer who was so classed. This factitious renown has since given way; and in spite of the constant hatred against Voltaire, which two or three generations of critics have carefully bequeathed, Crébillon could not sustain a rivalship with him, by whose side he was placed.

Not far from the same epoch, we find a writer whose reputation acquired a better title; it has also remained the greatest. There was wanting, in the literary glory of the age of Louis XIV., a lyric poet, to complete the réunion of celebrated men in each distinct species. Malherbe had not, like Corneille, the honour to find a successor. The lyrical career presents difficulties great enough to forbid the hope of obtaining a complete success.

Without speaking of the obstacles the language presents, in reference to syntax and harmony, it must be observed, that poetry among us obtains quite another direction to that of the ancients. It made an essential part of their morals, and almost of their language; it expressed habitual sentiments; it entered into their daily customs; it represented *facts*, such as they believed; *causes*, such as they

had under their own eye; it adored the gods which they celebrated in public worship;—in a word, it was full of reality, and was not a language of convention.

For us, if poetry had not received importations, both ancient and foreign, if it had continued the child of our old fables, of our romances of chivalry, of our ancient mysteries, of our Gothic superstitions, it had vegetated, perhaps, a long time in its infancy, but it would have kept a true and national character; an intimate connection with our morals, our religion, our annals, that would have given it an immediate and more complete effect. It has not been thus.

From the fifteenth century, our writers, instead of improving our Gothic literature, had comported themselves as descendants of Greece and Rome. They adopted the gods that were not ours, the manners to which we were strangers, and repudiated all the souvenirs of France, to transport themselves to those of antiquity. They began to copy or disguise antique models, and to repel the impressions and the inspirations of real life. The songs, formerly the delight of the palace and the old chateaus; the verses, that our kings and our heroes, men without knowledge or study, traced, at the point of their sword, to express, without difficulty, their loves and their chagrins, became the exclusive patrimony of the Doctes, who knew Horace and Pindar well enough, but forgat nature.

This imitation of the ancients had at first a pedantic

character, entirely out of truth : by degrees it formed itself into a sort of mélange. The circumstances of real life modified the impressions received from ancient literature, and from that double action resulted the middle direction in which it has since continued. But, in defiance of long habit, in spite of the education which has almost identified us with this system, poetry has always shown something borrowed, and estranged from our feelings. It is only by a sort of tacit consent that we transport ourselves into its domain. It is this which leaves us far behind the ancients, and above all, the Greeks, who were always in earnest; who painted that which they felt, described that which they saw; who thought themselves under no obligation to exaggerate their impressions, or to swell their language.

It is particularly in lyrical poetry that the fault is most felt; —*there*, the poet is entirely given up to himself, he must tell us of his feelings, his sentiments, and the pictures painted upon his imagination. We have been well pleased to hear Achilles and Agamemnon speak a language not ours; but the man of our day, who carries us to Greece or Rome to describe his feelings, will with difficulty obtain our sympathy; his enthusiasm will run great risk of becoming factitious, without our exhibiting any emotion. For this reason, the best odes of Rousseau, and in general the pieces most distinguished of our lyrical poetry, are those sacred subjects which have their source in our religion; and, moreover, the odes designed to recount

the personal impressions of grief, love, enjoyment,— all those allegorical odes, where the Pagan gods arrive to celebrate events, or to blend themselves with the detail of life, may be considered ingenious declamations, but are not true poetry — that which goes to the soul.

Rousseau brought into almost all his odes a great felicity and a sort of pompous harmony, which he alone knew how to give our language; but he is sometimes bombastic, and his style does not always search the heart — a defect, perhaps, it is impossible to avoid in French lyrical poetry. Rousseau, although he paraphrased the Psalms, although some men, who called themselves religious, considered him as one of their patrons, bears the character of a writer far removed from the severe school of the era of Louis XIV. In truth, what are we to think of a man who could at the same time exercise his talent in sacred poetry and in obscene epigrams? Is not such a contradiction exhibited to convince us that we no longer had to fear, as formerly, the censure of those serious minds whose opinions were once respected?

Chaulieu, who chaunted pleasure, but who did not, like Rousseau, prostitute poetry to the vile debauch, contributed yet more to show the influence morals had already exercised on letters. The society of the Temple, of which he sang the charms with so much grace and lewdness, was heir to the society of the Tournelles. The gaiety

of the friends of Ninon had passed away in taking a character more licentious with the courtezans of the Grand-prior of Vendôme. It was well known what habits the prince and his brother carried with them to the camp, what opinions they held, without any respect to their rank; it was concluded how much more they must defy all decency when they found themselves in that voluptuous retreat, surrounded by their familiars. Few things would be respected in such society; and the poet owed it to the prince, who admitted him to his friendship, to speak with complacency of its pleasures, and with levity of all that should curb them.

It is here we name a man who seems to unite the two epochs together: Fontenelle, born early enough for the best years of the famous reign that sparkled under his eyes, and who lived to see the best titles to glory in the eighteenth century. Nephew of Corneille, he first tried tragedy; but, being depressed by misfortune, his fall drew upon him the epigrams of Racine. Zeal for the glory of his uncle, and personal resentment, engaged Fontenelle in a party opposed to those men who then reigned sovereign over letters. He professed principles of taste different from theirs; but the mildness of his character and love of ease, which he always preferred to the enjoyments of vanity, prevented him from embracing any opinion with warmth. In the dispute about the ancients and moderns, he inclined to the side of the adversaries of antiquity, but ar-

gued without passion, as he always did. He had the rare good sense to attach neither importance nor certainty enough to his notions to desire others to follow him. When he had doubts upon religion, he knew how to confine himself within that just measure of reserve and criticism which distinguishes the "History of the Oracles." The pursuits of his youth had imbued him with the systems of the Cartesian philosophy; he preserved his esteem for them, but without defending them, or attacking the new school of philosophers with whom he lived in peace. The lukewarmness of his disposition shewed itself in his talent, remarkable for its ingenious finesse and impartiality. He had neither the rapture nor the imagination of a poet, nor the invention of a savant. He carried a sort of dryness and affectation into letters, and sometimes gave to the sciences a complexion very frivolous. Such as we have depicted him, we see that he had too much reflection and judgment entirely to be hurried away by the current of his time, and too much prudence to oppose it. He united always the reserve and gravity he had acquired during the first years of his life, to the tolerance professed by his latest contemporaries.

Among the writers who illustrate the beginning of his century, we must not forget to place La-Mothe, whose opinions, conduct, and character have, in this respect, a resemblance to Fontenelle. A poet cold and false in the highest species of lyrical

poetry — sometimes agreeable in the Anacreontic ode — a fabulist without naïveté, but, sometimes ingenious, he was happier in the dramatic career. After choosing a suitable subject, he disposed of it with considerable judgment, introduced situations really touching, that hid inability where he ought to have developed with profundity and sentiment. La-Mothe, in his day, was more remarkable as a critic than as an author; and we must notice the degree of merit he shewed in the discussion respecting the ancients and moderns. The cause Perrault had sustained, without wit or knowledge, against Racine and Boileau, was embraced by La-Mothe. In the dispute, he appears more subtile than erudite. He withdrew his admiration from those beauties that were not to his taste, and would dethrone poetry from that height to which he could not attain; but he brought into the discussion truth and decency, for he knew that, to render his opinion probable, he must sustain it with some degree of honour; — thus literary doctrines began also to stagger and become matters of doubt.

Such altogether is the picture presented to us of the end of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth centuries. Authority had lost its respectability and a part of its power; religion had ceased to be a universal curb; doubt had begun to destroy persuasion; knowledge and the habit of reflection, were more generally spread; judgment upon all things was consequently more diffused, but strength and du-

rability were lost. Every one had learnt to attach more importance to himself and his own opinions, and to have less regard for those which had been received.

The writers that we have named illustrate the epoch; some preserved in their talent and conduct somewhat of the character of the preceding years; others were entirely borne away by the influence of the mode. But literature had not taken a very decided direction; — it was not yet found among men strong enough to impress upon it a determined movement. Besides, when the mind and morals of a nation are in a state of crisis and change, writers cannot tender the whole of their opinions, principles and aim.

The men who shone at the commencement of the century had first lived in other times. To know the fruits of an epoch, it is necessary to see the genuine children — those to whom it had given birth and education.

CHAPTER III.

In the mean time, to carry off the palm from the schools, and the precocious success of the young, appeared a man who was destined to gather to himself the greater part of the glory of the age, to bear all its impress, and to become, so to speak, its representative, to the point where it was little more than needful for him to have imposed his name. Without doubt, nature had endowed Voltaire with the most astonishing faculties; without doubt, such powers of mind were not entirely the result either of education or circumstances: nevertheless, it will not be impossible to show that the employment of his talent was constantly conformed to the opinion of the times, and that the wish to prosper and to please (the *primum mobile* of almost all writers) had guided Voltaire every moment of his life. But as no person was more susceptible than he of the force of such impressions, his genius presents, as it seems to us, the singular phenomenon of a man often deprived of that faculty of the mind called reflection,

and, at the same time, endowed, in the highest degree, with the power to feel and to express, with a marvellous vivacity. This is doubtless the cause of his success and of his errors. That manner of considering every thing in one point of view, and of yielding to the actual sensations which an object produces, without thinking of those it might have yielded under other circumstances, have multiplied the contradictions of Voltaire, and often misled him from truth and reason to destroy the structure of his works as a perfect whole. But an entire abandonment to his impressions, a continual impetuosity of sentiment, an irritability so delicate and so lively, have produced the pathos, the irresistible passion, the force of wit or eloquence, and the continual grace that flows with a felicity without bounds. And when reason and justice came to be invested with this brilliant outside, they then acquired the most seducing charm: it seemed as if they were rising, without effort, to all the brightness of a direct and natural light; and their expounder left far behind him all those who demonstrated laboriously by judgment, comparison, and experience.

If the first success of Voltaire had been less splendid — if he had not suddenly been crowned with a glory which caused him to be sought by men most distinguished for rank and riches, he had doubtless maintained more modesty and reserve. The character of his first works shows that he bore to the world a genius not very independent. We

perceive clearly, in some, *that* levity and frivolity applied to every thing, which his contemporaries had carried to so high a pitch; yet we must remark something submissive and courtier-like towards every species of authority. But when the young author, intoxicated with the applauses of the theatre, and yet more by the flattering familiarity of some grandees, saw that he had restrained himself within useless limits, and the more he sported with every thing, the more he should please those with whom he flattered himself to be in friendship, then he lost, by degrees, the caution he had first observed, and emboldened himself to speak of all subjects with irreverence. Such is the degree of progression, that, more than all, is discovered in his fugitive poetry — those chefs-d'œuvres of badinage and agreeableness; that present unceasingly the seducing and dangerous contrast of serious things treated with a tone of jest, and, at the same time, with a show of justice and reason. Notwithstanding the success of Voltaire was always accumulating, his importance constantly displayed itself; and every thing encouraged him to scatter in his productions that spirit which succeeded so well with the public who applauded.

Divers times, government wished to check the impetus that every day gathered fresh strength. It found by his writings that all had begun a tendency to the same point; or, to speak more exactly, to travel in the same direction. He was imprisoned,

exiled, menaced; but these persecutions had not any effect. That which violated public morals—attacked every thing that the whole world respected, might well be punished with universal disapprobation; but that which expressed opinions generally spread, or, at least, those towards which each began to incline, would find on all sides supports which upheld it. Those who had the power often wished to punish him, and as often some one stepped forward to protect him. So Voltaire, only exasperated by his exile, and the condemnation of his works, became gradually not merely a power, but a power rendered hostile, at the same time that his influence was increased. His travels, and the reception he met with from strangers, gave him a dislike to his country: he was the first who professed, in his writings, an admiration for England. We will agree that the spectacle of a nation, whose government was at the same time free yet stable, where reigned together the love of country and the spirit of liberty, without injury to morals or public peace, would with difficulty be seen without regret by a Frenchman, who discerned, in his own country, a people of anti-courtiers, without public spirit; and a government, without note, exacting all the rights of despotism, yet too imbecile to suppress licence.

Voltaire, and others who followed him, praised England only to pity or to blame France. They thought ill, and had only seen the English nation

superficially, and were ignorant of the causes whence resulted its happiness. They often admired that which least merited to be envied. The boast was a subject to draw satire on the French.

It is needful for sad experience to shew us that such advantages are not acquired by imitation, and that the prosperity of a people can only originate in its own soil. It is not a merchandise which can be imported from abroad. For the rest, admiration of England, before it appeared in the works of Voltaire, had already been openly professed by the Regent and his friends. From the heads of the nation, it was more inconvenient than from the pen of an author.

The more Voltaire advanced in his career, the more we find him surrounded by homage and praise. Kings were his friends, and almost his courtiers. Hatred and envy revolted at his honors, and excited in him feelings of anger. The continual opposition gave yet more animation to his character, but mostly subtracted from him moderation, modesty, and good taste. Such was his life; such was the process that brought him to a lengthened old age, which he might have rendered so honorable when, environed by an immense share of glory, he reigned the autocrat of letters; which themselves had reached their greatest elevation on all subjects that could interest the curiosity, or excite the attention of mankind.

It is to be regretted that Voltaire had not felt how much he had the power to ennoble and illustrate such a position, in profiting by the advantages it offered, and in following that course which it seemed to prescribe to him. It is afflicting that, allowing himself to be hurried away by the torrent of a degraded age, he was plunged into that daring cynisme which might have found excuse in the freedom of youth, but forms a degrading contrast with grey hairs; the symbol of wisdom and purity. What spectacle can be more revolting than an old man insulting the Deity.

Instead of this picture, the imagination loves to trace another; and to represent Voltaire such as he might have been. It figures to itself a venerable man, whose mind had grasped many things, and almost always with success; enjoying tranquilly his renown; rectifying the imprudent mistakes of his youth; attracting the rising generation to the refinements of good taste, and to the sentiments of order and decency, of which he had seen the last remains; master of a large fortune acquired without cupidity, and consecrated to acts of beneficence; surrounded by the homage of Europe, whose choicest inhabitants should visit his retreat and seek his friendship: such is the position Voltaire ought to have enjoyed. Indeed so much is it indicated by his situation, that one often imagines it had really conformed to it.

Many times, in the midst of a shameful intoxication, in which vanity and the desire of influence

seemed plunged, he had returns of reason. He would fain have resisted in some things the impulse of which he had partaken, and rendered more active. In his last works, through the continual variety of opinions and systems — of assertions ever absolute and unceasingly contradictory, we sometimes meet with deductions profoundly rational, and a just appreciation of the miserable spirit which reigned around him. It is then we regret that he had had the perpetual mobility and want of reflection, and above all, that immense love of praise, and of the world. He alone, armed with all the powers of his mind, could, in a degree, have retarded the course of threatening opinions which accumulated on all sides, and which, combated with feebleness or insincerity, acquired yet more force by a powerless resistance.

After having examined the conduct and general character of Voltaire, we come to speak more particularly of his works. Their merit has been a hundred times discussed, and yet remains a problem. Almost always received with enthusiasm by the public, they met at the same time with decided detractors; and party spirit has always presided instead of judgment. Half a century has passed away, and the reputation of Voltaire is yet, like the dead body of Patrocles, disputed between two parties animated one against the other. Such a contest is sufficient to perpetuate his fame. Some men have become eminent by defending him; others

have only been celebrated by being at all times ready to attack him. In so prolonged a conflict, the renown of Voltaire, undoubtedly, has not preserved all the éclat with which it once sparkled.

It is no more the national enthusiasm, the admiration equal to that which heroes and benefactors of mankind have inspired; it is no more the triumph that was decreed him to his last hour as he descended into the tomb. A colder and more circumspect judgment has weakened those lively manifestations.

There is somewhat of absurdity and folly in the efforts of those who labour to preserve the glory of Voltaire entire. A sufficient space of time has passed away, for us to consider the opinion of posterity as pronounced.

Accustomed to place dramatic compositions in the first rank of literature, it is as a tragic poet that Voltaire first meets our observation. In the first productions of his youth, as well as in his conduct, he shows a conformity to received opinions and examples precedently given. In "Œdipe," we find a young author penetrated with the beauties of Racine and Corneille, and submitting his genius to follow them. In "Mariamne," the extreme care to imitate the poetry of Racine is yet more marked. That which astonishes us, is to see imitations full of life and truth, exhibiting at the same time an exact similitude. That work was not rewarded with success. After "Œdipe," in which

he was supported by the example of Sophocles, Voltaire could not obtain a complete triumph; nothing encouraged him to follow the vestiges of his predecessors. The impatience of his genius, whose nature was to wander unrestrained, forced him to rely entirely upon himself, and to yield to the free course of those thoughts with which he was filled.

Then appeared "Zaïre," with its defects so much censured, and its beauties which would make one forget them. It was in that work that Voltaire established the character of a tragic writer. It was not the perfection of the verse of Racine, and their melodious sweetness — it was not the scrupulous care in the contexture of the plot, the infinite gradations of sentiment; neither was it the lofty imagination and simplicity of Corneille. There is, perhaps, in Voltaire, that which belongs to no other: it is a certain hurried warmth of passion; an entire yielding; a power of sentiment that enchains and silences; a grace which charms while it subjugates. Poetry, such as his, can only be produced by men of the most ardent imagination; if any thing can give the idea of an author a prey to all the fascination of passion and poetry, it is in a work like that of "Zaïre." It is impossible, even to criticize it seriously, without being struck with the force, facility and grace, that distinguishes the tragic muse of Voltaire.

Other chefs-d'œuvres succeeded to "Zaïre," all with the same species of beauties and defects.

We must also remark, that Voltaire, having become somewhat more than a poet, wished to give his tragedies a more elevated aim than to please and to excite — he pretended to instruct his era by the influence of his dramatic works, and to give them the same construction as his other writings. Nothing hurts the imagination so much as giving it a design, or submitting it to a system: it contracts a coldness and affectation. This was the source of a defect that critics have remarked, not without reason; and from the same fault arose the emphatic and declamatory tone which often cooled the most lively situations, destroyed the truth of his characters, and defaced local colours. In these general remarks, we should have been glad not to have included Corneille, as culpable in that respect as Voltaire.

Of the rest he has left a monument, more complete and less attackable, of his tragic talent: "Mérope" may be presented to the critic without fear: and if the details have less charm than those of "Zaïre," the ensemble is less deserving of censure.

It is as an epic poet that Voltaire has most injured his reputation. In vain did he flatter himself to give an epic poem to France. It was not in the times in which he lived, it was not in his character to produce such a work. Epic poetry requires the animated and free imagination of the pri-

mitive ages; when knowledge has not yet enfeebled the strength of belief, the elevation of sentiment, the variety and vigour of character; —the epic can only be sung to a simple people, and, so to speak, children, sensible of the charm of the long recital, loving the marvellous, ignorant of explanations and criticisms. It is then that the epic may be painted in primitive colours, and clothed with the forms of grandeur. Such were the circumstances which produced Homer and Tasso.

By a grave and melancholy character, with true and pure sentiments nourishing the remembrance of misfortune in solitude, the epic has been rendered as touching as they made it grand, and secured admiration through the interest: but if Virgil fled the influence of the court of Augustus, Voltaire was, on the contrary, far from avoiding the influence of the court of the Regent. He formed an epic poem with the same degree of inspiration that he would have brought to compose a long epistle in verse; he thought that the epic poem consisted in certain conventional forms — in a marvellous assortment: he filled it with those formalities, and thought he had accomplished a masterpiece. He did not see that it is not a dream, a recitation, nor the divinities, that constitute the epic poem; but rather a solemn and elevated imagination, and, above all, simple and true, which forms it. The "Iliad" resembles the "Odyssey" in nothing but the disposal of the parts; yet they both have in

common, the character of the epic. Nevertheless, we do not deny that the "Henriade" offers great beauties; the poetry is not epic, but it is sometimes elevated and pathetic.

The beauty of the fugitive poems of Voltaire has not been so much contested. One of their principal merits, which augments more than any thing their interest, is, that they serve to make us acquainted with the feelings and thoughts of the poet. We love to see poetry borrow a charm from real impressions — for the rest, the greater part is a vain arrangement of words! Thus we follow the tide of Voltaire's feelings from his infancy to the last days of his life; he always gave verse as his interpreters.

Sometimes his muse sang the fickle and voluptuous amours of his youth, the charms of a free and epicurean life, the pleasures of friendship, the gratification of self-love; afterwards he conversed on the sciences, which he animated with his own fire; later he entered into discourse with kings, and lent to flattery the mask of familiarity; later still he had more to paint the sweets of liberty and solitude, the decline of life, the termination of his loves; and, at last, when he was conscious of old age, he expressed that continual uncertainty of opinions — that fluctuation of principles — that deplorable levity on all subjects of serious import to man, and that inquietude of character which old age could not calm. But some of the poetry of his last years

was often without disgrace to the author; whilst those obscure pamphlets, witty sayings in prose, the clandestine productions his friends demanded of him, and which he sent to them with so much complacency, are, in general, unworthy of an honest mind.

Among these writings we place a poem, which was, for a long time, considered as one of Voltaire's greatest pretensions to fame, and proves that he conformed to the times in parodying the heroic ages of his country, and in blemishing, by a mélange of gross obscenities, those pictures most grateful to the voluptuary, and sallies most daring to the mind. Now it could be no more than a crowd of acceptable details that drew favour to such a work. While, as a whole, we observe more of poetical imagination than in the "Henriade," yet the author remains as far behind Ariosto as Homer. The gay, as well as the sublime, requires a sort of naïveté and sincerity: it has no resemblance to scoffing or bantering.

Voltaire, as an historian, has likewise suffered attacks upon his renown. On that side he presents feeble parts; it was not with vivacity of opinion and the want of enquiry, that he could hope to attain the serious character of an historian. Nevertheless, his first essay was happy, and merited the success it obtained. He had the good fortune to choose for his hero the most romantic, and the most adventurous of sovereigns. Reflec-

tion had little value in the life of Charles of Sweden — it even would have destroyed its interest. It wanted rapidity of recital and brilliant colours — profound knowledge, and a just appreciation of mankind were little necessary, when he had to treat of a prince who had shewn himself quite beyond them. There were no grand conceptions to judge, no secret motives to unravel. Charles XII. was entirely an actor: it was only necessary to paint, and that was one of the talents of Voltaire.

To trace the tableau of the reign of Louis XIV. was an undertaking altogether of difficulty. In spite of all its éclat, the history is far from exhibiting the same interest with that of the King of Sweden. It has less of unity, it is more complicated, it embraces more characters, more causes, more motives. The events are not the immediate result of passion or persons. It is less dramatic, and speaks less to the imagination. One might say, the more a nation is civilized, the more it loses the prominent and picturesque forms of ancient ages, which make the charm of the recital. The duty of an historian is likewise more difficult to fulfil. We demand impartiality, and reproach him with lack of warmth and interest. We require particulars of commerce, arts, government; and complain that philosophical considerations swell the narrative of facts. We proscribe erudition, and censure the writer who neglects it. Older historians were not always so fettered They

wrote with all their prejudices, they preserved their individual features, without seeking for a cold impartiality, which shews itself more in forms than in reality. They recounted the victories of their country, without anxiety to learn the history of the vanquished. They neither abdicated their opinions nor their feelings.

Xenophon, in the middle of Athens, did not conceal his admiration of Lacedemon ; Tacitus yielded himself to a virtuous hatred of tyrants ; each gave himself up freely to that which was ; safe to be either blamed or praised ; it was for the reader to judge the strength of the testimony of the historian, and of the confidence that should be given to him. In history, as well as in general literature, they had the talent of painting personal impressions. While we conceive of modern history in a manner not analagous to that of Greece or Rome, we must renounce the hope of exciting the same interest. Chronicles, memoirs, biographies, can alone give us sensations of the like nature, and act upon our imaginations ; at least we find in them something of the dramatic which strikes and fastens upon the mind.

It was Voltaire who first gave a marked example of that new mode of writing history : he wished to make, no more a tableau, but a series of researches destined to improve the memoir and to occupy the argument. After him the English historians, in imitating that manner of writing, have surpassed

their model in erudition, philosophy, and impartiality; for sincerity and impartiality become more necessary in that species of history; and, even admitting that it be the best, Voltaire yet merits many censures. The little depth in his reflections, the incomplete knowledge of character; a style which pleases, without inducing thought, — such are the reproaches brought against him: they might have added some of a graver kind. Voltaire, in the reign of Louis XIV., only saw the éclat and splendour of the victories, the literature, the arts: he never thought of examining the character of the government and the administration of the monarch; the influence that he had had upon the character of the nation, and the consequences that had resulted. He had not remarked that, perhaps, no epoch in the history of France was more important, by the change in morals, the social relations, and the ancient spirit of our constitution.

It is to the brilliant colouring of Voltaire that we owe the unreserved admiration for the reign of Louis XIV. He has made us forget that a king has other duties than to acquire renown for his empire. He has made us forget that France had a glory more venerable and solid than that of an age of elegance. More than any other, he has desired to represent the times that had preceded that epoch, as obscured by barbarism.

For him, for his generation, and for those which

have followed, our nation merited no interest before the seventeenth century.

What importance in his consideration the beauty of our ancient manners; the noble and paternal character of some of our kings; the rights of the nation recognised and defended, when they were not respected; the freedom of the discourse, and the force of the character! All these attracted his attention less than the refinement of the language and the display of its poetry. Those advantages, so precious in the mind of a man of letters, prevented him from noticing that kingly power had overthrown all the ancient order of things, abolished all its traditions, and thrown a fatal uncertainty upon the principles of public right.

It is not thus that Louis XIV. has been judged in the years that have followed his death; we have been enlightened by the wrongs, by the disasters that have accrued. Some have preserved a resentment profound and even exaggerated.

Voltaire was one of the first who contributed to weaken the prepossessions and party-injustice, that had been cherished respecting the monarch. The memory of a king greater and more beloved, had yet more claims upon him, and the patriotic love of the French for Henry IV., was renewed by the praises which Voltaire lavished on him. No part of the reign of Louis XIV. claims the admiration or the remembrance of so good a king; per-

haps he was removed from the boast at that time.

The greater part of the censures passed upon the history of the era of Louis XIV. apply to the essay on the "Mœurs des Nations." But that work deserves blame of a graver cast; we find in it traces of the sectarian spirit adopted by Voltaire in the last years of his life. His hatred to religion is frequently expressed in bad faith and bad taste. Notwithstanding, the work is useful and instructive; the style is agreeable and natural; the facts are well disposed; the details given in a just proportion; the reflections sometimes light, sometimes rational; the sketch of some epochs, the portraits of many great men are drawn with a force and remarkable vivacity: few modern histories are more useful or more pleasant to read.

It remains for us to speak of the spirit which he introduced into philosophy; that is to say, the opinions relative to religion, morals, and politics. He is accused of a formal project to overthrow the three bases of the honour and happiness of mankind.

But those who expect to find in Voltaire a system of philosophy, connected principles, or a centre of opinions, would be much embarrassed. Nothing is less suited to the grave idea we have of a philosopher, than the kind of spirit and talent of Voltaire.

That he had a desire to please the age, to influence it, to revenge himself on his enemies, to form

a party which might be praised and defended, we could believe without much trouble. He lived in a time when morals were lost, at least in the superior classes of society: — envy and hatred employed against him the weapon of religion, when it was not much respected by its supporters. He considered it only as a species of persecution. His country had a government without strength, without note; and which took no means to obtain it: he had a spirit of independence and opposition. There is the real source of his sentiments. We can imagine how they were obtained without excusing them. He continually uttered them without dreaming of the fatal effects they might produce. He was, on many occasions, far from showing, in his errors, the undeviating obstinacy and immeasurable pride of many other writers of the same epoch.

He has, himself, in one of his romances, given us a just idea of his own philosophy. Babouc, commissioned to examine the manners and institutions of Persepolis, observed all the rites with wisdom, ridiculed every thing with all his powers, attacked every thing with a tenacious freedom; but when he thought at last, that from his definitive judgment might result the ruin of Persepolis, he found, in every thing, advantages he had not before discovered, and refused to destroy the city. Such was Voltaire. He desired permission to judge freely and to scoff at all things; but to overthrow, was far from his thoughts: he had a feeling right

enough, but a disgust too great for the vulgar and the populace, to form a similar vow. Unhappily, when a nation has possessed a philosopher like Babouc, he has not known, like him, to suspend and balance his judgment; it has only been by a deplorable experience that he has perceived, too late, that it had not been expedient to destroy Persepolis!

CHAPTER IV.

Montesquieu, the most illustrious of Voltaire's contemporaries, and who maintained his equality among those who contributed to the splendour of the century, notwithstanding the gravity of his character, and the regularity of his life, presents to us the same remarkable traces of the times in which he lived.

It is particularly in the "Lettres Persanes," the production of his youth, that we see the boldness of inquiry, the inclination to paradox, the judgments upon morals, laws, institutions, the libertinism of opinion, if we may so speak, which at once attest the passion, power, and imprudence of the mind. Religion fares no better. Under the thin veil of jests thrown at the Mussulman religion, and even by more direct attacks, Montesquieu consigned to ridicule the progress of theological arguments in general, as well as belief in every species of tenet. We may even say, that the raillery of Montesquieu had more bitterness than Voltaire's, and might produce more effect — as it directed its attacks against

the foundation of things. But when we bring a serious reflection to the reading of that work, when we do not attach more importance to the free opinions it contains, than we apply to the author himself, we may, under all the disapprobation, sometimes take a lively interest. We remark, through much judgment risked, traces of a noble and elevated understanding; the constant love of the just and the honest; and we persuade ourselves, that he who could write the fable of the "Troglodytes," worthy of the simple and eloquent philosophy of antiquity, was far from holding any culpable sentiment. After that work, everything contributed to modify the character of Montesquieu, and to render his opinions more complete and serious. He was not simply a writer; his life was not entirely devoted to literary success; he held a situation full of importance; it was needful that he should respect the examples of his forefathers; it was needful that he should merit the esteem of a class of men, among whom he was placed, and with whom knowledge was made to increase virtue. The president, Montesquieu, had not that independence so much sought by men of letters, and which, perhaps, hurts their talent as well as their character. He was held in the bonds of family and of the corporation, which imposed their duties upon him. He did not live estranged from his affairs, neither did he inhabit the world of theory, in which writers found nothing certain to bring them back to truth and reason when they had rambled from them.

Montesquieu fled from Paris, and passed the greater part of his time far from a society whose influence prevented him from devoting himself to study and meditation, and which taught him to substitute exaggeration for the force of a mind profoundly convinced. He was aloof from the career of fluctuating success, from the life of self-love, which attaches so much importance to the praises of critics, and gives to the culture of letters, to that noble and pure occupation of the soul, a spirit biassed by a profession engaged unceasingly in the prosperity of its commerce.

He entirely consecrated himself to study, as a philosopher, the laws which he already knew as a magistrate. He desired to ascertain how positive laws depended upon the morals of a people, the form of government, the physical circumstances of a country, the historical events,—in short, all that comprises the ensemble of each nation. Such was the work of his life. It was thus he erected a monument, perhaps the more honourable to his age and his country.

It was not the lofty eloquence of Bossuet, hovering over empires, throwing an eagle-like regard upon their revolutions and their ruins; placing himself as spectator above humanity, to find out the ways of Providence, in which he produced nothing directly applicable to the good of mankind or the policy of societies; and by which he learnt to disdain, by a sublime elevation, the greatest

events of this world, to think only of the grand hereafter.

But another species of honour is due to him who offers practical lessons; and who discovers the precise point at which the principles of things at once apply themselves to the positive details of politics, and to the exalted and general knowledge of men, their virtues, their vices, and their manifold tendencies. This is the plan of Montesquieu's work. We love to see a superior mind, animating, by the grandeur of its views, the contemplation of the textual rules that govern us. We experience all the charm of the warmth that reigns in the ideal region of philosophy; at the same time, an applicable spirit constantly displays itself, through the éclat of enlarged ideas and speaking pictures.

No work presents more useful instruction for the government and administration of European nations, and especially France.

Montesquieu is not lost in vain theories; he is fraught with the knowledge of history; he developes the character of the citizens, in his account of their constitutions; he travelled to compare various modern governments, and sought out the traces of their common origin.

That he has attributed too much power to sun and climate; that he has not expressly enough said that the principles assigned by him to each form of constitution should exist, but that he has never found them perfect, so that the type of the

three forms cannot be met with without mixture; that he has neglected restrictions, that we can easily supply by serious reflection; that he has employed brilliant language, which seems little worthy of himself or his subjects; these are the unimportant defects. But a passion for justice, an enlightened hatred of despotism, which is not spent in vague declamations, but unfolds with wisdom every thing that can mislead the people; that demonstrates every infamy, every absurdity, sometimes with the reason that judges, sometimes with the feeling of indignation: these animate "l'Esprit des Lois" from one end to the other.

We ought to add that all these noble sentiments are accompanied by a uniform moderation; and that, at the moment we begin to disapprove of the measure, nothing Montesquieu says can provoke to revolt against the authority. He inculcates respect for the laws and justice yet more especially than the love of liberty. He knew well that it is glory to enjoy what we possess, and that we can never be sure of conquest. He knew that a government established, by that even which has subsisted a long time, is always in a sort of harmony with the manners of the nation; and that, when it is destroyed, we may foresee certain calamities, without power to calculate upon their amelioration. Even despotism, which he detests, he does not recommend to be overthrown; he views it as a degradation of human nature; he deplores and

despises it much more as the result of a general debasement of minds, who are no longer conscious of their shame or their misfortune. For us to reclaim them, we should in vain change the order of things. Even sufferings would be entirely lost; they could neither recreate strength nor honour. Despotism is not even the punishment of corrupt nations — they merit and undergo the chastisement without feeling it.

Nevertheless, in spite of the gravity of his life and the elevation of his works, Montesquieu always preserved a portion of the character he had shewn in his "Lettres Persanes:" in truth we should have had to regret its entire suppression.

Much as his renown reposes upon the solid and serious titles, he was always as remarkable for the richness of his imagination as for the profundity of his thoughts. His works shew us a lively and animated genius, which could subdue itself to the labour of study and reflection. By the one an idea would take the form of a picture; by the other, a statement would result in exposition of some facts, Montesquieu had wearied himself to collect and present under that aspect. His talent had an invincible leaning to brilliant and poetic thoughts, while his occupations were devoted to the materials of morals, politics and government. All the works of Montesquieu exhibit traces of this double direction. In writing the "Lettres Persanes," he blended an animated picture of

oriental manners with a romantic interest into a work which had in appearance quite another design; in the Temple of Gnide, in the midst of a sketch of voluptuousness, we are surprised to find the philosopher delineating, in grand touches, the character of the people.

The talent of Montesquieu was, perhaps, never more shewn than when in two writings very little spread, "The Dialogues of Sylla and Lysimachus," he happily united the two features of his own mind. The poetic imagination has seldom produced a nobler work. There are two fine dramatic conceptions animated by an eloquence grave, convincing, and sublime. The genius of Corneille was honoured by it, and it also brings to our remembrance some dialogues of Plato.

The epoch in which Montesquieu wrote imparted also a particular colour to his opinions upon politics. He lived in times of peace and order; he was far from revolutions and all those movements, when the spirit of man takes a new form, and reveals itself suddenly in a manner unforeseen. He could not know how many impure elements hide themselves sometimes under the apparent grandeur of historical events; how many calamities, public and private, are screened by the éclat and the interest, when history sparkles in the eyes of posterity. Many objects presented themselves to him under an ideal point of view, had excited his imagination, and now appear to us under an en-

tirely different aspect. The present has taught us to comprehend many things we could not unravel of the past. History becomes more sorrowful and mighty for those who can, in reading it, compare it with the great events to which they have been witnesses.

What governments, what constitutions we have admired and considered as models that we must now regard with another eye! What men have appeared to us clothed with glory and celebrity, whose virtues and merit are at this time destroyed or diminished, now we have seen what circumstances may conduct to renown! What events in remote centuries have seemed to us solemn and imposing, and are now as useless comedies, of which posterity has lost the key! It is thus that, in admiring the arrangement and completion of the work on the "Grandeur and Decadence of Rome," we have the misery of not being able to enter completely into the system of virtue and prudence, that the imagination of Montesquieu made to preside, from age to age, over the destiny and the glory of the masters of the world; it is, that in adopting it we should fear to fall very short of his heroic tableau; it is, that the spectacle of our age makes us sincerely incredulous! Such is the effect of circumstances upon opinions! Montesquieu lived in peaceable times; and, not seeing the vices agitating around him, regarded success as the necessary and natural recompense of virtue and

honour. Machiavel, in the midst of the cruel combats of Italian politics, saw only the great ability and the force of character which were their direction and aim.

We, likewise, our souls grieved by revolutions, find ourselves much conformed to the sentiments of those writers who have lived in the midst for eruptions and of an unhappy people. They only appear to us true and solid. The contempt for mankind, the doubt of their virtues, the want of hope in the future, the reflections from which nothing consolatory flows; these are the themes we resort to, with a sorrowful pleasure, in the productions of the historian and the philosopher.

We console ourselves with thinking that the past has not been either more happy or more worthy to be so. There is something nobler, and, perhaps, also more true, not to despair of men nor nations, in marking out to them a path to virtue and honour; in giving them an impulse free and entire, and in drawing them away from that culpable indifference which can produce nothing but evil. If Montesquieu had flourished in our days, perhaps his works would have seemed more conversant in the painful knowledge of the evil propensities of the human heart; but they would have wanted that fine combination, that firmness of principle which gives them a power so brilliant and persuasive. If we would further ascertain the progress philosophy had made during fifty years, we must place

together the "Spirit of the Laws," and the "Treatise on the Laws," which Domat put at the head of his work. Then we may see how much the spirit of examination had spread; how questions were treated under a more general point of view; how religion, respected by Montesquieu, was, notwithstanding, judged by him; whilst Domat, who merely worshipped, had made every thing flow into it, instead of considering it as an accessary. If a man, serious and meditative, endowed with virtue and prudence, removes himself to the same point with another of the era preceding, who was occupied in the same study, and found in an analagous position, he may judge of the rapid progress trifling and inconsiderate minds had successively made.

We have now followed, to the end of their career, those two great writers, in exhibiting, at one time, an outline of their character and their works, without digressing to bestow attention on the authors distinguished in the next degree below them.

Returning now to our scheme, we proceed to examine the features that literature presents as a whole, at the time when Voltaire and Montesquieu occupied the supreme rank.

It has already been remarked, by many writers, that when letters originate among a people, "it is not by the degree of mediocrity or worse," as Despreaux said very justly.

The road is not yet traced: it is genius only that

can discover it, and seize upon it exclusively. Men of mediocrity have not learnt to follow the route; they desire to find out the way, and they wander from it unceasingly. But when uniform success has served as an example, talents of an inferior order are eager to imitate it, and gather thereby a degree of reputation; and, though they do not attain to that summit of glory which shines through centuries, and cannot compare with those powerful geniuses that survive the nation which produced them, and the language in which they wrote; yet at least their name is not forgotten by their contemporaries, and their fame is continued in the generations following. That which may render the moment yet more worthy of attention, is, that it forms the transition between two diverse epochs. We see the growth and rapid development of the germ of all that was quickly to give another aspect to the human mind. The age had not yet taken its distinctive character, but all was ready for the change. Two men of genius only, each in his own way, had taken the new direction, and shewed in their writings a different spirit to all that had preceded.

The era of Louis XIV., in establishing a literature that had become classical, had formed the taste of the nation. It was now more easy to write; letters had diffused themselves more every day; consequently they received more and more influence from society, and society acknowledged

more and more the domination of letters. Already associations were formed, for the honour of assembling men of talent together, in which they sought the art of exciting their minds to enjoy every moment; in which they exalted their self-love by a continual flattery; in which they habituated themselves to substitute rapid observations, and subtle and fugitive expressions into conversation, for the ripened opinions, inwardly discussed with reflection and trouble; and by which they created to themselves, by the charm of their minds, a rank and a power easily acquired and imprudently exercised. Thus literature, which formerly was a thing apart, a region foreign to the affairs of the world, a sanctuary interdicted to the vulgar and the frivolous, whose spirit sought abstraction and trouble, had now blended itself with the whole nation, become a part of its morals and dependent upon its character, which it also modified in its turn. The natural and accurate sciences began to attain some éclat, and to ennoble France; they drew the attention of the public, and illustrated themselves by undertakings formed under the auspices of the sovereign. The discoveries of Newton, the systems of Leibnitz were admitted and spread, and excited a noble emulation. Foreign literature made way also. Voltaire had set the fashion, and every day saw new translations come to light. Voyages, likewise, had established between nations a communication more intimate and more complete than formerly: Europe had

become one great empire, every province of which was equally known to the others.

They began to agitate the questions of policy and public economy.

Poetry, of the school of Louis XIV. still preserved its consequence; Voltaire had not yet acquired that renown which placed him, some years after, on the throne of letters. Contemporary poets were far from ratifying the decisions of the public. They had unceasingly placed the preceding generation in opposition to Voltaire, whom they ranked far below Corneille, Racine, Despréaux, Rousseau. The attacks of critics, were not in revolt against received opinions: they discussed merit as a passing thing. So Voltaire served not yet as a model — it was not he whom they imitated.

Louis Racine, without passion, unable to excite a sustaining interest, continued, more than any other, faithful to the age that his father had honoured; his verses were elegant and written with care, conscientiously and sincerely; he was ignorant of quackery in the management of his style, and when respect for religion was disappearing every day, he made it the subject of his songs.

Le Franc de Pompignan tried to succeed Rousseau, and, in spite of the anathema of ridicule hurled against his sacred poetry, by Voltaire, we may discover in it, besides one ode entirely perfect, a great number of remarkably fine stanzas. In tragedy, Voltaire had not a rival: a few years have

been sufficient to consign to oblivion almost all those essays intended to share his triumphs. Some endeavoured to imitate the correctness of Racine, and to produce interest, more by the development of sentiments than by the movement of situations; others essayed the manner of Corneille, and applied themselves more to find grandeur than truth; they obtained success also in contriving skilfully a complicated intrigue, fertile in sudden revolutions. Some authors, taking example by Voltaire, attempted to trace an action, varied and rapid, in which the passions might yield themselves to all their warmth and impetuosity. Thus tragedy, though many talents of second order had been exercised in it with honour, had not any very determined colour.

Comedy, likewise, was cultivated with success by some authors of the moment, and even with success that was durable; but it had quite changed its character. It was no more the naïve and profound painting of the human heart, in which Molière had excelled, and in which Dancourt and Le Sage had copied him. A certain language of convention had invaded comedy. Characters, manners, incidents even, were no longer taken from nature. Too happy when the painting of a momentary folly might have some truth, and yet it was rare that a faithful sketch was offered, even of that trifling outline. They sought carefully for gay and interesting situations, of which they calculated the effects without dreaming that every thing is situation to him who tho-

roughly knows the heart and the character. They concerted plans and contrasts to please and fascinate the spectator. The comic talent which reveals nature as it were by instinct, instead of anxiety as to the means art might furnish to produce effect, had disappeared.

Such were the faults of the new school of comedy; but, after having observed that it was no longer the same as in the times of Molière, and that it formed quite another species of literary composition, we ought to say that, the style once admitted, the talent showed itself likewise with some distinction. Writers had lost the truth of their personages, but there remained truth in their own minds and feelings. It sufficed if they brought the spectator to partake of the movement that inspired them; to obtain and merit success.

Whatever be the form given by a real inspiration it is sure to succeed. Thus the character of Métromane is assuredly conceived in an ideal manner, and is not a representation of nature; but it is written with a felicity and truth of sentiment quite entrancing. We think not if other poets have thus done; since we are assured that it was the soul of Piron powerfully and truly excited, when he made the Métromane speak, and of our own immediate sympathy with his emotion.

Destouches, though he did not succeed so well, has, in two or three comedies, secured a durable reputation. A pure and easy style, and engaging

situations, would maintain the " Glorieux " and the " Philosophe marié" a long time on the stage, although we find in them characters entirely out of nature.

Lachaussée, against whom some prejudices existed, shows, perhaps, a more original talent. Follies, misfortunes, vices, were not his fort; when he essayed their delineation, he employed false colours; but the delicacy of sentiment, the mild and true sensibility, the generous feelings which inspired him with a sort of warmth, without declamation or affectation, touch the heart; in this species, the only one in which he succeeded, he is far from Térence and his moving simplicity, though he sometimes recals him to our minds.

A more distinguished rank is reserved for Gresset, and he has more than one title to merit. The author of " Ververt," though not placed above his contemporary comic poets, is sure not to be forgotten. We may charge the comedy of the " Méchant" with having too little action, with lack of interest and developement; and perhaps Gresset should have shown more depth in the conception of his principal character; perhaps he ought to have demonstrated to what spirit of vanity and emulation the vices of Cléon owed their origin; and how, among a certain class of men, having neither virtue nor kindness, they might become an object for the struggles of self-love. Gresset seemed to think that the absence of every feeling of honesty and sym-

pathy might become a personal and solitary enjoyment. The gaiety he gives to the Méchant is not natural. To do evil is only a pleasure when society recompenses; and that happens often enough to have afforded Gresset opportunity of representing it. These faults are well compensated by the ease and elegance of the versification, by the true and animated imitation of the tone of conversation then reigning in the world.

The poesy and minor pieces of Gresset have less attractions than the lighter works of Voltaire. The mild and innocent pleasantry against the form of the pedant, unhappily have less effect than that which attacks subjects more conspicuous and important. Gresset offers little more than common ideas, but his position in the world caused those ideas to appear to him new and piquant; so his verses, far from seeming common, have the charm of nature and grace.

To finish the tableau of the principal comic authors, we must speak of Marivaux, whose works have a singular character. A minute observer of the human heart, he made it his particular study to find out the minor motives of our sentiments and determinations. That was his talent, and we cannot object to the fidelity of his observations; but he should not have been too lavish in that kind of merit; for we must remark, that in making a parade he diminished the effect. Marivaux gave us not the result of his observation, but the act of observation

itself. The dialogue of each person is arranged in a manner to show that the theory of the heart was well known to the author.

A scene of Molière is a representation of nature; a scene of Marivaux is a commentary upon nature. With such a manner of proceeding there is less place for the action than the sentiment. The author attaches so much importance to the exposition of causes, that the result remains without effect. Hence it happens, likewise, that the comedies of Marivaux are, all alike, to a point, that it is a trouble to distinguish one from the other; it is always an insensible transition from one sentiment to another, described in unvaried tints. There results, too, another fault; it is, that a developement made thus slowly, and step by step, cannot agree with the measure of time and events contained in a comedy; and the progress so carefully managed, naturally conducts to that most desirable to avoid, namely, want of resemblance.

The slower and more gradual course of a romance is better suited to that kind of composition. In renouncing the effects produced by rapid and passionate movements, and confining himself to paint the smooth sentiments, of which the analysis makes us feel the charm, and giving little enough of rapidity to the events to describe the minutiæ, Marivaux arrived at the capability to produce a romance full of charms and interest.

In this branch of literature, which many writers,

during the eighteenth century adorned, we must not forget the Abbé Prévost. The situation in which that author lived injured all his works. If he had not been obliged to make his pen subservient as a continual means of subsistence, he would, undoubtedly, have left a great reputation. In all that he wrote we find attractions and interest. He had a simplicity of relation : — nothing in his compositions nor in his style aims at effect. He relates events, he paints situations, without appearing to be at all moved by them himself; but, as he used simplicity in his recitals, the reader is touched, as if the thing itself passed before his eyes. In general, he was little engaged in seeking for feelings; but, on one occasion, he yielded to them, and, without departing from the manner which was his own, he became eminently touching. He was content in "Manon Lescaut" to be the historian of the passions, as he had equally been in the composition of his other romances; but he was so true, that he dispensed with eloquence, and painted the movements of the heart; it was sufficient for him to do so. As a whole, the character of his works seems rather to belong to other times than his own. A naïve manner of depicting that which they saw, or thought they saw; thinking little; neither unfolding sentiments nor affecting them at any time; such was the style of the old narrators.

The life of Prévost offers something estranged from the manners of his contemporaries; in truth,

he was released from the bonds and duties of society; he shook off the yoke his situation imposed upon him; he lived in disorder; and yet he did not raise up a system of principles to clear himself. He did not boast of his conduct; he erred, but not to make his errors of importance enough to desire others to imitate them: at that epoch such a character began to be rare.

We now enter upon the second epoch of the century so particularly marked.

At this time it was no more superior minds only who boldly asserted their ideas; writers of an inferior order walked in the same steps; the whole of literature took the same character, and the new opinions spread themselves through all kinds of writings. It is curious to follow this elevation of letters and philosophy by which they seemed to usurp universal dominion.

We shall endeavour to ascertain how opinions seized upon literature, thereby finding means to subjugate France and to dazzle Europe; how imprudently their domination was exercised, and how, without precisely aiming at it, they concurred with the manners, institutions and government, in effecting a disastrous revolution. Perhaps the ministry of Cardinal Fleury contributed, in some sort, to arrest, for a time, the progress of this movement. That venerable man had ability sufficient to finish his days tranquilly in the midst of power, but neither strength nor penetration enough to im-

part a more durable effect to his government. He appeared anxious only to terminate peacefully, and without opposition, his long career. His thoughts were without forecast, as those of extreme old age often are. Once, when refusing a favour to the Abbé Bernis, the cardinal said to him, " Vous ne l'obtiendrez pas tant que je vivrai;" the young man replied, " J'attendrai;" and a few years after he ruled France. He appeared to have had the same influence over the new opinions. They were suspended during his life ; when he was no more, they exercised absolute sway.

Before we discourse of those men designated more particularly as the philosophers of the eighteenth century, we are about to name a writer who must be separated from them. Vauvenargues was not a stranger to the influence of the times ; yet the particular study that he made of the authors of the preceding century, the admiration with which they inspired him, drew him from the route of his contemporaries ; he fell not, like them, into a frivolous disdain for his predecessors, and by that was spared many of their errors. It was in the school of Pascal that he learnt to sound the human heart; the school of Fénélon taught him to succour and encourage it. We experience a delightful feeling on seeing a moralist exempt from that sadness, harshness, and contempt for mankind which almost always follow the study in which he engages. He is condemned to a twofold and contradictory pu-

nishment, who, so proud before others, bears within himself, and for his torment, a feeling of humiliation that nourishes reflection and self-knowledge. He cannot revolt against calumny, and, when the opinions which degrade human nature are presented to him with some degree of force, he adopts them with eagerness, for they are conformed to the impressions he has often proved. When we find, under the precepts of religion, the feeling of self-contempt, which converts some and afflicts others, the sentiment makes us better and happier. If it destroy terrestrial affections, it gives more power to the love of divine things. Thus Pascal and Bossuet, in spite of their disdain for the human creature, neither wither nor discourage the soul; or at least into the wounds which they make, they pour a celestial balm to heal them; but to destroy religion, and impair the virtues of man, is a melancholy and perverse pursuit.

Vauvenargues had not the firm persuasion and earnest desire after religion that inspired the genius of the Christian philosophers; but his mind could not do without noble and elevated feelings, nor did he apply himself to blemish those which men had proved independently of a positive belief; on the contrary, he developed them with a sort of predilection; he did not despair of humanity, and his moral tends to dignify it. We owe him more than admiration — he merits our gratitude. Let us not forget that Vauvenargues had shewn, in some cri-

tical notices, a taste as pure as his morality, and was the first completely to appreciate Racine. We must remark, also, that it was a disciple of Voltaire, instructed by his daily conversations, who did that justice to Racine.

CHAPTER V.

The character of those men who devoted themselves to letters and the sciences, had much altered. Formerly, a small number only were spread throughout the whole of Europe, writing in a language unknown to the vulgar, living in a time when that which has been since called society and conversation did not exist, and devoted to science; the world and other men affected them but little, and they were little known to them. Hence their unbounded love of the study they cultivated, that free and entire complacence in the knowledge they had acquired, the disdain for the suffrages of the world, the sincerity which exposed them to ridicule without their perceiving it—in short, all that composed the severe pedantry of the first erudites. By degrees, the labours of those studious men bare fruit; knowledge began to circulate; it formed to itself a public; then it was to *that*, and no longer to their own approbation, writers addressed their works; it was *that* they desired to please; they attached

more importance to their success, less to their compositions; they not only exerted themselves to do well, but they wished to succeed also. Besides, unless they had taken care, communicating with other men, their influence would have been resented; there was a sort of harmony formed between the ideas circulating around them, and those to which their genius gave birth. The public, that had become their judge, was at first composed of those men whose situation permitted leisure.

In times little civilized, the class is not very numerous. It was at first for princes and their courtiers that literature descended from the heights of erudition; writers seeking the approbation of those men so elevated above them, were not humiliated by inferiority of position; the applauses of princes flattered and honoured them; they sought such success with deference and respect. They were doubtless an irritable race of writers.

Racine revenged himself, in his epigrams, on M. de Créqui, who had disparaged his verses; but he would not have been distressed at a circumstance that had marked a difference of rank. Pride was less in the person than in the performance. Afterwards, by the effect of civilization, the idle class was more numerous; then, as the public, more extended, had sought, as a want, intellectual and literary enjoyments, and, at the same time, the court had lost a part of its consideration, men of letters acquired a position more independent; the chief

sum of their works and themselves was no longer applied to the favour of power; then they discovered that they occupied an inferior place in the state; their pride took offence at it, and their opinions by that were modified.

Of the rest, this is not an accusation particularly intended for the literary class; as, in truth, all men who find themselves in an independent position, and at the same time inferior, experience almost always a feeling of revolt against that inequality, the necessity of which seems not indicated by the order of things. That which we have said of the literati applies equally to every class in the nation; among them all, we might see the spirit of equality rapidly bursting forth with civilization, and resulting from the change in the manner of life, from the intercourse between men, from the progress of their reflections, and, more than all, by the political nullity in the first orders of the state. We might also observe the difference of rank becoming more and more insupportable, because it had no longer a real foundation, and seemed borne in falsehood. Those who study the history of pride in France will quickly discover a great portion of the causes of the revolution that France has proved.

The period was also calculated to give writers a lofty idea of their own importance. Frederick II., employing every means to elevate his empire to the first rank, had drawn near to him a crowd of French literati, and had finished by attracting Voltaire; he

placed, almost on the same level, supreme power and superiority of mind; forgetting that the two despotisms could not long exist together in peace. The most illustrious of sovereigns thus courted the friendship of a poet! There was in that alone sufficient to excite the pride of the literati. They fancied they saw those days return, in which the sages of Greece were called to the courts of kings, to give their counsel, and into the republics, to make laws. As such, nothing further stopped their flight: every thing was within their domain; morals, politics, religion, were submitted to their revision. Their hope was not disappointed. The glory and consequence of French writers were always increasing; from the extremes of the North homage was sent to them, and their presence requested; kings were desirous of learning the smallest details of that literature, the object of conversation throughout Europe; they came in person to visit the men, and the academies which adorned France; the people demanded a constitution of the philosophers; men of condition conformed themselves to their school; the reigning government struggled feebly, and with irresolution, against the influence; but, as France owed neither glory nor power to the government — as the army was without éclat, the court without dignity, manners without chastity, the state without laws, the defenders of religion without fidelity, public opinion turning entirely to the side of a philosophy that gratified every species of self-love — it

disengaged itself from all bonds, and erected a system of contempt for power, that indeed it was then become difficult to respect. Assuredly philosophy might well bear, in its character, some presages of disorder and destruction; but it was not in that we have to remark the most irremediable and fearful symptoms.

A monarch indolent and egotistical, seeking pleasure with disgraceful mistresses; the noblesse professing immorality with impudence; ministers occupied mostly in intrigues; generals who had learnt the military art in the saloons; the influence of women recognized as a principle; every species of vanity conflicting the one against the other; every right contested, consequently every duty contestable; certes, there is warranty much more terrible of a revolution, than was in the pride and imprudence of philosophers, and the seven years' war brought us nearer to the catastrophe than the Encyclopædia. Nevertheless, not to be unjust, we must confess that, in the midst of that thirst for reputation and influence, the literati had an eager desire for good, an emulation to excel, which made an illusion in their sentiments of self-love. They took the desire to reign over all things, and to change them to their will, for a devotedness to the good of humanity and the advancement of knowledge; having thus, to their own eyes, disguised, under honourable appearances, the dispositions by which they were animated, nothing could make

them look into themselves. Hence the peremptory tone, the intimate persuasion in their own ideas, the self-complacency, the absence of doubt and hesitation, the ardour for proselytes, the haughty intolerance, with which they have been so much reproached.

We must not, however, imagine that this character reigned exclusively in all their writings. We find at intervals certain returns, certain restrictions, and some instances of circumspection and reserve. But their principles, spreading through the works of inferior writers and among the populace, did not always preserve the limits which they had sometimes imposed. We may judge by this the bent of the public for which they laboured; they plunged into the stream, and the course was so rapid that the efforts made to retard it were not even perceived. Nothing could then encourage writers to bear in their doctrines a spirit of wisdom and moderation so little relished at that time. The depositaries of power saw, with mistrust, the character and tendency of philosophers. They did not perceive that the evil was in the nation; they believed all was cured in preventing the external symptoms as they manifested themselves. So when they saw the philosophical society form the vast enterprise of an Encyclopedia, that immense frame in which all opinions might develope, the alarm was great in the ministry. They wished to arrest the universal examination which they took for a

pretext to attack every thing. The best means to prevent a danger that they greatly exaggerated, had, doubtless, been to accord protection and encouragement to the undertaking; they would, in that way, have acquired a marked influence over the work; — in pleasing the authors they would have modified their dispositions and counteracted them; but they committed a fault very common with governors — they would stop the course of things instead of directing them to their profit.

The obstacles put to the publication of the work injured the execution as much as its direction. If it had been published in tranquillity, it would, in a great measure, have had its true destination; it would have been a monument of the state of science at that epoch, and so have become useful. Nothing so much improves human knowledge as examining the progress already made. We follow those steps; we see how they have erred, and wherefore; we throw a coup-d'œil over the whole of science, and it becomes more simple and more fruitful. The best way to advance is to look over the route already performed.

Instead of producing a uniform effect, the Encyclopædia immediately changed into a party affair. It became more important for those who had projected it, to make it see the light, than to render it worthy; and, as it was constituted in defiance of established order, their pride applied itself to spread in the Encyclopedia that which they called

new and bold truths; thus it became an incomplete and less useful work. That which has been undertaken since, is, without doubt, conceived after a much better plan, more rich in science, and more conformable to its true end.

After having spoken in a general manner of the character and philosophical spirit of the period, and of the circumstances in which it took birth, we come now to the examination of the systems and opinions it was to conduct, adopt, and to spread. We have seen what writers were relatively to moral and political order; let us enquire what critics might think of their works, considered in themselves, and what place they ought to occupy in the history of letters.

The Encyclopædia was proudly intended to give centuries to come a lofty idea of the immense progress they thought made in human acquirements; to consider them under a new point of view; and in a spirit that was to change the character of almost all the sciences. In effect, they fancied they had discovered a new way to the common source, and traced the progress of the operations of the human mind by a route newly adopted.

We are taught this in the preliminary discourse to the Encyclopædia; a work that had great success, and which announced the enterprise in a brilliant manner.

D'Alembert, if we may believe the impartial tes-

timony of the mathematicians, was a genius of the first order, and he has left in the career traces of his toil. Without being very learned in the matter, we are not astonished at this judgment, in reading a portion of the introductory discourse to the Encyclopædia, that has reference to the accurate sciences. Perhaps, there never has been brought, into the examination of principles and their results, more ingenuity and sincerity. The analysis that makes their procedure, the way in which truth is shewn, acquiring the more certainty when it makes abstraction from a great number of circumstances, and being only truly complete when it becomes the identity of two signs expressing the same idea, belongs only to a man who hovers over the higher regions of the science he professes. But the other part of the discourse is far from giving an equally elevated idea of D'Alembert. When he comes to treat of the sources and principles of the other divisions of human knowledge, he then shews himself incomplete and superficial. If he had a profound notion of the sciences that classify and compare our perceptions, he was far from knowing those that consist in describing the impressions on the mind.

There are two modes of considering metaphysics: one occupies itself with the inward man, the faculties and aspirations of the soul, its future destiny, its essence, and the nature of its action. The difficulty of this science is in uniting the soul with the operations

of the body, and to find out at once the limit and transition between moral and physical action.

The other theory is completely opposed to this: it divides exterior objects, seeks their mechanical action upon man, examines sensations, their immediate results, and the readiest way to be taken in the endeavour to arrive from without at the central point, that constitutes the human being. But when they would join the animal operations to the operations of the soul, the inexplicable appearances and the chain, whether they took the one side, or whether they took the other, they always lost themselves. Thus there were the two sciences—the science of thought, and the science of sensation; which seemed, at the first aspect, to have the same domain, though they did not attain to it. In dividing the inward affections of the soul, they could not arrive at sensation; and however far they might push the theory of sensation, they could not say how it became a thought. As those who cultivated these sciences could not discover that wherein they lacked, the first came to deny the operation of exterior objects, the second found themselves brought to disown the existence of the soul. But, in general, the last gave way before the consequent, which, in effect, was more absurd than the other.

Formerly, neglecting to examine all the mechanism of the senses, all the direct affinities of the body

with objects, philosophers investigated principally that which passes within the man.

The study of the soul,—such was the noble occupation of Descartes, Pascal, Mallebranche, Leibnitz,—that conducts us directly to all the questions most important to our hearts. They rejected the thoughts that refer to the outward sense, and well considered that particular metaphysical question, since called the formation of ideas; but, following it, they touched too little at the foundation of things to give them their attention; perhaps they sometimes lost themselves in the clouds of those lofty regions in which they took their flight; perhaps their labours had no direct application, but at least they followed an elevated study; their doctrine was in affinity with the thoughts that agitate us when we profoundly reflect within ourselves, and necessarily conducts us to the nobler sciences of religion and morals; it supposes, in those who cultivate it, an aspiring genius, and extensive meditations.

We were tired of following them; we treated them as vain subtilties, and branded with the title of scholastic reveries the works of those great minds; we plunged into the science of sensation, hoping that it would be more within reach of human intelligence; we established, as a basis, that the study of the soul was useless, since we were ignorant of its nature, without discovering, by the

same rule, that we made it a constant and invariable faculty, always exercising the same kind of action; we avowed our ignorance, and founded a system upon a much more hazardous supposition, much less reasonable, than all those we had rejected. Having then made the soul a sort of vital principle, a neuter faculty, attached by bonds yet unknown to a certain assemblage of matter, we devoted ourselves more and more to the mechanical affinity of man with objects, and their influence upon his physical organization. So that metaphysics were constantly lowering, until, with some persons, the science was almost confounded with physiology.

At the same period, a neighbouring nation (Germany) acquired the proud inheritance of the higher philosophy; and had the advantage of us in the towering elevation it gave to the science of thought, and in disdaining our narrow mode of arguing upon the soul, and other faculties of the human being.

The eighteenth century would lead us to think this manner of considering man as one of the principal titles to glory.

Locke had already pursued the same direction, and was engaged in developing the same questions. But he appears not so desirous, as his disciples were, that all science should be reduced to the examining of sensations. He, doubtless, knew that the first mechanism of the human understanding, even

when it could not be united, as in effect it is, to the fundamental question, was far from constituting the whole essence of man. Leibnitz, who assisted at the birth of that school, exhibits a sort of pity for the superficial philosophy of Locke.

The philosophy of the Encyclopædists seized upon the ideas of Locke, and followed them to their final consequences. The system is implicitly professed in the introductory discourse to the Encyclopædia. But it is not to that we must have recourse, if we desire to be well informed. It is not there unfolded clearly and completely.

Condillac, who wrote a little before the epoch, is the chief of the school; and in his works metaphysics exercise all the seductions of method and lucidity—the more clear when least profound. Few writers have realized more success. He reduced to the capacity of the vulgar the science of thought, in retrenching every thing that soared above them. Every one was surprised, and proud to become a philosopher so easily; and felt much gratitude to him who had conferred the benefit. They did not discover that he had lowered the science to them, instead of making his disciples capable of attaining to it. This new metaphysic did not retard the extension of its influence over all other theories. There was very soon a new mode of examining every branch of human knowledge, of establishing the principles and linking the arguments. It was a change the more important, as the ideas and the

opinions that it spread have, so to speak, become classical in France, and have now insulated us from the ancient philosophy and the foreign schools.

The mathematical and natural sciences accommodate themselves very well to the theory of sensation; perhaps it is to their spirit that it owes its origin; at least, it is true, that it received at the time an impulse which gave it a rapid progress. Those sciences seek to discover what the nature is in itself, independently of the effect it produces upon each human being. To arrive at that point, they were careful to separate the impression produced by objects, from the particular circumstances which render it different for each individual. They applied themselves to consider the impression in a unique point of view; by which means they rendered it identical for all mankind; to the end that each might build the same edifice upon the same foundation. They tried to obtain, by that abstraction, a net produce of sensation, if one may so speak, in order to have a solid base of reasoning. Thus, to regard objects and their modifications as absolute, is a march conformable to the spirit of those sciences.

But the inclination most natural to man, is not to labour to render his ideas like those of all other men. Quite the contrary: he endeavours unceasingly to make others partake of his own impression, such as he has conceived, without abstraction from any circumstance. A sentiment of sympathy creates

in him a desire to excite in others the feeling he experiences. To proceed by way of demonstration, agreeably to the mathematical sciences, is assuredly a satisfaction to the human mind ; it is an artificial means of arriving at a truth, which is only another name for universal accord. To proceed by way of persuasion is much more in human nature : and to communicate a thought such as one has imagined, is a greater satisfaction than to enter into the consent of all, by an abstract notion without reality. Every thing which can act upon the heart of man, touch his individuality, penetrate into the interior of himself, belongs to this second operation. The principles of religion, morals, politics, eloquence, poetry, the arts of the imagination, could not exist, if they were not the intimate and complete thought of each man. To imagine, as some have thought, that by force of reasoning, we shall dispose of these principles of proceeding, and compose, by mathematical rule, a man cannot have exercised self-reflection.

With the slightest attention we shall see that abstract truth and demonstration, are as foreign to the individual, as the individual is to the exterior ; whilst truth of sentiment and persuasion make part of the man himself, and is a mode of his thought and of his being. Besides, each of the directions in which the spirit of man operates becomes united to a correspondent disposition of soul.

We would not say if there be *innate* ideas. In

the sense in which the term "idea" is taken, it seems to us that it cannot there have the meaning; but the soul has always its necessary dispositions belonging to its own nature, independently of exterior circumstances, found in all states of civilization under all the varieties of physical structure, which make the distinctive character of the man, as much as his corporeal form. Those dispositions are more or less developed, more or less capable of expressing themselves. The senses affect matter in proportion to their susceptibility.

Thus we shall every where find in man, the sentiment of infinity; we see him enlarging his desires beyond his wants; coveting more when they are satistified; seeking something yet unattainable; supposing a future life; respecting and burying the dead because he cannot think all annihilated for ever; unquiet from the course of nature, not believing it immutable; suspecting its commencement and dreading its destruction. Such in the nature of man, is the disposition that renders him religious; take any savage you will, you will perceive in his heart a fibre destined to this species of sentiment.

It is then the inclination of the soul, it is the interior revelation, that is the principle of religion. But the theory of sensation cannot take a disposition of soul as the base of its reasonings, since it makes it a power constant and neuter, a discolored tablet, on which, through the senses, exterior ob-

jects are painted: it is then forced to make for each theory, that which is made for the man himself; to examine by the outside, instead of penetrating to the inmost sanctuary; to find out how sensations and physical mechanism can have given birth to such and such tendency of the human mind; so that it takes the habit of considering, in detail, those things that ought to be viewed collectively. In examining the march of ideas, it has not arrived at the soul in following the course of sensation, neither can it come to the discovery of the particular centre to which each sphere of human knowledge is united. This method, by analysis, applied to things not within its jurisdiction, is, doubtless, convenient to dissolve and to destroy; for having, from the first, broken the fundamental principle, it is easy to attack, piece by piece, every thing derived from it. We feel neither the union nor the necessity. To suppose even that it be possible to demonstrate the first causes from the lowest effects, it is needful, in the examination by detail, to omit nothing; it is necessary to find the reciprocal affinities, and seek with care, all the diverse elements that should serve to build the arguments by which we ought to ascend to principles; it is needful to invest the ground entirely and find out that which may border upon it; without that, the science will be incomplete; we shall discover that it has a false origin. We should even be the more hurried away, the greater the clearness, method and

and precision. In imitation of the exact sciences, we should first make abstraction from a crowd of circumstances, in order that the reasoning have a progress less embarrassed, and afterwards we should neglect to re-enter, one by one, into the circumstances, before drawing the inference.

It was thus in establishing the moral, we only sought to divide it from the feeling of justice and benevolence that lives in the breast of all men, and combats, more or less, with his other dispositions, in order to found it upon a fact common to animal nature generally, the desire of preservation and well-being, whence the love of personal interest is derived.

As for religion, nothing in the physical being of man could conduct us to it; it was impossible to unite it by force of argument, to sensual ideas; we very soon denied it altogether; already incredulity had rejected the proofs of a divine revelation, and had abjured the duties and remembrances of Christians; then we saw atheism raising a more hardened front, and proclaiming that all religious feeling was a reverie of a disordered mind. It is to the epoch of the Encyclopædia, that we date the writings in which the opinion is most expressly professed. It was little adopted. Impiety, since avoiding the absurdity of dogmatical atheism, took shelter in a vague incredulity. Nevertheless, atheistical writers were more injurious than they were generally believed. They powerfully contributed to

corrupt the lower classes. We often now find traces of their influence upon the uninformed minds of men in inferior stations. Their effect has been the greater from portions of their works blending quickly with all those infamous productions that, circulating clandestinely, poisoned the minds of the populace. Obscenity also, took a philosophical colour, and constantly mixed its turpitude with irreligion.

CHAPTER VI.

Politics could no longer build upon historical traditions, upon positive rights, upon ancient laws, upon the morals of nations; those considerations could not furnish the basis of a precise and universal science. Society was regarded as an assemblage of individuals united for the defence of their mutual interests. All the theory was to repose upon the first fact, and then we might easily pursue the route by abstraction. Thus we came to think that the same policy, the same regimen, were better than all the minuter modifications connected with them.

Formerly we had considered the constitution of a people to be the whole of its morals, its laws, its character, all the interior as well as exterior circumstances; in like manner that the constitution of an individual composes all the circumstances which make him live. In the new politics — the constitution was a textual rule deduced from the general theory, to be suddenly imposed upon a nation.

The manner in which the word was insensibly changed from its primitive meaning, shows, better than a long detail, the process of reasoning adopted in politics.

A new science was born, at this time, called 'Political Economy:' it inquired into the source of the wealth of citizens and of nations, and how the existence of a people, and the greater or less extent of their prosperity, depend upon the pecuniary and commercial relations of individuals and the country at large. The theory of the circulation of money, public and particular, was ingeniously and clearly established, and realized an extraordinary success.

Almost the whole of Europe received, with a sort of enthusiasm, the systems of the economists for the public good. Even sovereigns openly honoured the new legislators. They participated in their hopes, and believed that those friends of mankind were to subjugate by the evidence of reason; and to force kings and people, by a luminous calculation of their interests, the one to be always just, the other to be always submissive. But to arrive at a mathematical certainty, they neglected many elements that it had been necessary to consider.

They had well seen that, in the movement of interests, all tended to a certain equilibrium; but they had not held account of the oscillations which might have preceded, and that those oscillations might be insupportable calamities.

The epoch also was a data that never entered into their calculations; but the greatest error in their science was to have reckoned as nothing the effects of opinion and human passion. We have since profited by their labours, and supplied those omissions. The theory has ceased to be mathematical. It is no longer a series of axioms, whence incontestible conclusions are derived. In becoming less precise and less certain, it has been more applicable and useful. It is no more a law that governs despotically the public administration, but it is the councils that guide.

As for the arts of the imagination, they were, in the eyes of the new metaphysic, no longer a manifestation of man's inward impression, and of the effects objects had produced upon him; but an imitation, more or less faithful, of those objects; a collection of signs which represented them. The artist and the poet were no longer regarded as the creators, but as the industrious copyists; forgetting that their talent consisted in painting that which they felt.

But it was grammar and all the science of language that received, more than any other branch of human knowledge, a face entirely new.

Dumarsais, treading in the steps of Port-Royal, had laboured to unite grammar in an immediate manner with the art of reasoning. Condillac and Duclos, coming after him, took a derivation from the new metaphysic. From their researches re-

sulted a theory of language, clear and methodical, which quickly made amends for the ancient nomenclature. Instead of referring all language to the Latin language, and adapting all grammar to the forms of one only, they tried to find the general rules from which the particular rules of each language might branch out. But grammarians fell into an error. In the same way that we thought to reach the human soul by the science of sensation, so we thought that grammar contained the art of writing; that is to say, it might furnish rules to men by which to communicate their impressions. Metaphysicians had supposed that thought was the faithful image of exterior objects, and had almost introduced mechanism into its formation. Grammarians followed the same process; they transformed, in like manner, thought into speech; regarding words as an invariable expression of ideas. Whilst the language that takes every moment a form and a colour, differing in each individual, agreeably to the impression he experiences; the language that is indebted for all its effects, not to the representation of objects, but to the picture of the affections of the soul excited by those objects; that language unceasingly contradicts all the systems of grammar and metaphysics. Then the theory began to attack languages themselves, and decided that they were not conformed to those principles; they forgat that apparently

they are in the nature of man, since they have been formed by his habits and his wants.

It was proclaimed that the perfect idiom should be an assemblage of signs, each irrevocably united to the same idea, and bound together by constant affinity. Algebra was called the model of languages. We would fetter the thought, and circumscribe it to its formal expression ; and, as metaphysicians had considered it uniform and identical in all men, their grammar could not lose much in lending itself to such a language.

Algebra is doubtless the finest of all languages, in the same sense that the mathematical sciences are the most true of all the sciences. Mathematical truth is the result of the comparison and combination of factitious ideas, owing their birth to abstractions made by a labour of the human mind. Therefore, algebra is the language best suited to the inquiry into that species of truth. It recals to the mind continually, that the idea expressed by a sign is such as we had at first decreed it ; that abstract idea shall be the same for all, shall make no impression different from that which another might conceive.

To assist that language we trod on a sure ground in mathematical reasoning, and in the discovery of abstract and artificial truth. But when we have to render an account of the impressions that are not the same in all, and even differ every moment in

each individual; when we would quit the sphere of mathematical ideas,—ideas rendered completely alike in each man—then we must have a flexible language, that may receive from each the testimony which he experiences, and varying in form and power with the speaker, to trace the image of his soul and of his character. The new systems of grammar conduct us, also, to another way of seeing what yet results from that of regarding ideas as the absolute images of objects, and as identical in all men. The one makes each man forced to express himself after one rule; the others come no longer to attach importance to the expression of the ideas, but to the forms of language.

The ideas following them being the same in all individuals, it was indifferent whether they were comprised in one way or in the other. Hence, all the blasphemies against poetry and style; hence the assertion that thoughts were every thing, and eloquence nothing worth. Yes, without doubt, they are every thing; for it is impossible to separate them from that which we have called *style;* it is their immediate production. It is the manner in which they affect men, that the manner in which they express themselves depends. If a man be forcibly moved, language, by an irresistible penchant, takes the form and colour of his ideas, and communicates to other men, as by sympathy, a common impression.

Thought is like the daughter of Jupiter, who sprang completely armed from his brain. A great

writer, contemporaneous with the new grammarians, saw the fallacy of their principles, and said with truth, "Style is the man himself." Who can doubt it; since it reveals to us the operation of thought upon the man, and, consequently, what is the thought in him?

Perhaps it will appear puerile to cite an example. When Chimène exclaims to Rodrigue:—"Va, je ne te hais pas;" in the eyes of a cold analysis, it is saying in a different form, "Va, je t'aime." If, however, she had pronounced the last words, she would have been quite another character; she would have insulted the manes of her father; she would have had neither charm nor modesty.

These vain distinctions between the thought and the style, were not known in the seventeenth century. We judged ideas and sentiments, we found them false or true, good or bad; when we were shocked by a discourse, we took no notice of its form, but ascended to its source, and blamed the author for having thought ill.

Style in those times was only grammatical correctness.

Now we speak of style as of the music of an opera; and we mean to say, that with certain artifices of style, with certain procedures skilfully performed, we can render new and original common thoughts. It is making the art of writing a mechanical art.

Of the rest, they were not poets who meditated

poetry; they were not writers of an animated style, who would wither it. Lamothe and Fontenelle had professed similar opinions; they regarded poetry as a factitious form given to thought. With them it was not a spontaneous production; it was the result of labour and industry. Thus they spake as they felt upon poetry, and, therefore, with truth and persuasion.

In the school of French metaphysicians of the eighteenth century, there was one, who, in pursuing the same steps, was animated by a totally different spirit. Charles Bonnet devoted himself more than any other to the development of the theory of sensations, and to gain an intimate knowledge of man; but the conclusions he endeavoured to draw, from the whole of his opinions, were not analagous with the tendency of those of Condillac or his disciples. This shows a striking example of the direct liaison that unites morals and letters. A little people, inhabiting the borders of France, speaking the same language, reading the same books, drawn nearer by a daily connection with the metropolitan literature, loving knowledge, zealous for the progress of the human mind, inclined to the study of nature and the exact sciences, learned in foreign languages, and every movement that the eighteenth century stamped in France — such was the republic of Geneva, which felt these movements perhaps more forcibly than any; yet, as morals there were severe,

religion respected, the action of the laws constant and regular, and their habits ancient and firm; no movement spread a spirit of doubt and levity, nor attacked any of the observances of society: their writers preserved a veneration for all that preceding generations had respected, and were more grave and circumspect. Its society was composed of men instructed and animated by a lively interest in letters, but reserved and reflective in their judgments and opinions. Bonnet set out from the same point absolutely with Condillac; he supposed that man is a statue, endowed with an unknown principle, which he considered as having no particular property; but all the faculties of which springing up, form and develope themselves by the action of exterior objects: he brought, however, into this history of the creation of man by his sensations, more reflection and impartiality than any other metaphysician; and kept himself from many omissions and errors in the details into which Condillac had fallen: but he is most distinguished, by his anxious endeavour all his life, to unite this theory with the moral nature and with religious creeds. He was full of love and zeal for the natural sciences, which he cultivated with success; he unceasingly occupied himself to learn the springs of physical organization; but his hearty belief, his habits, the circle in which he lived, all brought him back to an elevated morality and to the love of religion. Thus, willing to honour the object of his

studies and all that occupied and charmed his leisure, he sought for proofs to demonstrate that which other metaphysicians neglected or attacked.

We shall nowhere find, so well as in his works, the impossibility of arriving, by this route, at the end to which they would attain. We must remark, likewise, that, having no doubts himself, safe in his own belief, he was the more at liberty, freely to investigate a large proportion of physical nature; and precisely because, not dreaming of an objection to the divine essence of the soul, his metaphysic seems the more to relate to materialism; so much that, in one of his last works, he appeared to agree that all his researches applied themselves, not to the soul itself, but to a certain physical soul, formed of a delicate matter, subtile and mysterious, by the intermedial of which the soul, properly so called, communicates with the body. Himself, as we may suppose, had then perceived by which way his theory had failed. This supposition, that we find so fanciful, the more so, as it seems also to explain the dogma of the corporeal resurrection, was the result of a great sincerity, and of a sincere love of truth, which had no determined point to advance the design at which it aimed.

In another work, the "Contemplation of Nature," he was entirely devoted to his religious opinions, and desired to give them the support of final causes: they are a proof of the sentiment, whereof he, doubtless, felt the nullity as a philosophical argu-

ment; but he had a wish to spread the impressions which gave birth in him to the study and examination of nature. He tried also to accomplish the true wisdom, and to establish a sort of harmony between the occupations of his mind and the affections of his soul.

After having exhibited the system of metaphysics adopted towards the middle of the eighteenth century, and its effect upon divers branches of human knowledge, of which we trace at that time the sketch in the Encyclopædia, let us return to the authors of that vast undertaking.

D'Alembert, as we have said, merited considerable reputation by his mathematical labours. Living in another age, he would, without doubt, have been satisfied with that renown. The society in which he lived, the wish to obtain the most popular success, the desire to show himself universal, made him a scholar cold enough. When the wish to sparkle is the cause for which we write, we feel an equal inducement to attempt every thing. It is only genius that, writing from its own impulses, knows how to bear its own fruit. Voltaire, to show his versatility, essayed the accurate sciences. D'Alembert was too far from poetry to try its attainment, but he makes us see that his talent ill applied itself to literary matters.

It was not thus with Diderot, who was endowed with an ardent and inordinate soul. But it was a

fire without aliment; and the talent of which he has given us some index did not receive any complete application. If he had embraced a uniform career — if his impatient spirit had marched in a determined direction, instead of wandering through all the chaotic variety of contrary opinions, which that era saw born or die, Diderot would have left a durable reputation; and now, instead of repeating only his name, we should have spoken of his works. But without a profound knowledge of any thing, without settled persuasion, without respect for any received idea, for any sentiment, he strayed into the vague, and made it sometimes sparkling, sometimes clear.

A character such as his was quite lost, in adopting the philosophy to which he applied himself. He tried to improve the theatre, and protested against established rules. He implored a more exact imitation of nature. He shewed, in effect, that it was susceptible of being known and described; but, pretending to be the chief of a new dramatic school, and a dogmatical moralist, he fell into affectation, and into declamation the most high-flown. Thus, he was much more apart from nature than those against whom he had raised himself. He wrote on ethics, which finding capable of warmth and elevation, he made a mélange dark and incoherent, of an animated style, with a philosophy analytical and destructive.

His romances present also the burlesque assem-

blage of one knows not what love of virtue, blended with the most shameful cynisme, and a warmth sometimes true and profound, with terms coarse and ignoble. On the whole, Diderot was a writer as fatal to literature as to morals.

He became a model for those cold and empty minds who, learned in his school, "comme on pouvait se battre les flancs, pour se donner de la verve dans les mots," without having an interior centre of thought and feeling.

The disciple most faithful to the philosophy of the times, was Helvétius. A useless persecution gave to his work a celebrity that it would not have had without that circumstance. He desired to unite, in one system, the principles he heard professed around him; but his head was neither vast enough, nor strong enough, to accomplish such a project.

It is probable that, in the society in which he moved, he might hear every day contradictory opinions carelessly ventured, without design or consistency, modified unceasingly by every circumstance, and by each impression of the moment. At the bottom, these were often in the same direction, but the assertions became much varied in their form. "L'Esprit" is a work composed of such conversations—singular materials for a philosophical work! It appears, also, that the friends of Helvetius did not design to build their own reputation by this

production of their disciple — for it was attacked ; they defended it.

Helvétius, conformably with the new ideas, established all his doctrine upon this basis — that physical sensibility is the producing cause of all our thoughts. Of all the writers who embraced this opinion, none have presented it in so coarse a manner. When he would make the man depend upon his organization, then he must investigate that organization. When he would ascertain what the feeling be, and that thought is nothing more than the last degree of sensation, then he must try to learn and expose the process of that sensation. M. Cabanis amended all that portion of the work of Helvétius, and dived into that which his predecessor had with difficulty suspected. He was too wise to find, in all the gross machinery of the physical organization, the moral faculties that distinguish the man ; he carried his researches further, and desired to learn the faculties in the more subtile springs, and so to speak, the most mysterious of the physical nature. His ability only serves to confirm us yet more how much the essence of the moral nature is foreign to the laws that may govern matter. However sanguine was his desire to unite the moral with the physical, he was not able to approach the end to which he tended ; and he was little enough of a philosopher to show himself in love with an opinion that he could not arrive at demonstrating. When we would learn the man by

the physical being, it is difficult for the moral not to be reduced, to become the science of well-being. It is possible, that a skilfully performed calculation of well-being conducts to virtue. The smallest good sense is sufficient to perceive that this route is neither the most noble nor the most certain. But to say the truth, Helvétius, who was a just man, upright and benevolent, was far from wishing to destroy virtue. On the contrary, he reckoned on establishing it upon a solid base, and imagined, that when he should demonstrate the self-love that renders us virtuous, he should perform a great service to morality. According to him, it imported little, whether one saved the life of a friend at the expense of one's own, from the love of self, or the love of one's friend. Helvétius did not deny that there exists in self a sudden and involuntary feeling that bears one to the action ; he did not deny, that the feeling being in the heart of almost all men, they will admire the action. Thus he changed nothing in the foundation of things, he only raised a quibble about words. He imposed upon himself the task of proving that the sacrifice of self and self-love may be the same thing, although they appear exclusive by their appellation. But, however, we must admit, that in managing these terms, and in altering their natural signification, we may cause the most fatal results.

There are many persons with whom words are every thing, whose sentiments repose upon that

single basis, that it is needful to guard it well from giving way.

You tell them that man acts from self-love, and you agree that virtue is a succession of self-love. They will not comprehend that all your doctrine is supported upon that love of self, which, with all the world, is the preference of self to others, nor will it say more than that for you : for it is to that only that all the philosophy of Helvétius reduces itself. Ordinary minds, taking the term self-love in its ancient sense, will find that it ill accords with virtue, and so will become vicious. It seems to us that those who thus overthrew the dictionary, often forgat the change that they had made. Epicurus was one of the most rigid of philosophers, and his disciples were, at first, more austere than the Stoics. He said ' that the truest pleasure consisted in the practice of virtue.' A few years after, the swine of Epicurus, authorised by his name, forgat virtue in sensuality. The greater part of the philosophers, whom some persons affect to brand, were, like Helvétius, endowed with more than one virtue. They were disinterested, benevolent; they desired the good of their country and of humanity. They did not sacrifice their opinions for the vile appetite of gain. Many among them were insensible to the favour of kings, and preferred a life of independence. But they were accessible to all the seductions of vanity; their hearts were not closed against hatred

and jealousy. Contradiction irritated them, and the least restraint seemed tyranny. When we make pride the basis of virtue, when we think to disengage ourselves from the laws that govern mankind, we do not follow a certain course. The passions may mislead us, unless we lose the good opinion of self, the primary source of our errors. Pride is not so contemptible a counsellor as personal interest, but it readily carries us into faults. Hence the advantage of religion over human morals.

Such was nearly the character and conduct of the literati of the epoch. The opinions that they developed may be blamed, but we must not be unjust towards them personally. If they lost themselves in their works, their actions at least have nothing sufficiently condemnable to become a pretext for those declamations, void of sense, that we often hear repeated against the philosophers of the eighteenth century. According to those severe accusers, the philosophy would be a sort of conspiracy wickedly plotted, in order to destroy religious and political laws.

They have always spoken in that sense, some with insincerity, others without examination, repeating that the philosophical sect had arrived at the disastrous point at which they had aimed. It is proper now to enquire to what extent all those terms of sect, doctrine, system, and even of philosophy, are applicable to the circumstance.

CHAPTER VII.

Formerly, the name of philosopher appertained to those austere men who, smitten with a strong passion for truth, devoted their lives to its attainment. No cost was too great for them to arrive at that result. Their time was consumed in the acquisition of science; they went to countries the most distant, through fatigue and peril, to consult the traditions of the ancient sages; they lived in the midst of a people, whose morals were severe, and were themselves remarkable for a character yet more severe; their meditations were continual, and their little frequentation with the crowd prevented the evaporation of reflections only half formed. In their minds thus aggrandized by study, solitude, and labour of thought, were formed those vast systems, conceived in the ensemble, and developed with eloquence. Such a philosophy could have no design to injure. The void that results from default of belief overwhelmed those serious and meditative

minds ; they experienced a lively desire to replace that which was wanting, by some edifice conformed to the order of their thoughts. Having an abyss open before us, it is only indifferent to those who do not see it.

The character and habits of ancient philosophers gave them great authority among the people. They were in the midst of men as extraordinary beings, who, by the power of intellect, were elevated above all others. Numberless disciples pressed upon their steps, and, even as the master had consecrated his life to the search of truth, so the disciples devoted theirs to study, collect, and to spread the doctrines of their master.

The necessity of teaching their opinions in a direct and positive manner contributed yet further to give the philosophers of antiquity a unity of principles binding together the tendency towards a centre well determined. Thus they formed a body of doctrine, constructed with caution and method, and textually exposed, to be judged, compared, and discussed. They presented to the mind materials for long reflection ; and, even in rejecting them, they left us to admire the strength and ingenuity of the imagination that had created them. Commonly, they are considered as brilliant dreams, but, well regarded, have more depth than is thought. That which may appear fanciful becomes often a real difficulty, that we would gladly vanquish, though the casual observer has not noticed it.

In modern times, philosophers have become persons of less consequence; they occupy no rank among men, neither do they exercise any authority over them. That species of influence passed away in acquiring a force much more powerful, in the hands of those who were illustrious in the science of religion. Properly speaking, there was no longer the philosophical sect; we only find more religious sects. The separation of the divine, from the human, science considerably lowered philosophy.

The Pagan worship could not satisfy the inquiries of the ancient sages. All sparkling as it was to their imagination, it had nothing which could penetrate to the bottom of the soul, or accord with the reflections of a vast and profound mind. It was not sufficiently metaphysical. The loftier philosophy endeavoured to supply the void by an imperfect religion. Sometimes it was forced to lend itself to subtile interpretations; sometimes it appeared impious, because it found itself obliged to reject, in part, a worship which did not accommodate itself to its abstractions.

At length, when the Christian religion appeared upon the earth, it found Paganism giving way in all parts. It came to the aid of the poor, who no longer respected the discarded tenets, and whom worldly misfortunes rendered nevertheless eager for the consolations of religion; it came, likewise, to succour men wise and instructed, who, losing them-

selves in the clouds of philosophy, vainly sought in it the aliment necessary to their soul.

Christianity inherits a great portion of the philosophy of antiquity; and it is to that we must look for its last ennobling and deifying vestiges.

After the revival of letters, when philosophy again showed itself, it took a new direction. That religion which, in the eyes of the simple, offered only those appearances which were not above their capacity; that lent itself to the habitual wants of life; whose tenets and worship seized upon the imagination, the senses, the actions,—could also elevate itself to minds in love with general and abstract things. It showed itself positive, to satisfy the heart in the daily practice, and ideal, to those spirits pre-occupied by a sublime curiosity. Thus human philosophy saw itself reduced to inquire the principles of things, without essaying to unite them to the First and Universal Cause. All those fundamental questions, into which we continually retomb in our investigation, passed into the domain of religion. Philosophy occupied itself to guide the progress of the sciences, to improve human reason, to learn the diverse faculties of man, and to direct the employ.

As the movement which had developed mind was owing, in a great measure, to the works of the ancients; erudition became the ground-work of every kind of culture. The first duty of philosophers, as of all other writers, was to learn and compare to-

gether all those who, in old times, had preceded them in the career. Thus study and the morals of the people, imposed upon them (as we have already remarked) a grave and retired life, and though it had nothing of the solemnity of that of the Grecian sages, yet it was equally preserved from distractions and contact with the crowd. France exhibits, less than any other European nation, the new character of philosophy. Montaigne differs completely. Des Cartes and his disciples followed a more elevated route. Their works were more analagous to the antique philosophy.

But the eighteenth century offers in France, a tableau that resembles nothing that we had seen. They are no longer serious men, erudite, nourished by reflection and study, seeking a general point of view, proceeding with method, compelling themselves to form a system, all whose parts should be thoroughly co-ordained. They are writers, living in the midst of a frivolous society, animated by its spirit, organs of its opinions; exercising and partaking of an enthusiasm that at once applied itself to things the most futile and to objects the most serious; judging of all things with facility, conformably to rapid and momentary impressions; little inquisitive upon questions which had been formerly debated; disdaining the past and erudition; inclined to a frivolous doubt, that had not the indecision of philosophy, but much rather a part taken to advance unbelief. At length

the name of philosophy was never granted to the best merchandise. When we reproach the authors of the epoch with having sustained a system and destructive principles, and calumniate them in this respect, or the other, we give them a praise that they did not merit. We might combat with indignation Hobbes or Spinosa. They had a direct design, a marked intention; they presented themselves with weapons in their career; they offered challenge; we know that which we have to dispute: but the philosophy of the eighteenth century, since we must adopt the name, will never form a textual doctrine; it will never be permitted to quote a writer, to prove that the philosophy had a certain project, and recognized principles. None of the literati agreed among themselves. They even had so little idea of any result whatever, that to take each one particularly, there is not one who does not contradict himself perpetually. Their vanity, their love of success prevented them, yet more than the character of their studies, from forming a sect. None felt either respect or deference for another; none would avow to himself his inferiority. That zeal for truth, that enthusiasm for genius, all the disinterested sentiments that make sects and parties, were not found in those times. What a difference between Voltaire, trafficking for praise with all the other writers of the age, and a venerable philosopher, surrounded by disciples eager for his words and

admirers of his virtues, reigning over them by the power of his discourse and example!

The philosophy of the eighteenth century is then a spirit universal in the nation, evidenced by its writings. It is a written testimony of the tendency of contemporary opinions. There was, in the whole period, a necessary liaison between literature and the state of society. Sometimes the affinity demands the inquiry to be made with wisdom, and carefully developed, to be rendered sensible and evident; but in this case it was so direct and immediate, that it does not require a subtile observation to unfold it. Writings not only received influence from the public; they were, to say the truth, written under its dictation. We even find men, whose talents seem to announce an illustrious career, dissipate their lives and faculties, to obtain every day the seducing success of conversation; and yielding to that employment the vivacity of a fine imagination, leaving no result after them; so absolute was the domination of society over letters. The character likewise, of that philosophy showed itself less in the opinions, than in the manner in which they were professed. Conformable to this idea, we have been more anxious to inquire the general spirit of the writers, than to enter upon the detail of their works. Nevertheless, while we demonstrate that authors, far from directing the movement of morals, or the tone of society, on the

contrary, rather obeyed it, yet we would not entirely excuse them.

That an ordinary person, whose employment is neither to reflect nor to observe, should leave to incoherence, or hazard, those opinions and judgments, that he yields to every fugitive impression, is a misfortune, no doubt; it would have been better had a reserved spirit governed him, even though it lost a portion of its grace and facility; for, in fine, there is a general course of ideas, by which the crowd are hurried, without power to resist, or even to perceive. But the more difficult duties are prescribed to him who has received from nature the noble gift of talent, and who seeks the honour of imposing upon his fellow-creatures his own thoughts. No longer abandoned to caprices, he should maturely and conscientiously examine his opinions before spreading them, and attach less importance to the frivolous success of the world. Study and meditation should preserve him from the contagious vices of his times, and instead of flattering, he should combat them. He is accountable to his talent, as the magistrate of its authority.

The simple citizen, on whom no one depends, whose example is not contagious, whose words are little heard, freely gratifies his tastes and inclinations,—whilst the magistrate is a slave to the power confided to him, to live in a manner grave

and rigid, in thinking that he has a responsibility beyond himself.

The better to ascertain how far the character of the literati was independent of the diverse shades of opinions, and allied rather to the universal order of things, we may quote Duclos; who took no part in the common cause with those of whom we have spoken, and who, more than once, affected distance from their principles.

Do we not find in him a spirit of vanity and independence; the disdain for power and riches; that alliance of cynisme and morality; the pretence of bearing philosophy in the least things, and in considering stories of fairies and romances no longer as a simple amusement, but as vehicles of knowledge and reason? Is not all this in him common with those whom he disapproved? Is it not all in perfect assortment with the period in which he is found? We might make the same remarks upon those men who have shown themselves yet more opposed to the philosophical side.

Considered as a writer, Duclos is much nearer to his contemporaries. His talent bears the stamp of coldness, examination, and even of dryness. In his histories, and in his "Voyage en Italie," the character is a defect; but the "Considérations sur les Mœurs," being a work entirely conceived in that spirit, is complete in its plan; it is not a work of profound and general morality; it probes not for a reply to the heart of man; but it is not very

possible, better to learn, or better to paint, all the variegated tints of the spirit of society, or better to characterize causes and their immediate effects. It is a spiritual tableau of the superficial covering, in which the habits of the world clothe mankind. Above all, a remarkable precision and clearness pervades it. We always comprehend the thoughts of the author,—rarely can we contest his truth. This advantage results from the talent of definition. Duclos begins by establishing the signification of the words he employs, or at least that which he wishes them to signify. Thus he makes us always understand the limits that he had imposed upon his thoughts. We evidently see how far his reasoning extends, and are not tempted to deny the result. Discussions come ordinarily from our not attaching the same sense to the same words: when he has made us comprehend his meaning, it meets with few opposers. He only concerns himself, to transport others to the point at which he is placed to investigate things; then they partake, or at least acknowledge the same impressions.

The Abbé de Mably, like Duclos, had not only a reserve towards the chiefs of the new school of philosophy; he shewed even a repugnance towards them; he set no value either upon their opinions or their systems. However, he resembles them more than he thought; taking, in appearance, another road, he arrived with all his forces at the same point.

He was, all his life, occupied with more ardour and gravity than other writers upon politics and morals; in so far as they had reference to public order. Far from eulogizing, as they did, the march of intellect, and priding himself in the existing times, he constantly shewed disdain for the morals of the age, and for the character of men and nations; indignant at the disorder and frivolity reigning around him, his esteem carried him back to the souvenirs of antiquity. The Abbé de Mably rendered no justice to any thing appertaining to modern times; neither religion, government, nor distinction, neither the annals of France nor European nations appeared to him to merit a regard. He only cared to bear himself to remote times, in which all things had some impress of respect and affection.

It seemed that his aversion from the actual order could not pardon even the first origin whence that order was derived. His works were much less a praise on the past, than an attack upon the present; he was inspired with less veneration for the ancient, than contempt for modern institutions.

A morose and hostile tone could not give birth to admiration. Besides, that which is an exclusive boast, having no affinity nor relationship with us, could only inspire feelings of coldness and separation. The Abbé de Mably then followed, as well as other writers, a destructive method, and contributed, without knowing it, to weaken the bonds,

already impaired, that yet united the members of an old society. This character is more than all shewn in the "Observations sur l'Histoire de France:" the Abbé refused to enter into the spirit of our ancient morals and our forms of government: it was not assuredly from lack of research and reflection, it was rather the effect of a blind prepossession; but in fine, the author seemed not to comprehend the history of his country.

He was one of the first who elevated the voice to declaim against the sovereigns of France; he accustomed our ears to hear taxed with barbarity, despotism or anarchy, the necessary institutions of their times, and which, modifying successively, have given to France, through the duration of ages, sometimes happiness, sometimes glory. He cared not to see all that the national character presents of the noble and honourable during its early times; and because the companions of St. Louis had for their descendants the courtiers of Louis XV., he was not able to find the admirable but in Greece or Rome.

That which we have said of the effect, the knowledge and imitation of the works of antiquity produced in letters, in the sixteenth century, applies equally to politics and history. The morals and government of Rome and Greece became as classical as their poetry. The Roman law, and all the maxims of absolute power, had taken, by degrees, the place of the public right of the free

nations of Germanic origin. Infancy learned to stammer the names of Cato and Epaminondas, long before it could utter those of Dugesclin and Bayard. Every one was at liberty to find the Trojan war great and poetical; but to admire the Crusades had been a thing unheard of. The verses of Virgil were engraven on the memory, but taste prohibited the solacing of oneself with the tinsel of Tasso.

In this manner, we find ourselves insulated by degrees from the history of the country — its traditions were disdained and broken. Our magistrates alone, by their duties and occupations, were bound to the science, and continued to dive into its spirit. Some scholars directed their researches on that side; but the classical studies, and the opinions of society, had no reference whatever to that kind of labour. Afterwards, when we wished to occupy ourselves with matters of politics, we no longer found a certain base, and it was necessary to propose doctrines, instead of following the guidance of habits and experience.

Some authors thought, with reason and prudence, that it was expedient to consult authorities in the records of the nation, in order, as much as it was possible from the past times, to learn the rights it had had, and the duties it had fulfilled. But the vestiges of all those things were much effaced, and, at last, none but the real and positive elements could serve us for a recomposition.

It was in this sense that Fénélon, greatly as he

admired antiquity, always spake of French politics. Montesquieu followed expressly the same opinion. We have said that Daniel sought in history the proofs of his doctrines; and about the same epoch, Boulainvilliers was entirely consecrated to inquire into the spirit and detail of our institutions. No author bore more knowledge and science into the investigation, nor more enlightened the much neglected study of our ancient and national public privileges.

The Abbé Dubos adopted a system opposed to that of Boulainvilliers, but with less zeal and erudition.

But circumstances were little favourable to multiply such enquiries and studies; they were not in accordance with the habitual ideas of society. The form of government also rendered the science idle and inapplicable.

After long distractions, when order was re-established in France, nothing had been regulated; all was uncertain, although all was in repose. No class of citizens, no authority knew equity, either in its prerogatives or its obligations; no habit could form itself, because nothing was assured or fixed. In that incertitude, the greater part of those engaged in politics were bound to reason in a general manner, to enquire the primordial principles of every species of society; and found it more simple, in destroying the remains of the old foundation, to construct an entirely new

edifice: thus some lost themselves in a vain and abstract policy; others, such as Mably, instructed in ancient history, had a tendency to introduce those forms which, being foreign to us, were as much removed from reality as the systems of the first. We again find, it seems, this double school of politics in the spirit which was shewn at the commencement of the Revolution, when entering upon the discussion of the materials of government.

But if the Abbé de Mably exercised a grievous influence over the untaught, it was most assuredly against his will: he never desired that European constitutions should be modelled by the ancient republics. He repeated continually that the change was neither possible nor rational. He thought nations were not worthy of the trial. No writer could better foresee the result of a movement of the people; he partook not of the trifling hopes of the philosophers of his times, who saw nothing in the coming future but liberty, happiness, knowledge and perfection. Enlightened by the profound contempt he had for his contemporaries, he could predict a great part of our misfortunes.

Much above those of whom we have spoken, and without marching under any of their banners, we find Rousseau. If, among the illustrious writers of the age, there be one who had a particular influence, yet, without making himself subservient to follow the common movement, it was, without

doubt, Rousseau who obtained that honour. Formed by misfortunes and in solitude, nourished by meditation and secret chagrins, he was, as it would seem, of all his literary contemporaries, the one who bore the most distinct and native character. Whilst others received all the influence of society, participating of the morals and opinions disseminated through the public, endeavouring to please it, and conforming themselves to its spirit; Rousseau felt all those effects in another manner.

Their action exercised upon him a sort of weight that oppressed without enslaving him. His talent, in the midst of all those circumstances, contracted somewhat more of individuality, and, consequently, became more profound and persuasive; his fame likewise was greater and more flattering. Others arrived at approbation; Rousseau excited enthusiasm; and that which is at once flattering, both to the writer and his admirers, is, that such success was, in a great measure, owing to his nobler opinions, and to a language replete with more force, enthusiasm and emotion. Philosophy, in the mouth of Rousseau, found again those weapons, of which it was at that time destitute, — eloquence and feeling.

But we must allow that his philosophy inclosed a thousand dangerous germs. Perhaps it was more prejudicial than that of other writers. Without family, without friends, without country; wandering from place to place, from condition to con-

dition; oppressed every where by a world in which he possessed nothing, Rousseau conceived a spirit of revolt, and an interior pride, that raised him almost to delirium. The vanity of other authors was all exterior; that of Rousseau, which, for a long time, received no enjoyment from without, took refuge in the deepest recesses of his soul, there to embitter all his happiness, at the same time that it afforded him no relief. Nothing could gratify him; — without good will towards mankind, no kindness could soften him; he was of those spirits, whose pride is really insatiable; who, in their extremity, are filled with indignation at being men, imagining that nature owes them more than the rest of the world.

Every thing done by society wounds such characters; they cannot learn submission, not even to the force of things. Necessity not only afflicts, but mortifies them.

It was in such a disposition that Rousseau drew out his talent, his opinions, and his faults; it was from having lived estranged in the midst of society, we might even say of humanity, and feeling with enthusiasm a love of virtue and justice, and willing to excite the same in others, that he shook that which serves as the basis of virtue and justice — the sentiment of duty. Hence arose, as it appears to us, the vice of his philosophy. Insulated among men, he had never felt duty as a bond; he had always found that his own impulse carried him

beyond the position assigned to him; he never could see, unfortunate being that he was, that duty, far from being a barrier to the feelings of the man, is, on the contrary, their application well directed.

It is in this case, as in all the prerogatives with which man is endowed by nature. In order to live in society, he must sacrifice a portion, that he may tranquilly enjoy that other portion of which he is assured. He has a right to the possession of the whole earth; but every one is at liberty to contest the exercise of that right; then it must be resigned for the smaller part, where no one may deprive him. His affections, in like manner, might embrace all the objects in nature, could anything fix or secure them. Society, in bestowing on a man the bonds of family and country, of morals and laws, has restrained his affections; but it has likewise protected them, and so disposed all around them, to the end that they may have an open course. Held by the just and the honest, they injure no one, and none may attack them. By a necessary vicissitude, on the contrary, if those feelings carry the man beyond the limits society has prescribed, society will be avenged, and the more cruelly in proportion as it is better regulated. It unceasingly harasses those who infringe the general order, and makes them feel, in a thousand ways, that they have broken the established equilibrium. Then comes the outcry against the duties imposed by so-

ciety; they are accused of stifling the feelings of nature, not perceiving that duties are nothing more than those feelings permitted and consecrated.

With Rousseau, the accomplishment of duty had never been the source of any enjoyment; he had not been able to find in it the employment of an ardent and sensitive mind. He was always met with in a false position, where his feelings were out of place; thus he imputed his misfortunes to human institutions. In the inner sanctuary, they doubtless accused him of his faults; and he cherished by those means, a sentiment of bitterness and hostility against that society, in which his character and circumstances had prevented him from taking a suitable place. Then he would make man's progress to virtue, not by attention to duties, but by a free and passionate transition, followed by pride and independence. Such a route has no secure ground, and can only deceive us. Rousseau gave us his life as an example; it was filled with errors and defects; yet none professed virtue with more warmth and enthusiasm than he. When we do not submit our conduct to the prescribed rules, it is in vain that the imagination be inflamed by zeal for all that is noble and honest; we are no longer virtuous. It is a trait peculiar to civilized times, that those characters who insulate themselves from real circumstances and nourish illusions, live with sentiments the most sublime. The mind is exalted; it feels, with a

marvellous vivacity the passion for excellence; the imagination sees nothing but purity; knows nothing of evil; but, having disdained the trodden paths, not regarding duty as sacred, men wander from error to error without even perceiving it. Experiencing within themselves, in their utmost force, the most virtuous motives, they cannot think them culpable. Sentiments appear to them to have more reality than actions. Rousseau, in the height of his impurity, believed himself to be the most virtuous of men; he was willing to appear before the tribunal of God with his works in his hand, and thought their pages would be found to contain that which would redeem all his faults. This disposition sensibly influences the nature of the talent. The man whose life is in accordance with his sentiments, expresses them simply and without effort; there is in his words as much elevation as there can be, somewhat of the assured and positive, that penetrates and carries us with them. But he, whose virtue exists only in an overheated imagination, intoxicates himself in his notions, and attaches himself to them so much the more as they are his only good; they are not wanting in truth; they have much of the sincerity of the feelings he expresses; it is his very soul revealing its emotion to ours. It persuades us, it moves us; we have a conference, but no account is rendered: what contradiction! We cannot repose in full confidence on his statements;

they are true, but they are not plain. The highest character of genius, whose charm is eternal, is wanting. By this rule; Rousseau was far behind the eloquence of Bossuet.

Such was the general colour of all the works of Rousseau; but it is necessary to shew how it applied itself to each of them particularly.

CHAPTER VIII.

The romance, that formerly was no more than a naïve recital of facts, and which, in the reign of Louis XIV. had begun to be joined to a detailed picture of the feelings, took under the pen of Rousseau an entirely new character. The facts became the least part of the sketch; it was to trace the movements of the soul that he was particularly destined; not only the simple movements immediately produced by the effect of circumstances, whereof character is composed, and whence results the conduct, but the inward action of the soul upon itself, when, upon the wings of the imagination and the passions, it takes its flight far above real and positive things. Rousseau placed his personages upon that ideal scene, the only one in which he was pleased to live himself; and thus brought the romance nearer to the character of the highest dramatic poetry. We must not then seek in the new Héloïse for the picture of mankind, such as they appear before us. It is not thus Rousseau

desired to represent them. How rarely, to the eyes of others, does the man dare to reveal the mysteries of his soul; at least that passionate and involuntary impulse which hurries him away. It is a *je ne sais quelle* sort of modesty, united to the fear of incapability, that generally throws a veil over the secret movements, and deadens the impressions.

Within the man pass a thousand agitations, a thousand conflicts, that have no apparent result, and to which no words can bear witness. It is this portion of our interior being that Rousseau has represented: the letters of Julie do not inclose that which is said, but that which is felt, without being spoken.

This manner of considering and describing the human heart was the source of the admirable beauties of the work; and likewise hurried him into some faults; the greatest, doubtless, is that uniformity of an even style, always destined to paint exalted impressions, and to touch them in detail. Nothing reposes; simple language never comes to replace the reader in a natural position.

Richardson, though less eloquent than Rousseau, perhaps better understood romance; he mixed elevated sentiments with real circumstances, in so far as they appear in life, where the spirit does not entirely unveil itself, but when impelled by some extraordinary circumstance. That process is more conformable to nature; it is also more moral, since

it represents virtue, not upon a stage elevated above common life, but upon a level with the soil on which we live, and susceptible of a daily and habitual application.

Let us remark, likewise, that in order to give woman a deep and impassioned language, a knowledge of the impressions she experiences, the appreciation of their force, and inquietude as to their result, one must subtract from her the charms of modesty, ignorance of self, involuntary abandonment, and by that deprive her of half the graces of her sex.

Another defect in the work is the mad pretence of being a course of morality. Besides the general design Rousseau gave to his romance, he would not lose an opportunity of dogmatising. There are few circumstances in life that do not find some pattern in the Héloïse; and without examining within himself the system of morality, one easily perceives that the mania of philosophising often made the romancer a little pedantic.

Rousseau himself noticed the defect; it had been better had it altogether disappeared.

We cannot bring the same reproach against his Emile, which is a work essentially dogmatical, and of which we must speak in a single point of view. It was quite plain, that Rousseau, occupying himself upon education, wished to bring up a child not for society, but against it. He set out from that point, and, consequently, composed a work

which was inapplicable, if not injurious. In effect, when we have formed a being, in a manner to constitute an hostility with his fellow-creatures, and afterwards place him in the midst of them, his feelings will be in revolt against every thing that should serve to regulate him. We have taught him to follow only those self-formed rules; whilst nothing will contribute towards his maintenance in them; they are imaginary, well as we may have prescribed them. His interest, his pride, his independent habits, will cause him to transgress; unless the general example recal him, he will be culpable and unhappy; at the same time he will meet with neither pity nor good-will, but find himself conformed to the philosophy that has given him such an education.

There is yet another fault: it is that of placing a child in factitious circumstances, so arranged for him as to produce a calculated effect. That method of playing comedy with children, to teach them how to conduct themselves in a life which is all reality, was adopted by numberless tutors which the end of the century produced.

Each would deceive his pupil; disguise to him that which appeared to his view; direct his will, instead of obtaining his obedience; conduct him to virtue by paths covered with flowers, and to science by amusement. We endeavoured to sweeten with honey the brim of the cup, instead of teaching the child that though the drink were bitter, yet it must

be swallowed. We must not have for the infant a complacency that nature has not for the man. We must speak to him frankly; besides, he will not be so easily deceived as may be thought; and, when once he has detected the fraud, all is then lost.

Another consideration arises against all those systems of instruction: they are not applicable to public education; consequently, they are useless. We could maintain, with great probability, that public education is essentially the best; but it is clear, at least, that it is necessary for the greater number; for a whole generation cannot be occupied to bring up the rising one, for that in its turn to charge itself with the instruction of another; it would be a ceaseless cultivation, and compiling for ever.

In thus placing education in arranged scenes, Rousseau often shewed how little he had observed the early age. He fell into the grossest errors upon the progressive formation of the ideas and feelings of childhood. But was it not natural that such a father as Rousseau should misunderstand infancy? In truth, he must have been very completely ignorant of the first notions of practical knowledge to desire that the child should re-fashion, for himself personally, the work of civilization, and invent that which he ought to learn, from the sciences even to the attainment of virtue.

One point that has not been sufficiently remarked, is, that Rousseau, in the Emile, founded

all his moral upon the consideration of personal interest, even in a more especial manner, perhaps, than Helvétius. It was to be expected, on the part of a man who had always been deficient in good will towards his species; but it is singular that to accomplish that object, having employed the metaphysic of the eighteenth century, he used, in the celebrated confession of faith, the noblest eloquence of the Cartesian philosophy, which, in effect, would directly conduct to religious creeds. One is likewise surprised to find him, at first, ascend by a sublime flight, almost to the knowledge of God; and then depart from it to reject practical religion and forms of worship. But such a procedure is in conformity with all the philosophy of Rousseau. The idea of a Supreme Being, a vague feeling of gratitude and respect, and, in a word, all that is called natural religion, is entirely in the region of the imagination. One may be unceasingly agitated by those noble thoughts, while the action remains unchanged; but worship is a positive application of the feelings; by that intermedial they become useful; by that only they take a form, acquire reality, and assume an influence over the conduct.

In examining Rousseau, we find an analogy between a religion without worship, and a morality without practice. Of all the works of Rousseau, those that have exercised the greatest empire over opinion, are, perhaps, his political writings.

His literary career began by an attack upon civilization. Whether, as it has been pretended, that it was at first a *jeu d'esprit*, to sustain those opinions that he afterwards embraced with ardour, or that his talent had not acquired all its force, his first essay was only an ingenious declamation, whereof the thoughts, although expressed with a degree of warmth, had nothing of depth in them.

In the discourse upon inequality, he attempted the history of society, sought how and wherefore men were united together, and the result that was owing to it. As he was an enemy to the actual order of things, he spake with animated bitterness against the fruits of human associations. Property, distinction of rank, mutual duties, the obligation to manual labour, and even to the labour of mind — all were subject to his attacks; and, even remounting, to ascertain the time when man had not had such misfortunes to fear, he travelled over all the degrees of civilization, he found again unceasingly the principles which impose upon the human species the inclination and the necessity to live in society. There was little wanting in his vexation to make him suppose that man was only to live in the state of a brute. Nevertheless, he dare not risk that absurd opinion, nor make man a perfect animal. Thus, his discourse had no result; it led to nothing; it was the effusion of a philosophy hating society, of which it could not deny its necessity; but it had, in that sense, an evil tendency,

for it was suited to give birth to a feeling of attack and aversion against social order, whatever that order might be.

He sought the principles of government and laws in the nature of man; and society in the social contract. Montesquieu said, "I never heard a discussion upon public right, that it did not begin carefully to enquire into the origin of societies; which seems to me ridiculous. If men did not form them; if they quitted or fled from each other; it would be necessary to demand the reason, and to inquire why they held themselves apart; but they all grow in union the one with the other. A child is born after his father, and is bound to him; there is society, and the cause of society."

Rousseau, leaving those considerations, would show the moral principles by which men were united; the design proposed by their union; and the best means of arriving at that design, independently of particular cases.

Departing from the principle that society subsists by a general accord of its members, he inquired on what conditions men were obliged to exceed the contract, and the means that would make them observe it. The work, as Montesquieu thought, is evidently idle and useless. It is clear that society exists by consent of its members. That consent or contract is, in effect, the rational principle of its existence; but the contract is tacit; it

has always been, consequently, it has nothing practical. It is thus in geometry we say, that a solid is engendered by the motion of a plane. The definition is true; it exactly represents the idea of a regular solid; but it has no affinity with the material condition in the existence of the solid. It is a distinctive character, to suppose that it exists, but it is not the principle which makes it exist. The same if there be society: it is by abstraction resulting from the consent of all its members; in reality it proceeds from that which many men have reached in a certain country, where they have been established, had children, property, a government, common habits; if we would exert ourselves to give them a good policy, we must separate all those positive circumstances. A geometrician will never attempt to create a solid by the movement of a plane. He knows very well the nature of that kind of truth; but we may inspire men with an idea of the possibilty of concluding and renewing the social contract, and by that notion empires are overthrown.

Rousseau was drawn into notable errors in thus desiring to give such abstractions a positive appearance.

After having supposed the possibility of the contract; after having shown men connected together in order to pass it, he saw no inconvenience for each one to abdicate, by the covenant, all his individual rights, for the benefit of society: free to

destroy it the moment it should be found no longer suitable. Thence issues the principle of the sovereignty of the people.

Rousseau did not discover that, in this way, he gave tyranny the most powerful weapon. In effect the government that exercises that authority, is not an abstract being, which, by its essence, should be the representative of society, and, in that sense, can do nothing that is not for its good; but, in reality, it is a man, or many men, animated by personal interests, agitated by passions and liable to errors; who, being invested with sovereign power, use it to break the contract. The will of the greater number is often insufficient to prevent this; the sovereign, armed with the forces confided to him, may keep it a long time idle and almost mute; so the doctrine of the sovereignty of the people, leads us to take no precautions against power, and by that means is injurious to liberty.

If it were needful to renounce the establishment of ideas of policy upon the rights and wants that positive laws and habits have given to the people, and seek for an abstract basis, the system of Hobbes would even be preferable to that of Rousseau. If governments have no other right than that of force; defence, and even attack, are legitimate. Each would essay to be the strongest; and to learn if repose were dearer than interest. From this spirit diverse situations may result. The sovereign boldly abuses his power without fearing that he may be

deprived of it in defending himself. This is despotism. Citizens may sacrifice their tranquillity in the defence or aggrandisement of their privileges. Hence disorder and revolution. At length, the sovereign may be arrested in his enterprises from the fear of wounding too sensibly, or stirring up the people to their personal interests; and the citizens may, likewise, in opposition to government, make a similar calculation. This armistice between two parties who find it their advantage to remain in presence, without warfare, constitutes those states at once free and happy. Commonly, they fluctuate between that perfection and complete disorder.

This is very nearly the spirit of ancient European governments, which is yet preserved in England. Between the mass of the people and their monarch, we find a body of citizens who have more privileges to defend and more means of resistance; it is with them only, that sovereignty has to debate its interests. They are, as advanced guards, destined to protect public liberty; by degrees, in our own country, royal authority, either by force or address, gained a victory over that advanced guard of the nation. That victory was the cause of its ruin. It found itself afterwards, in the hands of the main body of the army, and suffering a total defeat. Of the rest, Rousseau erred only by an inclination natural enough, of giving to his system an appearance of clearness

and certainty, and a form similar to that of the exact sciences, which, at the time, had become the model of all the sciences. The faults of his method are most shown in their application. We have to notice this in his work on Poland, in which, far from falling into abstractions, he sought every means of establishing a good government, engrafted upon the character of the people, upon their ancient laws, and in a word, upon all real circumstances, that, in truth, he knew ill enough. Besides, he could never have desired to attempt a trial of his own maxims. Like Mably, he had too great a contempt for European societies, to expect any good from their operations.

We shall speak less of the other works of Rousseau; we recognize in them all that we have said on his character, his morals, his religion, and his politics. His controversial writings (except that "Sur les Spectacles," which is his best work,) further show, an irritable vanity, which, in its anger, knew neither method nor discretion. In spite of their philosophical pretensions, the authors of the eighteenth century leave us to observe, generally, a very exalted vanity in their literary quarrels. Their polemics had not so much of sang-froid and dignity, as the ridiculous debate of pedants. Some of them shewed the most bitter gall, others blended the grossest injuries. Montesquieu alone maintained, with a noble dignity, his elevated character.

We shall make a few observations on the "Con-

fessions." It is, assuredly, a very singular phenomenon that a man should undertake to achieve the esteem, and even admiration of posterity, by making known the smallest details of a life, presenting neither grandeur nor elevated action; but which, on the contrary, was filled with ignoble minutiæ and unpardonable faults. But there is something yet more surprising; it is, the success of such an enterprise; in having induced a persuasion that he was virtuous, by recounting that he was not so. Herein is a proof, how powerful over the heart of man is the picture of a vivid and real impression; of the sympathy it excites, and how established between author and reader, is that intimate relation by which the one feels as quickly as the other describes. It has been truly said, that no one knew better than Rousseau how to reveal his inmost soul. Who has not felt charmed and moved in reading the animated picture of his vague reveries; of his hopes continually blighted and continually revived; of the enjoyments of his imagination; of his romances of virtue and happiness, always balked, and as often renewed; of those storms which come from the utmost depths of the heart; in fine, all the history of a being recluse and thoughtful? After we are thus placed by the magic of truth, in each of these situations, Rousseau makes us partake of his thoughts, and, so to speak, of his actions. We fall by an irresistible proneness into

his errors; we take part with his foolish pride; we see nothing but outrage and injustice; we become the enemies of all mankind; and we prefer him to them. But, on better reflection, we discover that the man who has so enchanted us, led a uniformly egotistical life; that in every point he brought us back to himself; that the enjoyments he courted had always something solitary and undivided; that he only sacrificed his interest to his pride; that he was envious of that he could not obtain, although he had often renounced its pursuit; that his affections even had a selfish character; that he loved for his own gratification, and not for that of others. At length it repents us to be thus slandered in not believing ourselves better than such a man: we thoroughly comprehend all his faults, but no longer pardon them, nor confound explanations with excuses.

It remains yet to speak of one of those men of the first order, who formed the lustre of the age. With Voltaire, Montesquieu, and Rousseau, we must associate Buffon; four writers who left far behind them all their contemporaries.

The spectacle of nature may affect the mind in two very different ways. It presents itself as a source of varied impressions, influencing the soul, addressing the imagination, and exciting the sentiment. Such is the tableau of the universe, in its direct affinity with man. It was thus, that in the first ages of the world, men were struck, when they were

simple and childlike; neither seeking to compare nor to explain; every object stamping a new and insulated impression, consequently much stronger and more lively; the world appearing to them an accumulation of wonders terrible or imposing; their imagination only being smitten, they would see nothing but picturesque and poetical aspects. In time, they would discover conformity and differences, they would class and divide objects, they would find analogies in the effects, from them ascend to causes. Nature would no longer be only the principle of individual sensations; it would become subject of reflection, inducing general ideas independently of each individual. This is the spirit of the natural sciences; their principle, as we have said, is to consider nature in itself, and to make abstraction from the effect produced upon any man in particular.

We see by this that the savant changed the primitive direction of the human mind, and carried its activity to inquire into causes, to divert it from the care of representing the first impressions arising out of the appearances of the universe. But when sciences are in their nativity; whether endowed with greater force of imagination in seeking the employ, or enchanted with the novel instrument discovered, he exaggerates the power, man bears into the explanation of the phenomena a spirit productive and impatient, which, unable to at-

tain to a knowledge of nature, hastily guesses at it.

That epoch originates numberless systems and ingenious hypotheses; sciences constructed from few facts; each submitting them to his own notions; each day seeing them destroyed, and again springing up under another form. Such was the first progress of the sciences among the Greeks, who described with poesy and eloquence.

The talent of Buffon had more than one resemblance to that which animated the philosophers of Greece, whose imagination was so vivid and so bold. He angered himself against those who desired to make the history of nature a simple nomenclature, and a collection of facts, united together by artificial bonds. The zeal of his spirit applied itself to penetrate suddenly into the principles of nature, to reveal its secret; and likewise to offer it under picturesque relations. Such was the double use Buffon made of his eloquence.

The character and habits of animals, the aspect and features of countries, were traced by his pencil with an inconceivable magic. The frequently vague impression that we experience, on the first view of objects, is, by him, reproduced with a precision and simplicity that astonishes every moment. In reading Buffon, we feel anew that which we have often experienced without well defining it; again, the feelings arise, that the horse galloping over a meadow,

or the ass bearing with patience its burthen, had excited. The picture of eternal snows freezes our senses; and, when he represents the muddy swamps of South America, a profound impression of disgust and horror entirely seizes us. No painter speaks more to the imagination than Buffon. His language, in which some persons cannot find traces either of art or patience, is notwithstanding the faithful representation of the most lively feelings, often so true, that the reader is as much excited as if the author had intended to paint the effects of the passions. When he depicts with justice and depth, we feel in our heart the least of its movements.

The style of Buffon is not less perfect when he ascends to general causes, and when he exposes his brilliant hypothesis; it is then splendid and simply persuasive; he participates in the grandeur of his subject; the examples and observations upon facts are engrafted insensibly with the theory. Nothing in his discourses seems laboured; they have something at once serious and elevated; they are worthy, but not ambitious. The author appears, by an extensive view, to include all nature, and not overpowered by the spectacle, although he appreciates its grandeur; in a word, no writer of the eighteenth century speaks finer language than Buffon, or, more properly speaking, had grander thoughts. He approaches, nearer than any other, the authors of the preceding era, who disposed of

language so boldly, and, in a manner, to engrave the features of their heart and thoughts; though Buffon treated subjects with a less profound and less general interest. We remark in the science and writings of Buffon, traces of the epoch. A century before a writer had been similarly occupied in the study of nature. Descartes had likewise the noble desire to understand it; but that which most occupied his spirit was, the union of the moral with the physical nature. He employed himself unremittingly to find their common centre; and, in reading his works, we see how much that important question weighed upon his mind. Pascal reproached him with having done his utmost to exclude the Deity from his system, not thinking that such a genius could not render a more transcendant homage to the Divine Being than by all moral ideas, which only could unite themselves to that Great First Source. Buffon, placed in another epoch, only considered physical nature. We were tired of the loftier study; mind had taken another direction; it had reached to the exclusion of the Deity, or, at least, the mention of Him was discarded from all the writings of philosophers; those who resorted to the great question were inclined to admit one single nature only, the physical nature. Buffon held himself entirely estranged from such a subject, and, in spite of the greatness of his spirit, shewed himself little animated by a desire to engage

in it. After Buffon, the sciences began to depart from the track they had followed; they entered upon the almost absolute dominion of experience; they lost the contemplative character, to acquire the character of accurate observation. In that career they made rapid progress; became practical; were allied to the arts; their study required less talent; a greater number of persons might learn them; the ambition of savants aspired to less important discoveries; but they nevertheless attained to a greater certainty. It was thus that, in their turn, they threw a sparkling lustre upon France, so much honoured by its literature in the preceding period.

But this is not a reason to disdain the aspect under which Buffon viewed science; or to reduce the glory, yet so great, of an eloquent writer and inimitable painter.

The desire to explain, the curiosity into causes, the love for general theories, form the first and necessary aliment of the sciences; it is because we hope to reveal some great secret of nature, that we feel an ardour to learn its details; the hope becomes emulation. If to have a strong desire for an hypothesis be injurious to knowledge, the despair of forming a system hurts it much more; since by that, we lose courage to observe facts, as well as the means of uniting them together. If, then, we constantly decry the spirit of theory; if we be armed with ridicule and contempt against

him who exercises his imagination, and, at the same time, his faculty to observe, we shall destroy the germ and principle of warmth by which the sciences live ; we shall break the thread that conducts through the labyrinth of observed facts; and the mind will lose, by degrees, a curiosity that no longer expects gratification. Savants will become the manipulators destined to aid the practice of the mechanical arts, and the human mind will find itself withered in that branch of its activity.

Few writers have attempted to imitate Buffon. Bailly, who was more known by his misfortunes than his works, has since desired to give to science the charms of style ; he could not see that the principal talent of Buffon was a rich and powerful imagination; and did his utmost to supply a prodigality of ornament that was far from producing the same effects.

Now we have travelled over the most brilliant epoch of the eighteenth century, we shall have no more to notice any of those men of genius who illustrated their country and their times. The old age of Voltaire, Buffon, Rousseau, saw nothing exalted enough to resemble them. But the second rank was occupied by writers who merited some reputation.

CHAPTER IX.

The drama was the branch of literature most sensible of the decadency; it required, more than any other, a lively imagination and true feelings. Labour, reflection, and study could not of themselves form the genuine character of dramatic poetry. To suppose the attainment of a profound knowledge of the human heart, that knowledge would yet remain sterile, were it produced by a far-fetched examination, and if there were not something instinctive to give the author a faculty of depicting personages from the imagination, and not by theory.

When we make tragedy or comedy with the memory of those who have calculated characters, situations, and effects; when we regard the drama as a work of art, whose perfection depends more or less upon an industrious practice; we cannot hope for a prolonged success. On glancing further, we shall perceive that the works of our great dramatic poets remain alone, or nearly so, upon the

stage; and we shall successively find those disappear who had them chalked out as their models.

Comedy had finished with Gresset. Even before his time, we had heard a certain precious jargon, formed by an endeavour to describe the language of a society, in which every thing, even to the feelings, was submitted to the empire of the mode; in which frivolity had its pedants; carelessness its demonstrations; and in which impertinence seemed prescribed by some, and courted by others.

To paint affectation superficially is, doubtless, an easy task; it was that of the comic authors. By the side of their ephemeral comedies, dramas, imitated by Diderot, showed another species of affectation. Exaggeration of sentiment; pomp of words; the mania of rendering mean personages solemn; and of ennobling that which seemed debased by situation; such were the features of that kind of work. Scarcely any have survived; and, were they not testimonies to the spirit of the times, it would be unnecessary to mention them. Collé was an author who has left only a few marks of his talent, and shews that he knew much better than his contemporaries what comedy ought to be.

In tragedy, two writers had a success that yet survives them. Lemierre was remarkable for a sort of nerve of expression, which was not, however, from warmth of feeling, for he could neither draw a character, nor delineate a situation; but in his rude, though not natural style, we meet him in

portions where the declamation neither wants strength nor height.

Dubelloy was happier; he takes shelter with names illustrious and dear to France; he reminds us of our ancient and glorious souvenirs. Perhaps our brave chevaliers, their noble deeds of arms, their simple virtues, and all the history of the old times of our country, should have inspired Dubelloy in a truer manner, and withheld him from those pompous declamations into which he fell.

We delight to meet again with some of the features of those periods and persons that he desired to sketch, and whose names alone succeed so well in subjugating us; but, at the time he wrote, we had a great taste for the pomp of words. Voltaire himself did not always preserve his tragic heroes from that defect.

Colardeau had, perhaps, a genius more conformed to poetry than the authors of whom we have spoken; nevertheless, he was inferior to them in the dramatic art; and his talent displayed itself with more success in another career. He had not strength enough to conceive a vast subject; his mind was not struck with the ensemble of objects.

The sentiment exalted by passion, or enriched by the imagination, was not the source of his inspiration. Then he confined poetry to be nothing more than an elegant and careful expression of ideas that had nothing poetical in themselves. It seems that the light constraint to which one is subject when

clothing the thought in the form of verse, fixes the attention more particularly to the thought; the fact penetrates deeper; it induces a more lively and delicate action upon the feelings of the poet, and, consequently, upon those of his readers. We may, at least, ascribe to this cause the charm of the versification, although applied to such ideas as would be without effect in prose.

This species of talent appears also suited to translation, where the thought is furnished by another, and in which the merit consists in receiving an impression strong enough to secure a happy re-production.

Colardeau was distinguished in both these styles, but has since been surpassed.

Saint-Lambert, his contemporary, cultivated only descriptive poetry: he was correct and elegant, but had less facility and charm.

Two poets, who died young, shewed, perhaps, a truer inspiration, and have left proud regrets after them—they were Malfilatre and Gilbert.

The prose writers were more distinguished. Perhaps, none took more care, or put forth more claims, to arrive at eloquence than Thomas, who figures with some honour in the new school of poesy; but he followed a false route. Not knowing that eloquence is in the character of the thought, he believed it was attained in tormenting his style, to give it force and grandeur. He tried every artificial means of rhetoric, in order to give his

language effect; forgetting that the intimate correspondence of ideas, with their expression, is the only thing which makes a lively impression. He likewise employed combinations, to appear a profound thinker; he affected to spread in his writings, ideas and relations drawn up from the exact sciences, or the arts; but, as he possessed them in an incomplete manner, as he studied them for citation, and not for knowledge, he shewed less science than pedantry.

Thus, Thomas was sometimes affected and declamatory, while he thought himself sublime and touching. The themes he cultivated also tended to throw him into those defects. The funeral oration, delivered in a church, surrounded by all the pomp of religion and death, finds itself supported by circumstances that elevate and excite the soul in a real manner. But the panegyrist who, to gratify an academical assemblage, tries, after a lapse of years, to produce similar effects, and would strike the mind by grand and profound words, when nothing disposes us to receive the impression, will fall into affectation. He is far from being moved, although he concerts artifices of style; he cannot, therefore, touch us. The panegyric thus conceived is, as we have often remarked, a style essentially cold and false. On one occasion, Thomas had the good fortune completely to fix upon the true character of an elevated and moving eloquence. He brought forward the

praise of Marcus Aurelius; he transported the imagination, even to the place and the times in which the action passed. He placed us in Rome, in the midst of the funeral train of the virtuous emperor; that empire, which embraced the universe, and whose fate depended upon a single man, he represents to us penetrated with grief, and trembling with fears for the future: he showed us philosophy in tears; an army weeping for their chief; and tyranny, newly born, augmenting the regrets for expired virtue. At that time, in the midst of so vast a spectacle, solemn words and exalted expressions were in perfect accordance with the feelings, and produced all their effect.

Marmontel likewise essayed to be a poet; but left no other reputation than that of a prose writer, although that is well merited. He had a constant facility and elegance. The first chapters of Bélisaire recal the Telemachus; and we regret that the author, instead of pretending to instruct the king and the people, as all writers then thought themselves obliged, had not followed the true direction of his talent, which was to recite and to paint with fidelity. But he did not obtain so much success by his Contes Moraux, which describe with great felicity the changes and opinions formed in the habitual order of things. He has been reproached with having copied, without taste or truth, the language of society at that period.

He would learn if, in the midst of a depravation

of morals, words had not lost all modesty and decency. The memoirs and recitals lead us to think this. The romances of Crébillon the younger, which are nothing more than vice clothed in impudence and affectation, and which are not actually readable, had some success from their newness, because they were full of accordance with the morals.

Of the rest, Marmontel published other stories, in which he did not essay the reproduction of the passing tints in the aspect of society, and they had more interest and simplicity than the first.

But it was in the Eléments de Littérature that Marmontel showed himself to the most advantage. The desire to distinguish himself by a sort of revolt against received opinions, at first threw him into some paradoxes, which he defended badly enough, and which by degrees he renounced. The rhetoric just then adopted had borne the attention to the exterior forms of eloquence and poetry, considering them as arts, and had tried to indicate their procedure, so to speak, mechanically, to aid in the practice of them. In general, rhetoricians had little thought of diving beyond that; they had not sought the union between the various changes of language and the correspondent movements of the soul; and with all those circumstances in which the speaker and him spoken to find themselves placed.

Fénélon, in "Les Dialogues et les Lettres sur l'Eloquence," Montesquieu in "l'Essai sur le Goût,"

indicated this procedure; they occupied themselves with the sentiment to which we owed the arts of the imagination, and not the details of their practice. The Abbé Dubos, in "Les Réflexions sur la Poésie et la Peinture," had followed the same direction: and so did Marmontel; he analysed, with finesse and discernment, the species of sentiment that characterizes the different forms in which the productions of the mind invest themselves. He inquired into the causes which might influence the sentiment and modify it; he did not apply himself to those rules which are powerless to form talent; he learnt to feel; to admire the works of the imagination; and not to compare them deliberately with the standard prescribed by rhetoric, in order to judge of their conformity, more or less exact with the model. Whilst the older rhetoricians, in the height of their career and their technical language, conveyed to the mind no sort of pleasure, Marmontel preserved, in his style, those lively impressions that contribute to our literary enjoyment. To read and to admire is in effect a feeling; with the others, it was that feeling faithfully represented.

It was to paint that kind of emotion particularly that M. de Laharpe excelled yet more than Marmontel. He was also more distinguished as a poet. Some of his works are retained on the stage, although they have no original character, and he was sometimes graceful in the lighter kind of poetry; but his renown reposes almost entirely

upon the success he obtained in criticism. He dispersed through the journals, at different periods of his life, those materials which afterwards were united together under the name of "Cours de Littérature."

He did not, like Marmontel, engage himself in the general principles of literature, but examined how those principles had been applied in the composition of this or that work in particular; and, above all, exerted himself to reproduce the sentiments to which the examination of works, submitted to his judgment, gave birth. No one shewed more nerve than M. de Laharpe in that kind of style; he was absolute in his constructions, which he embraced with pride, and abandoned himself to them without measure; no one ever yielded more to his own opinions; his language took an extreme strength and power; and he often used the most animated eloquence to describe the effect produced upon his mind by literary beauties and defects.

But from such a description of talent results inconveniences that M. de Laharpe did not avoid. He bore neither reserve nor hesitation in his judgments, nor suspected that sometimes they were dictated by influences foreign to literature. His friendships, and yet oftener his enmities, biassed his strictures. The little flexibility of his mind likewise injured the skill and depth of his views. He only saw literature according to his own ha-

bitual ideas; taking the form to which he was accustomed for a perfect type, he could not feel the beauties which entered not into that system. He likewise appreciated, in a very superficial manner, all literature ancient and foreign.

We may observe also that the admiration of M. de Laharpe bestowed itself very often upon artifices in composition; to the calculations of art that he supposed were unfolded in the chief works; whilst he neglected to consider the feeling that had dictated them, the circumstances that had influenced the author, the character of his talent, in short, all that is the life and principle of the productions of the mind. It was, on the contrary, in this system that numberless critics of his day wrote whatever might be their opinion. There are few who have shewn so much eloquence as M. de Laharpe; but many have shewn a much greater penetration and a more subtile and profound analysis.

Among the writers in prose, no one applied his talent to that kind which belongs to the best employment; the era gave us no remarkable historian. We translated, with elegance, the wise and instructive writings of the English historians; they were the models of that method which had already been adopted in writing history, and which we noticed in speaking of Voltaire; but they found no rivals in France.

Nevertheless, the writers who were engaged in

history during the eighteenth century, were numerous; but the nature of the French philosophy ill accorded with that species of composition. If we would infuse a charm into it, it is necessary, to excel in the recital, to place ourselves in the scene that we would describe, to render it, as much as possible, lively and animated.

For contemporary historians, and those who write from oral traditions, it is easier to feel and to excite that kind of interest. Those who set forth the history of ancient times, cannot attain to the same end but by a profound knowledge of written evidences. They should cast off the spirit of the age, transport themselves by erudition into the past, and make themselves contemporary. We should little exact such complaisance from a writer of the eighteenth century. He saw the epoch presenting too much above all preceding ones, to be willing to descend for an instant. He would have thought it injurious to his judgment, and prejudicial to his view, if he had essayed to partake, or even to conceive, the feelings of his forefathers. Besides, we had begun to have so grand an idea of human reason, and the point of perfection to which it had reached, that in every sort of study we sought, above all things, for positive notions. We cared little to learn that which others had thought or felt about facts; each would have his will at his own free disposal, in order to build upon that base an edifice of argument quite new. To hasten the

moment when we might immerse ourselves in that creation, it was needful to reduce the greatest possible number of first notions, and, more than all, to disengage them from any particular colour.

It was thus that historical works withered and became an assemblage of facts without union, or a succession of abstract arguments reposing upon an insufficient base. In that way ignorance likewise began to circulate. In effect, to be much acquainted with the writings and labours of past times, we ought to have some love and esteem for them; we ought to delight ourselves in all their details, and place confidence in their merit. When, on the contrary, we would only enquire into their substance, and disdain their spirit, we study without taste or order; we persuade ourselves that we know enough, and we think that all is useless, because nothing appears to us agreeable. It was by this means that instruction became superficial in France; we attempted only the quackery of knowledge, in order to support, in an apparent manner, the vanity of argument; and with this pretended love for positive knowledge, we were never less nourished by a real erudition.

By this rule, history was deprived of that which gives to the recital a lively and sustaining interest. No one composed a sketch conscientiously and traced with feeling. Some made abridgments or extracts, deprived of all the charm of the details, Their brevity seemed destined to aid the memory,

but the design failed; for we cannot easily remember that which does not interest us.

The president, Hénault, gave the first model of that skeleton history. His talent was worthy of a better employ. He found means in those rough-hewn summaries, to make it apparent that he had a more animated and stronger mind than the other contemporary historians. It is that which will give durability to his reputation: if his merit had been confined to the plan of his work, there would have been no reason to prefer him to his numberless imitators. Others gave more extension to their works; but employed themselves to make a parade of their systems and arguments. They regarded facts as proofs; and more important in the eyes of the historian were his opinions than his recitals. Condillac wrote many volumes in that spirit, and none could better make us feel his defects.

Of all the historians of that school, the Abbé Raynal had the most renown. The success, rather than the merit of the "Histoire des deux Indes," imposes upon us the obligation to speak of it. Raynal, after some obscure essays, produced that grand work. Many persons boasted its utility, and the precision of the positive notions that it enclosed. It seems they were exact in all that had reference to commerce and the arts. The exposition of historical facts showed, on the contrary, less erudition and criticism, but the illustra-

tion "De l'Histoire des deux Indes," bears particularly the character of Raynal's philosophy.

Perhaps no author of the period failed to so great an extent of sense in the ideas, or measure in the manner of expressing them. It is difficult to conceive how any one could betray such delirium of opinions, or such ridiculous emphasis in words. Raynal held up to view those principles which were opposed to the good order of society. There were no crimes committed during the last troubles in France, that were not, so to speak, brought to a great crisis by that declamator. Nevertheless, when he found himself really immersed in the disorders of a revolution, he showed himself just, moderate, and courageous. It is very unsafe to confide in opinions that are neither the result of experience nor reflection! A writer, shut up in his closet, ignorant of men and their affairs, far from all reality, inflames himself with his own rhetoric; revolutions, wars; the effusion of tides of blood; the destruction of the people; appear no more to him than grand spectacles, the ornaments of triumph to his opinions. He thinks it brave not to alter his notions, notwithstanding all the fracas of events. That man lays his pen aside, and becomes that which he really is, — the friend of peace, mildness, and pity. Himself detesting, from the mouth of another, the words that he had committed to paper. In civilized times, writing becomes a trade distinct from habitual life; it is a

situation enjoyed only at certain moments, and quitted when the duty is performed. In old times an author was a man whom genius and circumstances brought to express his real thoughts, with more power than the vulgar; by that means, language was less prepared, and opinions were more circumspect.

The historical works of the erudites deserve particular mention. The collection of the Academy of Inscriptions, is assuredly a very honourable monument to the eighteenth century. The character of the savans who yielded themselves to those studies, had somewhat of the ancient spirit of men of letters. Their pursuit alone occupied them; they devoted themselves to it with patience, for the love of it, and not for the love of success. At the same time they acquired a sound criticism; they disengaged themselves from that blind prejudice, which the erudites of the preceding ages brought into every thing that related to antiquity; and became every day better known.

They introduced themselves into the morals and opinions of the Greeks and Romans, and by that better understood their works. Instead of wishing to accommodate antiquity to the taste of the moderns, they tried to reproduce the colour and character of antiquity in all its purity: the system of translation likewise changed, and was preferred to that adopted in the seventeenth century.

The learned were likewise devoted to researches yet more interesting. Whilst historians and politicians neglected the old times of France, they made it the object of a great part of their labours ; they buried themselves in our ancient institutions, our laws, our origin; they contributed to publish valuable collections for our common right; their imagination also, was not insensible to the souvenirs of the country; and the literati might learn from them some powerful charm to recal the antique manners, the chivalry, and the naïve poetry, of our bards and troubadours.

If we were examining the literature of ancient republics, we should place the orators before the writers, and before those who had employed their talent to compose books : with them, spoken eloquence had something truer and more penetrating, since it made, so to speak, part of the person : speech was for orators a sort of action, for they used it in the direct relations with men. It departed from the domain of the imagination, to confound itself entirely with the character, the opinions, or the interests ; but in our practice, orators draw much nearer to the literati ; they have no arena, where eloquence might serve as a weapon to defend personal sentiments — where it might shine in the contest, and be filled with a complete reality. The men permitted to speak are always in a given position ; the character of their language, the nature of their ideas, determined before-hand.

The oration is with them a part of the profession that they fill in society; it is needful to conform to its dictation, and not to that of the feeling.

Nevertheless, a priest, who is always immersed in his holy calling, whom the world never meets in its frivolous ranks, who, speaking in the sanctuary, has never enforced other words than the Word of God, must attain, more than any other, to the sublimest eloquence. Like the ancient orators, he speaks his true thoughts, such as, from firm conviction, he wishes to prevail over mankind; for how much greater and more touching than all those that belong to human interests, are those words — "Death!" and "Eternity!" — Honour, liberty, country, the noblest ideas of men, are humbled, when we think of that abyss in which they are all ingulfed.

Those were happy who saw Bossuet, embellished by his silver locks and many virtues, standing in the pulpit before the coffin of the great Condé, and consecrating the praise of the perishable glory, by associating it with the praises of the glory of the life eternal! Human words had, doubtless, never been greater; and we think that the imagination never could have created a sublimer spectacle.

But the time for religious eloquence had now passed; orators, and their auditory too, had changed; faith was extinct with the greater part of men, and cold or timid with others. We no longer resorted to the temple, to hear those truths preached that were

established and respected from deep and heartfelt conviction; we no longer arrived there with feelings of conformity and sympathy: quite the contrary — we were conducted there by a curiosity without good will. We came to listen to the Holy Word, but not to imbibe it; we went to learn whether an orator could easily overcome the difficulty of speaking upon subjects that no longer obtained either belief, or veneration; we listened to a sermon with the same disposition that led us to an academical lecture.

To combat that unhappy propensity of minds, it was necessary that orators should be filled with zeal and boldness; profound in the knowledge of religion; and animated by a faith that the incredulity of the age could afflict, but not intimidate. But, by ill luck, the public always influenced those who addressed it, more than they influenced the public; and, ordinarily, to please men, and to produce a more certain effect upon them, we entered into their feelings, or, at least, we sought not to wound them. Thus the preachers of the eighteenth century felt the effect of the prevailing spirit. It was with a sort of fear or reserve that they fulfilled their holy ministry: they dreaded to offend the world; they endeavoured to get its suffrages for their profession and their discourses. Accommodating themselves to the taste of their auditory, they avoided every thing that inclined to tenet or positive principles of religion; they en-

larged with more complacency upon that which simply had reference to human morality; and religion was employed only as a convenient accessory, that it was needful to dissemble, as adroitly as possible, in order to avoid derision; they blushed at the Gospel instead of professing it boldly.

That equivocal disposition could not inspire eloquence. Besides which, their resources were suspended in discarding the tenet to embrace the moral! Did they think it possible to replace, by causes purely human, the means religion furnishes to strike the imagination and to rouse souls? The ornamented and worldly style, the elegance of fine spirits, — could they compensate for the resources which the truly Christian orator finds in the striking and mysterious language of the Sacred Writings?

Pulpit eloquence lost its simple and almost common form, which rendered the thought stronger and more wonderful, which stamped upon it a particular character, and drew it off from a union with the compositions of writers; it lost also that powerful erudition which reminded us unceasingly either of the divine souvenirs of the Scriptures, or the touching remembrances of the first ages of religion, the genius of the fathers of the church, the acts of the martyrs, or the devotion of the recluses. Preachers and pontiffs as they were, they became men of letters. And, if we would find the true character of sacred eloquence, it must be sought for, not among the greatest and most skilful in

the church; but with some simple and stern missionary, insulated, by his habits, from all the influences of the age.

The eloquence of the bar likewise demands some attention; we find in it traces of the progress of opinions. It had more reference to political events; and the direction it took, had, perhaps, more direct effects.

At the commencement of the eighteenth century, advocates had forsaken the vain luxury of erudition, the pedantry, and the ridiculous *bel-esprit* of which Patru was already divested. Their language had become simple and serious; their plea had a grave and measured tone; they no longer confined themselves to discuss from citations and authorities; they were engaged in seeking, from principles, to make a base for their argument. It was by that species of talent that Cochin, Lenormand, and some others, acquired a merited reputation. In another branch of law eloquence, D'Aguesseau was distinguished by the same advantages, appropriated to the situation in which he was placed. He was elegant, suitable and dignified in all that he wrote as a magistrate.

But a concurrence of things introduced, by degrees, fresh changes. While writers debated all the questions of public right, and criminal or civil legislation, and discussed the rights and obligations of citizens, magistrates, and sovereigns, it was difficult for men who, from occupation, were devoted

to such matters, to continue to treat them in a manner simple and positive. They very soon engaged in the development of general views; to ascend to universal causes; to establish a theory, instead of discussing a fact. Legislative eloquence thus acquired a more extended interest; it seemed stronger and more nourished by thought; perhaps, at the bottom, it had less of true science, and removed itself from its real destination; but it was susceptible of producing greater effects. It was thus we saw law and literature unite themselves together. The pleas of lawyers and the discourses of magistrates had a success as universal as the productions of men of letters; and men of letters were capable of appearing in a career, to which a few years before they were strangers. The government contributed to give a new spirit to the bar; and to make it, unknowingly, that which would render it hostile. Without being tyrannical, it would not recognise personal rights;—in the midst of its weakness, it professed principles of despotism the most absolute.

In the face of the whole country, in despite of all the souvenirs and written laws, royal authority pretended that nothing ought to balance its action; writers were encouraged to sustain that doctrine; and we desired to fortify religious authority by some historical stories, in the cutting and irreflective spirit of military courtiers. The magistracy, which for two centuries had found itself, from the force of

things, charged to defend the rights of citizens, and even those of the nation, continually opposed itself to that claim of which we had not preserved the remembrance, badly as it seemed to accord with the incertitude and debility of government. It bore impatiently the opposition of the tribunals and contested the noble privilege to maintain the laws. Magistrates vainly relied upon the authority of souvenirs yet recent; upon the morals of the nation; upon testimonies written and positive: they were not listened to; they were considered as rebels. At the same time, the learned and the ignorant marvelled to see them defend their rights by such reasons. It appeared pedantic and gothic to seek demonstrations except from the general principles of politics, and from the nature of communities. We soon obeyed that double direction; the advice of parliament, the speeches pronounced by its members, the opinions of magistrates, felt the ensemble of things, and changed character.

Thus, the magistracy, and every thing surrounding it, was constrained to depart from the route which it ought naturally to have followed. Some particular causes more powerfully contributed to that result. While religion was attacked or forsaken, its defenders, as if they had taken pleasure in co-operating with its enemies, fomented the discords and persecutions in its own bosom. Faith was enfeebled; but self-love had preserved all its fire; and the church employed the last remains of

its force to show intolerance towards a part of its children. Violent and arbitrary means were demanded and obtained. The depositaries of the laws saw with chagrin that they were violated, and strove to defend the party oppressed. Tribunals and advocates throughout the kingdom, were occupied in discussing the right that the government of the church had to exercise such power. The questions of liberty; the limit of authorities; the constitution of the Christian republic; all these were debated, either with the weapons of erudition, or by the arguments drawn from the nature of things. Resistance on one side quickly brought exaggeration on the other. That controversy, of which we know so little at present, was one of the causes that most powerfully influenced the spirit of advocates, by giving them a great facility in treating of general questions, in furnishing them with weapons, and inspiring them at the same time with the desire to make use of them for attack.

The suppression of the order of Jesuits was likewise a favourable occasion for the eloquence and authority of magistrates.

The examination of the statutes of that powerful order, and the doctrines imputed to it; the danger of its existence as a body in the state; its influence, through instruction, upon the nation;—those were questions of the highest importance, and necessary for the discussion of all Europe. Many magistrates were found equal to the part they had to fulfil; and

unfolding with wisdom the loftiest thoughts and most extensive considerations.

M. de Montclar and M. de Castillon, at Aix, recal us, by the gravity and elevation of their eloquence, to the best times of the magistracy. M. de Chalotais partook more of the spirit which was then abroad in the world, and relied upon the philosophical doctrines, in which his talent acquired powerful success. A little later, M. Servan shewed likewise the same degree of merit in the other questions.

In examining the various kinds of literature, we have endeavoured to shew the progress of opinions during the first years of the century; we have seen the march become more and more rapid, every day presenting fewer obstacles to oppose; though efforts were made to arrest it for a time. We wished to raise a party that should oppose itself to the success of the literati, of which we dreaded the influence. Some trials had been made. Some comedies had been represented, in which we had vainly sought to throw ridicule upon those who had made literature their most powerful weapon. Some journals had been encouraged in their criticisms. In the Academy, discourses were directed against the opinions which then prevailed. But all those efforts were useless. Those who encouaged them, subjugated by the fashion and the general train, were sorry to appear dupes of the factitious movement that they excited, and the first to ridi-

cule their defenders. And, in fact, one party were without faith, and had no other motive than jealousy and particular dislike; at the bottom they had the same habits of cynisme and frivolity with which they reproached their adversaries; the other owed their sincerity only to a mediocre and narrow mind, which contested that which it could not comprehend. It was soon necessary to revoke those essays which prepared an easy conquest for the dominant spirit.

We now come to the last period; to that period, almost contemporary, which was terminated by so terrible a denouement. Here letters become less important in their detail. We shall no more be obliged to seek in writings for the general spirit of the nation; it had become more active; it had taken more extension and power; it quickly began to shew itself in deeds.

We shall have to represent a tableau greater and more animated of the universal disposition; literary works became less and less important, when they were confined to repeat that which might be distinctly heard pronounced by the voice of a whole pēople. It will no longer be the reciprocal action of morals and literature, the one upon the other, that we shall have to describe; for letters and philosophy can no longer be distinguished from morals; they make a part of them.

CHAPTER X.

The end of the reign of Louis XV. was signalized by a greater irregularity in all things.

That monarch was plunged more and more in a degraded life; he brought, say they, a disposition to alter the posture of affairs; and a self-love to show himself indifferent to it; while all who surrounded him thought proper to imitate his absurd example. Thus all the respect which ought to attach to the government was destroyed. In the latter part of his reign, Louis XV. employed his kingly power and excited popular animadversion, which increased the contempt: it is peculiar to an unsteady authority to regard despotism as a means of safety. The magistracy had once more been called to account for being opposed to royal authority. The public were filled with indignation at those acts which they considered as arbitrary. One writer became the organ of that resentment. Beaumarchais, in that particular cause, took for an ally the general opinion, and by that means obtained a success which had all the vivacity of the mode.

His memoirs, as well as his comedies, are full of nerve, cynisme, buffoonery, elegance, and bad taste; and a singular mélange of pride, with a complete absence of all dignity.

What a deplorable spectacle! a nation adopting such an organ of its opinions; a tribunal in whose bosom Aristophanes had established his theatre, there to hold up to the public derision those magistrates who, by misfortune, were worthy of the treatment; and that which was more sad, a government that could neither be pitied nor excused; a vicious circle, whence the hope of good could scarcely flow!

It was thus, in the midst of hatred and contempt, that Louis XV. terminated his too long career. It was with a lively feeling of hope that we saw the new king ascend the throne. Every one expected that things would alter their appearance; every one believed that his views and desires would be realized; the monarch was animated by a purer zeal for the public benefit; few kings had a more sincere and constant intention to live for the happiness of his people; but his mind and character were too feeble to have any determined resolution: he wished to do right, but he knew not how to perform it.

At length, to attain his end, he referred it to those he supposed had the most knowledge. It was then that philosophy thought itself arrived at the point of its ambition. Ministers were chosen

from its ranks, and were called upon to fulfil the promises of their works and doctrines. They brought an earnest desire to be useful; a sanguine love of the just and the honest; a severity of power, and a great devotedness to their sovereign; but they misunderstood the character of the nation and the age; they were not able to defend themselves from the frivolous intrigues directed against them. Nourished by theories, they knew not how to adapt their opinions, or to adopt them without noise, and, as it were, insensibly; they could not essay the amelioration, without interruption to the habits, and without alarm to the self-love. In fine, their aid was without fruit; a fatality was shed over all circumstances; and all efforts were powerless to bring about the hoped-for good. Nevertheless, the incertitude of the monarch, who seemed to acknowledge that a change in the order of things was necessary, though he knew not how to operate it, had directed minds with yet greater force towards that notion; each applied himself to the extent of his capacity, to the principles of philosophy and politics. Confused notions of government, legislation, public economy, fermented all heads; there was in the nation a vague desire of improvement; an intoxication in the knowledge acquired; a superb disdain for the past; in short, an effervescence that was constantly increasing.

Literature was regarded as the universal instrument, with which each thought it needful to be

armed; to be a writer, was to occupy a rank in the state; and mind had become a power to which all rendered homage.

Opinions circulated promptly throughout the nation; every class, either from self-love or imitation, hastened to adopt the ideas of those above them; and never were there more means of accelerating the community. Never had literature shown itself more popular; the minor theatres, the almanacks, the most ignoble romances, were replete with the opinions of the mode, and conveyed to the people. A traveller returned to France after some years of absence, and was questioned upon the changes that he remarked. "Nothing," said he, "save that what was once spoken in the saloon, is now repeated in the streets."

Thus were all classes and conditions crammed with authors and philosophers. In the absence of sentiments and ideas, the greater number nourished themselves with words badly understood and ill directed. The journals marvellously aided that tendency. In thus multiplying, they had ceased to be, as formerly, a collection of solid judgments upon sciences and letters;—published every day, or at short intervals, they had acquired readers without number; and, made with more facility, they were read with less reflection. By this progress society and conversation had acquired a great influence. The pleasure of communicating ideas as fast as they grew, gave them more rapidity; and

to enjoy more quickly and more completely the effects, had propagated the mode of communication.

The journals made intercourse common between thousands of men; and taught them to think with ease, though without maturity. Thus everywhere disappeared the hesitation in forming an opinion, and the reserve in making it known; each built upon his science or his judgment. In the meantime, that universal movement presented at the first view a spectacle fair enough. A general zeal for the good of humanity animated all thoughts; we were lost in illusions, to speak the truth; but they were not criminal. Much pride and vanity entered into all the fermentation; but personal interest, properly speaking, blended not its sordid calculations. The sciences were arrived at a remarkable epoch in their progress; they struggled to be useful, and not unfrequently succeeded. In short, there was in all circumstances something more moral, and less degraded, than in the last years of the reign of Louis XV. Just as we sometimes see, in old men, a return of strength and activity, an unexpected spark of the fire of youth; exhausting the feeble remains of a worn-out body, and presaging some violent malady. In effect, the public spirit aimed more and more at an alteration, without much knowing that which ought to be changed. From the throne to the last rank of the people, all wished for a new order; there was a complete discordance between institutions and opinions. We tried for some time

to make institutions bend; circumstances were opposed; the thing appeared impossible; institutions fell.

In the midst of the rumbling noise, precursor of the storm, literature resumed more vivacity and a truer character. It was at that time that the translator of Virgil, whose talent had already been announced with éclat, composed a work, in which, descriptive poetry was ornamented with all its charms. Then, and not without surprise, in the midst of an era so removed from simplicity of sentiment, and a naïve painting of nature, we saw, like a phenomenon, a work clothed with those colors whose usage appeared to be lost. Posterity would with difficulty believe that Paul et Virginie had been composed at the end of the eighteenth century. Without doubt it would guess that a mind in love with solitude and meditation, inspired by the spectacle of a creature, wild and almost spotless, could alone have traced such a picture.

It was during those years that two erratic poets distinguished themselves in a species which, until then, had been unknown in French letters.

Comedy forsook the affected and ridiculous tone of Dorat and his imitators.

Collin d'Harleville carried us back, not to the times of Molière, but to those of Destouches or of Lachaussée. He knew how to spread a soft interest into sentiments expressed with charm and truth.

Fabre, his rival, had more energy; but, in spite of his lofty claims, he was often nothing more than a declamator.

The only fables that we can read with pleasure after La Fontaine, were likewise composed in those times; and their author was distinguished by more than one single work.

Anacharsis even appeared at that epoch. Erudition had not yet been consecrated to such an employ. Instead of presenting the arid results of his labours and all the supports of his researches, the Abbé Barthélemy put erudition into action, and used it to trace a living picture of ancient Greece. The tableau is as animated as if it were the fruit of the imagination. The long toil necessary to prepare the material, did not cool the author; we find that he had before his eyes all that he had placed in his memory; it is, perhaps, to that lively taste for antiquity in which he had so well transported himself, that his style bears some distant affinity with that of Fénélon. At least, it is certain that Plato sometimes made the abbé as eloquent, as Homer had rendered Fénélon poetic.

A crowd of books, serious and useful, or at least, which tried to be so, were yet more in harmony with the general occupation of minds. Some men of condition gave to some subjects, which, until then, had been unknown to the public, an interest that was owing to the elevation of their ideas; to the purity of their views; and to the nobility of their

sentiments. Among them, M. Neckar distinguished himself by a more enlightened love of morality and virtue; in the midst of that proud intoxication of human reason, his eloquence preserved a wisdom and a moderation unknown at the time. He defended the cause of religious sentiments against the torrent of opinions so much the mode; and gave to all his works a character of delicacy and elevation, of gravity and sweetness.

We return to the disposition of minds at the moment in which the Revolution burst forth.

The movements which agitate the people may be of two kinds. Some are produced by a direct cause, whence results an immediate effect. Any circumstance whatever that brings a nation, or even part of a nation to desire a determined end; the enterprise succeeds or miscarries. The Decemviri made their tyranny a burthen in Rome; a particular event rendered it quite insupportable; it was overthrown. The parliament of England in despair of seeing the nation happy under the domination of the Stuarts; changed the dynasty. The Americans, finding themselves oppressed; declared their independence. Those were happy revolutions; we know that which was desired; they marched to a determined point; and reposed when that was attained. But there are other revolutions that depend upon a general movement in the spirit of nations. By the course of opinions, citizens grow tired of that which is; the actual order of things

offends in its totality; an ardour, a new activity, seizes upon the mind. Each is impatient in the place assigned to him; and desires a new one; he knows not what he would have; and becomes more susceptible of discontent and inquietude. These are symptoms of those long crises, to which we cannot assign any direct or positive cause; seeming the result of a thousand simultaneous circumstances rather than of any one in particular, that kindle all around them, because all are ready to inflame; which at first inclose no salutary principle suited to extinguish; which at length become an endless chain of misfortunes, revolutions, and crimes; if the peril, and yet more the weariness, come not to terminate them. Such was the convulsion, through proscriptions and civil wars, that conducted Rome from the republican government to the domination of the Emperors; such was the long agitation that Europe experienced at the time of the establishment of the Reformation; that sanguinary period; which was the transition of morals and ancient constitutions to an order quite new. These are the critical epochs of the human spirit, that accrue when it has lost its habitual temper, and which it casts not off till it have totally changed character and physiognomy.

The French revolution offers a similar spectacle; inasmuch as it was brought on by universal and connected causes. All the circumstances from which it seemed to result, were bound together; and were

powerful only by their re-union. Besides, when effects have been so vast, who can think that the cause were small? When the least stone taken away from an edifice hurries its downfal, who would not conclude that it was ready to tumble into ruins? It is not the desire to torture an explanation of facts that conceives such a notion. What precise motive can we assign to our troubles? Can we say that any one thing in particular excited a discontent so vital? Was it tyranny that gave birth to sedition? Whence comes it then that authority had neither will nor force to repress it? We should vainly say, that power confided to other hands had been better defended. The character of a government, we might even say of a sovereign, does it not depend upon the circumstances in which the nation is found; and upon the ideas that are spread through it? Are we to affirm that a king should use violent and military measures, although, for a hundred years, neither he nor his fathers were soldiers? The army and its chiefs, have they the same spirit and discipline after a long repose, as after sanguinary wars? It is thus we may convince ourselves, that a revolution, which changes the face of the universe, results not from the character of one man, nor from any step that he has taken.

It was then, an impatience, as strong in its attacks, as it was vague in its desires, which produced the first shock. Every one freely abandoned himself to the sentiment without reserve or remorse.

We imagined that civilization and knowledge had weakened the passions and softened all characters; it seemed that morality had become easy to practise, and that the balance of social order was so well established that nothing could derange it. We had forgotten that it is not with impunity that we put the interests and opinions of men into fermentation. Calm and long habits stifle in the human heart an active egotism: but an ardour, that breaks out again when charged personally to defend its interests; when the disorder of society remains a problem; when it is not protected and upheld by fixed rules; when those rules are destroyed; finds the man himself, as at first, rough and hostile. That social gentleness that repose had given him, gives place to vices and crimes. He had been moral by harmony with the established order; he finds again all his violence in entering upon the career of evil.

Another cause augmented the warmth and imprudence of opinions; it was the certainty that each attached to them. In times peaceable and uniform, ideas and systems had a free course; nothing counteracted nor opposed them; we wanted experience, and we gave all our confidence to theory: but when stormy moments came; when, at every moment, new and unforeseen events attested the weakness of arguments and predictions; when we were one day mistaken in men and things, to be undeceived by a sudden information the next;—

then we became less bold in our calculations; we dreaded to be mistaken, and we would hazard nothing upon the fragile assurances of our own reason.

Thus, we could not expect either prudence or moderation, even from men virtuous and wise. The idea of a complete renewal frightened us not; the thing appeared to us easy, and the result happy; no hesitation arrested us; the object of our wishes was not only to modify the existing order, but to create another. In a short time the destruction was total; nothing escaped the passion to demolish. They little suspected that thus to overturn all the laws, all the habits of a people; to derange all their springs; to melt their principles; is to deprive them of all the means of resistance against oppression. To fight, it is necessary to find certain points of support, centres of aggregation, ensigns to rally under; or we remove all aid. The nation was shaken piecemeal, and yielded, without defence, to every revolutionary despotism. Such is the inconvenience of a revolutionary enterprise, undertaken, not for a certain end, but for the gratification of a vague sentiment. If we had had to implore some privilege, some positive right included in the national charter, we had obtained it, and had then been satisfied. But when men at some great crisis require liberty, without attaching to it any fixed idea, they do no more than prepare a way for despotism, and overthrow all that should check it.

The greater proportion of the first artisans in that

destruction were inspired by pure and beneficent views. Although the first of our public assemblies lost itself in many illusions, it offers, without doubt, a title to glory for France. It presents an imposing spectacle; the réunion of men, the élite of the country, assembling from all points of its territory to discuss the dearest interests of the nation and of humanity; bearing to it the noblest warmth and all the energy of their souls; almost all sacrificing their personal interests, except that of their renown. But their exertions, having no happy result, appear to us sometimes vain and insensate; the ardour to establish principles, and neglecting to enter into their application, seems to us sometimes puerile. We are tempted to despise our predecessors as much as they had despised theirs. Nevertheless, we will not forget that it is easy to judge after the event.

Let us endeavour to transport ourselves, in thought, to the times which first appear to us remote from these; when spirits full of spring and energy desire occupation and movement; whose ardour inclines them to all objects in which their faculties are ambitious of an entire exercise; and if we acknowledge that, in such a disposition, minds are liable to error and illusion, perhaps we shall also think that they have not, on that account, lost either magnanimity or power. Then we shall perceive how far talents distinguished themselves in that assembly. We may observe the character of public eloquence at the only moment in which it

could shew itself in France. We find in it the defects of the literature and philosophy of the eighteenth century. We could desire in it something more simple and less declamatory; we regret that some celebrated orators had not substituted the authority of a life grave and pure, for the warmth, sometimes fastidious and theatrical, in their discourses. But, at the same time, we will admire how often the speeches in that tribune were noble, elevated, and persuasive; how far the philosophical discussion was profound and subtile; how much activity and courage of character were displayed in the attack and in the defence. We congratulate ourselves to see France so fertile in enlightened men, and in friendship with the public weal. In short, we learn to draw honor from a moment for which some persons, dim-sighted or incredulous, would make the nation blush.

But soon the spectacle changed: the movement spread itself to one after another; and each desired to concern himself with the troubles. Ere long we saw, in the public assembly, men of a new character; the greater part born in a secondary class, having lived out of a society that tames the character and diminishes the force of its vanity, by giving it daily enjoyments;—enemies, envious and provoked at the difference of rank; nourished from modern works and their theories, which commerce with men had not modified in their spirit; but in which they had found wherewith to clothe, under ho-

nourable names, those personal sentiments which they themselves but badly understood. Some, inspired by Rousseau, had drawn from his works hatred towards all that had been above them; others had learned from Mably to admire ancient republics, and wished to reproduce their forms among us; some had borrowed of Raynal the revolutionary torch that he had lighted to consume all institutions — others, disciples of the fanatic Diderot, trembled with anger at the name of priest and of religion; there were also some who would coldly try their abstract theories; of which their pride desired the application, whatever price it might cost.

Such was the second class of men who took part in the revolution; there was no very decided perversity; blindness entered into their faults; they gathered no fruit from the evil they did; and were quickly punished. The talent of some among them ought not to be passed over in silence; it showed itself most when their eloquence was employed in excuses, after having themselves attacked so much; and their language was then frequently touching and true.

After them, the Revolution belongs no more to the history of opinions; it yields almost entirely to passions and personal interests. The mask under which they were concealed was so grossly applied, that no person could be deceived; many of those it covered could not realise the illusion to them-

selves. That which they had done had not even the excuse of infatuation or enthusiasm.

Thus, having desired to treat upon the often debated question of the influence of letters and philosophy in our political troubles, we conclude at the moment at which they became as nothing. In the midst of crimes and of public calamities, literature could only enjoy a very secondary consideration. We must, however, remark one circumstance which seems peculiar to civilised times: no party nor power omitted to gloss over its own acts and its sentiments by a varnish of reasoning. The strongest will always prove that he had right any way than by force. Sophism and declamation were constantly exercised; speech was employed by all; there was nothing that it could not justify, nothing that it did not praise. We found complaisant philosophers to excuse the massacres; and friends of liberty to extol arbitrary power. Even poetry lent its accents to sing the most lamentable times of our misfortunes. It had enthusiasm at command; and caused its voice to be heard in the midst of blood and tears. At that time there was little of the revolutionary literature remaining. Language could have neither persuasion nor power in such moments. Art could not give a durable effect to an eloquent hypocrisy; and even when that, by a fatal blindness, acquired a certain degree of warmth and passion, it seemed in our eyes, as an exaltation produced by drunkenness — an object of disgust and pity.

At last, with the century that convulsion terminated, which appeared again and again renewed; one powerful hand came to calm the interior troubles of France.

Europe, which had not contended with, nor even understood, the violence and the nature of our revolution, began to participate in it entirely; the ancient order of things, as if it had been condemned by an irrevocable decree, every where gave way as soon as it was attacked.

The future will learn what morals, what political opinions and manners could grow out of all those elements, that the new composition has not yet entirely combined.

Minds were not changed so rapidly as events; much agitation and uncertainty troubled souls; and left them for a long time unquiet and doubtful in their sentiments, their desires, or their opinions. Those who had been corrupted by long irregularity, could not all at once become better; ideas that for a long time had wanted a centre of union, could not become secure or fixed: habits formed themselves doubtfully among men, who during many years could not reckon upon the morrow. In short, calm perhaps may be re-established in the physical world; if it be permitted so to speak of the whole of a nation and the public affinities of men with each other; whilst a lamentable chaos may reign in the moral world. Let us rapidly pass over again the course we have followed in our reflections upon the

progress of human intellect during the eighteenth century.

The end of the reign of Louis XIV. witnessed the loss of those men who had contributed to illustrate that monarch. Deprived of the splendour which they had shed over him, he lost, before his death, through his faults and his misfortunes, the admiration and respect of his people; he saw his work fall to ruin; every thing had blended itself with his person; and he could perceive that with his death, all would terminate. Scarcely, indeed, was he expired, than we saw the disorders break out that had fermented for many years. Licentiousness succeeded rapidly to the constraint which then ceased. Literature, that at first had appeared unable to survive those who had honoured it in the preceding epoch, revived again after a short moment of inaction; but it began to take a new form; its essence was no longer the same; those who cultivated it, had no longer the same manners or the same spirit as their predecessors.

Those changes shortly became more marked; letters participated in the licentious spirit of society. An ardent genius subjected itself to all the new-born opinions; at first to please them, and then to anticipate and give them rapidity; it shone upon the scene, and enriched it by new masterpieces.

Poetry, in its mouth, acquired all the charm of

facility and elegance ; its activity attempted all kinds of success ; it mostly obtained it, and often deservedly ; its works had all the same direction ; they attest the spirit and taste of contemporaries. One writer, more serious and profound, concealed likewise, under a more secret covering, a great conformity with the general course of mind, and directed the public attention to matters of government and policy ; he shewed himself wise and skilful.

Nevertheless by degrees, the fate of literary men changed ; they were become more numerous; had acquired more independence ; and occupied a more important place in society. Their vanity increased; and their opinions felt the change. When it was thought a duty to oppose, the resistance was feeble and ill directed : it only served to augment hostile dispositions. Public opinion, and the flattering reception of all Europe, encouraged them to unite together and form a sort of sect, whose members did not profess determined or uniform opinions ; though, animated by the same spirit, they tended to produce the same effect.

In that sect a new philosophy was born ; man was considered under a different point of view ; a metaphysic clearer and less elevated was adopted ; it was thought demonstrable. Ethics and Politics marvelled to see their principles rear themselves upon the new basis. Religion was attacked with violence. All those opinions disseminated them-

selves in the particular works of each writer; and unitedly formed one single and vast body of doctrines, undertaken with serviceable views, but executed afterwards with another intention; social order concurring marvellously with that progress of opinions; authority having no force, and without regular action; the nation without glory; religion without apostles; practical morality having disappeared even before the attempt was made to shake its principles.

One philosopher separated himself entirely from the others; and even declared himself their enemy; more eloquent and enthusiastic than all who surrounded him, he reached the same point by a different way; he attacked with passion the laws of society and the duties which they impose; and although the defender of virtuous and noble sentiments, he led to them by a dangerous route.

The sciences which, at the commencement of the century, had proceeded with patience, but without brilliant success, became suddenly a lofty title to celebrity for the nation. One man, profound in the mathematical sciences, shewed us their progress and spirit, considering them under a philosophical coup-d'œil; and, perhaps, tracing the way for all those who have been so illustrious since.

The natural sciences were embraced by a writer who exhibited them with genius, and lent them an eloquent language. After him, they adopted another spirit; made rapid progress; advanced from

discovery to discovery; divided themselves into clearer and ingenious theories, and became more extended and useful. The new metaphysic aided all that success; it was entirely conformed to the spirit of the sciences, of facts, and of abstract demonstration.

During this time, letters declined; we no longer found spirits full of force imprinting upon them a new movement; the dramatic art decayed; poetry lost its grandeur and only preserved its grace. Prose writers were more happy; they shewed sense, facility, and elegance; and only weak when they emulated the attainment of the highest eloquence. A crowd of useful and instructive books were circulated; knowledge became more easy of acquisition, but precisely, by the same rule, it was oftener more in appearance than in reality.

A new reign commenced; that circumstance enlightened the desire for change; we aspired to a new state of things; all thoughts directed themselves towards it; and letters participated in the return of energy and activity. This shoot presents a noble aspect; we love to dwell upon that ardour of so many virtuous men, enlightened for the good of their country: but the best minds lost themselves in vain illusions: never had we had more vanity and boldness; we would destroy without knowing precisely why; we would create all things anew, disdaining that which the past had bequeathed; and our foolish pretensions were punished. Every

thing gave way; nothing made amends; a long succession of misfortunes brought experience to humble the pride of opinions, and to inspire a wish for repose. At length, a new state of things arrived, which, after some uncertainty of the human mind, will take a direction that we cannot foresee, while we are troubled by the too vivid remembrance of our past deplorable agitations.

Thus the eighteenth century ran its course. When by the rapid succession of time, a great number of similar periods shall have passed over the tombs of those men, and also over those of the people, the era will not remain unknown in the throng of crowded epochs. It will not be confounded with those which recal no souvenir to the memory of man. The march of the human mind, the point to which it had reached, were so remarkable, that they will always attract the attention of posterity. It was not, in truth, renown in which it fell short; and if it be permitted to form a prayer for the future, in which a feeble part only belongs to us, we breathe a desire that the age just begun — the century we have seen born, and which will see us all die — may bring to our sons and their children, not more glory and éclat, but more virtue and less misfortune!

NOTE OF THE EDITOR.

Madame de Staël wrote, for the French Mercury, the following analysis of the work that we are about to reprint.

The critic refused the insertion of the article, which we have recovered and now publish for the first time. We have thought that it would be curious to read the delicate and profound views that Madame de Staël threw, quite *en passant*, upon the subject.

"The Institute gave, as a subject of competition, an examination of the French literature of the eighteenth century. It appears that the subject met with great difficulties, since that, during many years, none of the essays sent seemed worthy to obtain the proposed prize.

"Perhaps the requisition was not rendered sufficiently clear to the writers who should treat on such a theme.

"Was it the influence of the literature of the eighteenth century upon the taste, the fine arts, morals, religion, politics; or simply, an accurate nomenclature of the celebrated authors and their works? The first would require

a coup-d'œil, philosophical, bold, independent; the second is the work of a patient spirit that puts, after each proper name an encomium or an ingenious censure. In the work we have announced, the literature of the eighteenth century is considered, in a general point of view; many authors are judged with a profound sagacity; but, above all, the principal question is investigated in all its bearings. That question consists in enquiring if we are to accuse the writers of the eighteenth century with the misfortune of the revolution, or if their tendency were good and their intentions pure. The author seeks to prove that their errors were the result of the political circumstances in which they were placed, of the laxity of the social principle, prepared by the old age of Louis XIV., the corruption of the Regent, and the negligence of Louis XV. But he thinks he discovers a sincere love of good in the general desire then experienced by enlightened men to accomplish that good by knowledge.

"The author, in showing this justice towards the philosophers of the eighteenth century, is not the less severe and pure in the judgments pronounced upon the laxity of morals, and the levity yet more culpable in religion. We love to see in the opinions and character of a young writer, a happy mixture of austerity of principles and indulgence towards mankind; but that which predominates above all, in the discourse, is the national spirit — the love of country; we feel that the word France is all-powerful in him who writes; he repeats it to himself with delight.

"Ancient France speaks to his imagination; France of Louis XIV. gratifies his pride; France of the eighteenth century occupies his thoughts; and France of the first days of the revolution seems to him to elevate itself to the

height of eloquence and enthusiasm of a free people. This patriotism of sentiments and ideas, fortifies the public spirit, and gives to the talent of writing a national power.

"Among the sketches that we have remarked, we would indicate particularly, a passage on the origin of French poetry; a painting singularly spiritual of La Fronde; reflections full of depth upon the reign of Louis XIV.; and a judgment upon Bossuet, superb in the midst of all that Bossuet has inspired.

"But, above all, we love to recal the morceau upon the Constituent Assembly, because that it appears to us to have already the impartiality of history. The author seems to have nothing to do with party-prejudice. We should, perhaps, do injury to a work, in which there are ideas in every line, to indicate more phrases. The brilliant pieces of enthusiasm might be detached; but a continued force, an animated reserve, reflections that induce many other reflections, the knowledge that we perceive, and the yet greater proportion that we guess at; must all be read from the first line to the last.

"Perhaps we have never seen the début of a writer in the literary career in a work more wisely learned; and if the character of talent is to be young at any age, perhaps the character of his talent is, to give maturity to his youth.

"Besides, the author of this work being destined to the career of the administration, cultivated, very early, that spirit of justice and discernment which belongs particularly to philosophical literature; to that which makes no part of the empire of fiction; that empire to which we must give life, and with it, all the passions that signalize it. The style of a writer is already known, when it is said that the ideas are new, original, born in his head, that a pure soul excited him, that his judgment is impar-

tial and profound; 'for the *style*,' as repeated, with justice, by M. de Barante, 'is the man himself;' but we must also agree that there is much correctness and grammatical precision in the work. We could have desired that the author had abandoned himself oftener to his own movements. For, much as we feel in the work of M. de B——, more warmth than he shows, we could wish that he had oftener said that which he has left us to divine.

"His heart and his principles are extremely religious, but his manner of viewing things sometimes seems to partake of the doctrine of fatality; it is said, that he does not admit of the influence of the action, and that, with much spirit he says, referring to the Hermit of Prague in Shakspeare, that which 'is, *is*.'

"It is possible that the nineteenth century takes its character of resignation from the force of circumstances, that the all-powerful facts to which it has been witness might inspire. Nevertheless, when a man announces himself with the superiority of M. de B——; one is tempted to demand a positive direction.

"'Duty,' does he reply. Yes, duty in the private life, in the public employ, in which the end is determined; but in the sublime route of thought, ought not the impulse to direct us to the character of the enthusiast? Should he not be partial for or against — praise much, blame much, in order to possess in himself a movement and a will forcible enough to communicate it to others?

"The eighteenth century declared its principles in a manner too absolute; perhaps the nineteenth century comments upon the facts with too much submission. The one dwells upon the nature of things; the other dwells on the circumstances. The one would command the future;

the other confines itself to the knowledge of human nature. The author of the work of which we speak is, perhaps, the first who has sensibly taken the colour of a new century. He detaches and elevates himself above the times that were contemporary with his childhood; he is posterity in his judgments; but when he should in his turn create, and be busy in the future also; he should feel the want, and develope the means, of exercising an animated and decided influence.

A

NOMENCLATURE OF FRENCH WRITERS,

AND

THEIR CHIEF WORKS.

D'AGUESSEAU. 1668—1751.
An example to Magistrates. — Wrote on Civil Literature.

D'ALEMBERT. 1717—1783.
Philosophical Writer. — Encyclopædia.

ARNAUD. 1716—1805.
Poet, naturalist, dramatist. — In friendship with Voltaire and Frederick of Prussia.

BALZAC. 1594—1654.
Polite literature.

BOSSUET. 1627—1704.
Preacher, historian.—Enemy to Fénélon — Sermons. — "Eglise Catholique." — "Eglises Protestantes." — "Discourses on Universal History."

BOILEAU. 1636—1711.
Satirical writer, wit, poet.

BAYLE. 1647—1706.
Philosophical writer. — Critical Dictionary.

BOULAINVILLIERS. 1658—1722.
Historian.—"Memoires sur l'Ancien Gouvernement de France."

BUFFON. 1707—1788.
Naturalist. — "Theory of the Earth." — "Natural History," 31 volumes.

BARTHELEMY. 1716—1795.
Antiquary, linguist. — "Anacharsis."

BONNET. 1720—1793.
Natural philosopher. — "Contemplation of Nature."

BAILLY. 1736—1793.
Naturalist. — Universal talent.

BEAUMARCHAIS. 1732—1799.
Dramatic writer.—"Barber of Seville."—"Marriage of Figaro."

DES CARTES. 1596—1650.
Metaphysician. — "Philosophical Meditations."

CORNEILLE. 1606—1684.
Poet. —The Shakspeare of France. — "The Cid." — "Melite."

CHARLEVAL. 1613—1693.
Poet. — Poems, in 1 volume.

CHAULIEU. 1639—1726.
Licentious poet. — Made Grand Prior, by Duke de Vendôme.

CAMPISTRON. 1656—1723.
Poet. — Plays in 3 volumes.

CREBILLON. 1674—1762.

Powerful tragic poet. — "Rhadamistus." — "Electra." — "Idomeneus."

CREBILLON THE YOUNGER. 1707—1777.
Writer of romances. — In friendship with Lord Chesterfield.

COLLE. 1709—1783.
Comic writer. — The Anacreon of his age.

CONDILLAC. 1715—1780.
Metaphysician. — Censured for scepticism.

COLARDEAU. 1735—1776.
Poet — translator.—"Eloisa" and "Night Thoughts," &c. &c.

M. CABANIS. 1756—1808.
Physician — Wrote many works.

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DUBOS. 1670—1742.
Author of "Les Réflexions sur la Poesie et la Peinture," &c. &c.

DIDEROT. 1713—1784.
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ST. EVREMONT. 1613—1703.
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