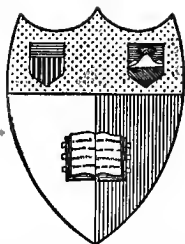


THE GARDEN OF EPICURUS
BY ANATOLE FRANCE



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IN AN ENGLISH TRANSLATION
EDITED BY FREDERIC CHAPMAN

THE GARDEN OF EPICURUS



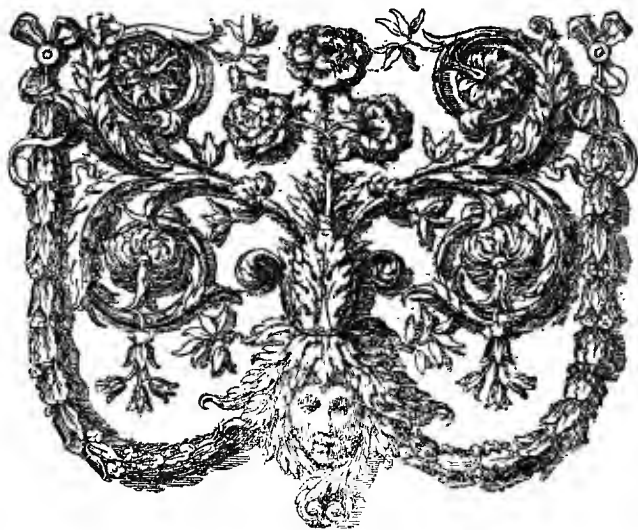
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THE GARDEN OF EPICURUS



A TRANSLATION BY
ALFRED ALLINSON



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CONTENTS

	PAGE
THE GARDEN OF EPICURUS	11
ON NUNNERIES	139
HOW I DISCOURSED ONE NIGHT WITH AN APPARITION ON THE FIRST ORIGINS OF THE ALPHABET	153
CAREERS FOR WOMEN	167
MIRACLE	175
CARD HOUSES	185
IN THE ELYSIAN FIELDS	195
ARISTOS AND POLYPHILOS ON THE LANGUAGE OF METAPHYSICS	207
THE PRIORY	231

*Cecropius suaves expirans hortulus auras
Florentis viridi Sophiae complectitur umbra.*

CIRIS.

*Que n'avons-nous connu vos caresses légères,
O souffles embaumés de l'antique jardin,
O brises de Cecrops, divines messagères,
Vous qui tentiez jadis le poète latin !*

*C'est de là que nos yeux, dans un calme sourire,
Auraient pu voir au loin les erreurs des mortels,
L'ambition, l'amour, égaux en leur délire,
Et l'inutile encens brûlé sur les autels.*

La Lampe d'Argile, par FRÉDÉRIC PLESSIS.

Καὶ χαλεπωτέτων δὲ καιρῶν κατασχόντων τηρικαῦτα τὴν Ἑλλάδα, αὐτόθι καταβιῶναι δις ἢ καὶ τρίς ἐπὶ τοὺς περὶ τὴν Ἰωνίαν τόπους διαδραμόντα πρὸς τοὺς φίλους, οἳ καὶ πανταχόθεν πρὸς αὐτὸν ἀφικνοῦντο, καὶ συνεβίουν αὐτῷ ἐν τῷ κήπῳ, καθὰ φησὶ καὶ Ἀπολλόδωρος ὃν καὶ ὀγδοήκοντα μνῶν πρίασθαι.

DIOGENES LAERTIUS, *De Vitis Philosophorum*, lib. x. cap. 1.

Il acheta un beau jardin qu'il cultivoit lui-même. C'est là où il établit son école ; il menoit une vie douce et agréable avec ses disciples qu'il enseignoit en se promenant et en travaillant. . . . Il étoit doux et affable à tout le monde. . . . Il croyoit qu'il n'y a rien de plus noble que de s'appliquer à la philosophie.

*(Abrégé de la vie des plus illustres philosophes de l'antiquité, ouvrage destiné à l'éducation de la jeunesse, par FÉNELON).**

* A Cecropian garden-plot, breathing scented airs, enfolds me in the verdant shade of flowering Sophia (Wisdom).

CIRIS, vv. 3, 4.

Why have we not known your dainty caresses, oh! scented airs of the ancient garden, oh! breezes of Cecrops, divine harbingers, ye who tempted in olden days the Latin bard! 'Tis thence our eyes, in a tranquil smile, might have beheld afar off the errors of mortal men,—ambition and love, well matched in their frenzy, and the unavailing incense burned on the altars.

La Lampe d'Argile (The Lamp of Clay), by FRÉDÉRIC PLESSIS.

Moreover, very troublous times having come upon Greece in those days, making it hard to live there, twice or thrice over he took voyages in the regions of Ionia among his friends, who used likewise to flock to him from all parts, and share his life in the garden, as Apollodorus relates; who tells us he purchased the plot for eighty minæ.

DIOGENES LAERTIUS, *Lives of the Philosophers*, Bk. I. ch. I.

He bought a fair garden, which he tilled himself. There it was he set up his school, and there he lived a gentle and agreeable life with his disciples, whom he taught as he walked and worked. . . . He was gentle and affable to all men. . . . He held there was nothing nobler than to apply oneself to philosophy.

(Summary of the Life of the most illustrious Philosophers of Antiquity,—
Work destined for the Education of Youth, by FÉNELON.)

THE GARDEN OF EPICURUS



WE find it hard to picture to ourselves the state of mind of a man of older days who firmly believed that the Earth was the centre of the Universe, and that all the heavenly bodies revolved round it. He could feel beneath his feet the writhings of the damned amid the flames; very likely he had seen with his own eyes and smelt with his own nostrils the sulphurous fumes of Hell escaping from some fissure in the rocks. Looking upwards, he beheld the twelve spheres,—first that of the elements, comprising air and fire, then the sphere of the Moon, of Mercury, of Venus, which Dante visited on Good Friday of the year 1300, then those of the Sun, of Mars, of Jupiter, and of Saturn, then the incorruptible firmament, wherein the stars hung fixed like so many lamps. Imagination carried his gaze further still, and his mind's eye discerned in a remoter distance the Ninth Heaven, whither the Saints were translated to

glory, the *primum mobile* or crystalline, and finally the Empyrean, abode of the Blessed, to which, after death, two angels robed in white (as he steadfastly hoped) would bear his soul, as it were a little child, washed by baptism and perfumed with the oil of the last sacraments. In those times God had no other children but mankind, and all His creation was administered after a fashion at once puerile and poetical, like the routine of a vast cathedral. Thus conceived, the Universe was so simple that it was fully and adequately represented, with its true shape and proper motion, in sundry great clocks compacted and painted by the craftsmen of the Middle Ages.

We are done now with the twelve spheres and the planets under which men were born happy or unhappy, jovial or saturnine. The solid vault of the firmament is cleft asunder. Our eyes and thoughts plunge into the infinite abysses of the heavens. Beyond the planets, we discover, instead of the Empyrean of the elect and the angels, a hundred millions of suns rolling through space, escorted each by its own procession of dim satellites, invisible to us. Amidst this infinitude of systems *our* Sun is but a bubble of gas and the Earth a drop of mud. The imagination is vexed and startled when the astronomers tell us that the luminous ray which reaches us from the pole-star has been

half a century on the road ; and yet that noble star is our next neighbour, and with Sirius and Arcturus, one of the least remote of the suns that are sisters of our own. There are stars we still see in the field of our telescopes which ceased to shine, it may be, three thousand years ago.

Worlds die,—for are they not born ? Birth and death are unceasingly at work. Creation is never complete and perfect ; it goes on for ever under incessant changes and modifications. The stars go out, but we cannot say if these daughters of light, when they die down into darkness, do not enter on a new and fecund existence as planets,—if the planets themselves do not melt away and become stars again. All we know is this ; there is no more repose in the spaces of the sky than on earth, and the same law of strife and struggle governs the infinitude of the cosmic universe.

There are stars that have gone out under our eyes, while others are even now flickering like the dying flame of a taper. The heavens, which men deemed incorruptible, know of no eternity but the eternal flux of things.

That organic life is diffused through all parts of the Universe can hardly be doubted,—unless indeed organic life is a mere accident, an unhappy chance, a deplorable something that has inexplicably arisen

in the particular drop of mud inhabited by ourselves.

But it is more natural to suppose that life has developed in the planets of our solar system, the Earth's sisters and like her, daughters of the Sun, and that it arose there under conditions analogous in the main to those in which it manifests itself with us,—under animal and vegetable forms. A meteoric stone has actually reached us from the heavens containing carbon. To convince us in more gracious fashion, the Angels that brought St. Dorothy garlands of flowers from Paradise would have to come again with their celestial blossoms. Mars to all appearance is habitable for living things of kinds comparable to our terrestrial animals and plants. It seems likely that, being habitable, it is inhabited. Rest assured, there too species is devouring species, and individual individual, at this present moment.

The uniformity of composition of the stars is now proved by spectrum analysis. Hence we are bound to suppose that the same causes that have produced life from the nebulous nucleus we call the Earth engender it in all the others.

When we say life, we mean the activity of organized matter under the conditions in which we see it manifested in our own world. But it is equally possible that life may be developed in a

totally different environment, at extremely high or extremely low temperatures, and under forms unthinkable by us. It may even be developed under an ethereal form, close beside us, in our atmosphere ; and it is possible that in this way we are surrounded by angels,—beings we shall never know, because to know them implies a point of common contact, a mutual relation, such as there can never be between them and us.

Again, it is possible that these millions of suns, along with thousands of millions more we cannot see, make up altogether but a globule of blood or lymph in the veins of an animal, of a minute insect, hatched in a world of whose vastness we can frame no conception, but which nevertheless would itself, in proportion to some other world, be no more than a speck of dust.

Nor is there anything absurd in supposing that centuries of thought and intelligence may live and die before us in the space of a minute of time, in the confines of an atom of matter. In themselves things are neither great nor small, and when we say the Universe is vast we speak purely from a human standpoint. { If it were suddenly reduced to the dimensions of a hazel-nut, all things keeping their relative proportions, we should know nothing of the change. } The pole-star, included together with ourselves in the nut, would still take fifty

years to transmit its light to us as before. And the Earth, though grown smaller than an atom, would be watered with tears and blood just as copiously as it is to-day. [The wonder is, not that the field of the stars is so vast, but that man has measured it.]

Relativity of man's size



CHRISTIANITY has done much for love by making a sin of it. The Church excludes woman from the priesthood; it fears her, and thereby shows how dangerous she is. It repeats with the Ecclesiast: "The arms of a woman are like the nets of the hunters,—*laqueus venatorum.*" It warns us not to put our hope in her: "Lean not upon a reed shaken in the wind, and put not your trust therein, for all flesh is grass, and the glory thereof passeth away like the flower of the fields." It dreads the wiles of this pest of the human race: "All cunning is small beside the cunning of a woman's heart. *Brevis omnis malitia super malitiam mulieris.*" But by the very terror it betrays of her, it makes her strong and formidable.

To grasp the full significance of these maxims you must have lived with the mystics. You must have passed your childhood in a religious atmosphere. You must have gone into "retreat"; followed the observances of the Church. You must have read, at twelve years old, those little

books of edification that reveal the supernatura world to simple souls. You must have known the story of St. Francis de Borgia gazing into the open coffin of Queen Isabella, or the apparition of the Abbess of Vermont to her daughters in Christ. The Abbess had died in the odour of sanctity, and the nuns, who had shared in her works of angelic piety, believing her in Heaven, were wont to invoke her in their prayers. But one day she appeared to them, with wan face and flames licking the border of her robe. "Pray for me," she bade them; "in the days when I was alive, joining my hands in prayer, I thought what pretty hands they were. To-day I am expiating that sinful thought in the torments of Purgatory. Know, my daughters, the adorable goodness of God, and pray for me." These little books of childish theology contain a thousand tales of the kind—tales that give purity too exalted a price not to add an infinite zest to carnal pleasures.

In consideration of their beauty, the Church made Aspasia, Laïs, and Cleopatra into demons, ladies of Hell. What glory for them! Why, a Saint would have appreciated the compliment! The most modest and austere of womankind, who has no faintest wish to destroy any man's peace of mind, would fain have the power to destroy all men's. Her pride is flattered by the precautions

the Church takes against her. When poor St. Antony shouts at her : "Begone, foul beast !" his very alarm tickles her vanity deliciously. She is ravished to find herself more dangerous than she had ever suspected.

But never think too highly of yourselves, my sisters ; you were not, at your first appearance in the world, perfect and fully armed. Your grandmothers of the days of the mammoth and the giant bear did not wield the same domination over the prehistoric hunters and cavemen which you possess over us. You were useful then, and necessary, but you were not invincible. To tell the truth, in those far-off ages, and for long afterwards, you lacked charm. In those days you were like men, and men were like brutes. To make of you the fearful and wonderful thing you are to-day, to become the indifferent and sovereign cause of countless sacrifices and crimes, you still needed two things : Civilization, which gave you veils, and Religion, which gave you ^{us} scruples. Since then your powers are perfected ; you are now a mystery, and you are a sin. Men dream of you and lose their souls for you. You inspire longing and alarm ; love's delirium has come into the world. Yes, it is an infallible instinct inclines you to piety. You are well advised to love Christianity. It has multiplied your puissance tenfold. Do you know St.

Jerome? At Rome and in Asia you inspired him with such panic terror that he fled to escape you into a frightful desert. There he fed on roots, and the skin clung to his fleshless bones and was burnt black by the sun, yet he found you there also. His solitude was peopled with your phantoms, yet more alluring even than yourselves.

For it is a truth, only too well proven by the ascetics, that the dreams you excite are more seductive, if that is possible, than the realities you have in your power to offer. Jerome rejected with equal horror your presence and the remembrance of your presence. But in vain he gave himself up to fasts and prayers; you filled his life, from which he had expelled you, with hallucinations. Such was the power of woman over a Saint. I doubt if it is as great over an habitué of the Moulin-Rouge. Take heed your empire be not diminished along with men's belief in God; beware you do not lose a portion of your influence through ceasing to be a sin.

Candidly I do not think rationalism is good for you. In your place, I should not be overfond of the physiologists who are so indiscreet, who are so over ready to explain things to you, who say you are sick when we think you are inspired, and who attribute to the predominance of reflex actions your sublime potentialities for love and suffering.

That is not the way they speak of you in the *Golden Legend*; 'white dove,' 'lily of purity,' 'rose of love,' are the names they give you there. Surely this is more agreeable than to be dubbed hysterical, cataleptic, subject to hallucinations,—as you are every day since science has ruled the ro^{ast}.

Moreover, if I were one of you, I should cordially detest all those emancipators of the sex who are for making you into men's equals. They are urging you to take a false step. Fine promotion, to be sure, for you, to be as good as an attorney or a druggist! Take care, I say; already you have stripped off some particles of your mystery and fascination. All is not lost. Men still fight, and ruin and kill themselves for you; but the young fellows in tramcars leave you to stand on the platform while they sit snug inside. Your cult is declining along with other things once held sacrosanct.



AMBLERS play just as lovers make love and drunkards drink,—blindly and of necessity, under domination of an irresistible force. There are beings vowed to play, as there are others vowed to love. I wonder who invented the story of the two sailors who were so possessed by the lust of gambling? They were shipwrecked, and only escaped a watery grave, after experiencing the most appalling vicissitudes, by climbing on the back of a whale. The instant they were installed there, they lugged out of their pockets dice and dice-boxes and settled themselves down to play. The story is truer than truth. Every gambler is like those sailors. And in very deed there is something in play that does terribly stir the fibres of daring hearts. Is it an insignificant delight to tempt fortune? Is it a pleasure devoid of intoxication to taste in one second months, years, a whole lifetime of fears and hopes? I was not ten years old when M. Grépinet, my master in the junior class,

read us out the fable of the *Man and the Genie*. Yet I remember the tale better than if I had read it yesterday. A genie gives a boy a ball of thread, and tells him: "This is the thread of your life. Take it. When you find time heavy on your hands, pull it out; your days will pass quick or slow according as you unwind the ball rapidly or little by little. So long as you leave the thread alone, you will remain stationary at the same hour of your existence." The boy took the thread; first he pulled at it to become a man, then to marry the girl he loved, then to see his children grow up, to win offices and profit and honour, to abridge anxieties, to escape griefs and the infirmities that came with the years, and finally, alas! to cut short a peevish old age. He had lived just four months and six days since the date of the genie's visit.

Well, what is play, I should like to know, but the art of producing in a second the changes that Destiny ordinarily effects only in the course of many hours or even many years, the art of collecting into a single instant the emotions dispersed throughout the slow-moving existence of ordinary men, the secret of living a whole lifetime in a few minutes, in a word the genie's ball of thread? Play is a hand-to-hand encounter with Fate. It is the wrestling of Jacob with the Angel, the pact of

Doctor Faustus with the Devil. The stake is money,—in other words immediate, infinite possibilities of pleasure. Perhaps the next card turned, the ball now rolling, will give the player parks and gardens, fields and forests, castles and manors lifting heavenward their pointed turrets and fretted roofs. Yes, that little dancing ball holds within it acres of good land and roofs of slate with sculptured chimneys reflected in the broad bosom of the Loire ; it contains treasures of art, marvels of taste, jewels of price, the most exquisite bodies in all the world, nay ! even souls,—souls none ever dreamt were venal, all the decorations, all the distinctions, all the elegance, and all the puissance of the world. What do I say ? It contains better than that ; it embraces the dream and vision of it all. And you would have me give up play ? Nay ; if play only availed to give endless hopes, if our only vision of it were the smile of its green eyes, it would be loved less fanatically. But it has nails of adamant, it is cruel and terrible, at its caprice it gives poverty and wretchedness and shame ; that is why its votaries adore it.

The fascination of danger is at the bottom of all great passions. There is no fullness of pleasure unless the precipice is near. It is the mingling of terror with delight that intoxicates. And what more terrifying than play ? It gives and takes away ;

its logic is not our logic. It is dumb and blind and deaf. It is almighty. It is a God.

Yes, a God ; it has its votaries and its saints, who love it for itself, not for what it promises, and who fall down in adoration when its blow strikes them. It strips them ruthlessly, and they lay the blame on themselves, not on their deity.

“I played a bad game,” they say.

They find fault with themselves ; they do not blaspheme their God.



THE human race is not susceptible of an indeterminate progress. To allow of its development, the Earth had to conform to certain conditions, physical and chemical, which are not stable. There was a time when our planet was not suitable for mankind; it was too hot and moist. A time will come when it will cease to be suitable; it will be too cold and dry. When the sun goes out,—a catastrophe that is bound to be,—mankind will have long ago disappeared. The last inhabitants of earth will be as destitute and ignorant, as feeble and dull-witted, as the first. They will have forgotten all the arts and all the sciences. They will huddle wretchedly in caves alongside the glaciers that will then roll their transparent masses over the half-obliterated ruins of the cities where now men think and love, suffer and hope. All the elms and lindens will have been killed by the cold; and the firs will be left sole masters of the frozen earth. The last desperate survivors of human-

kind,—desperate without so much as realizing why or wherefore,—will know nothing of us, nothing of our genius, nothing of our love ; yet will they be our latest-born children and blood of our blood. A feeble flicker of the regal intelligence of nobler days, still lingering in their dulled brains, will for a while yet enable them to hold their empire over the bears that have multiplied about their subterranean lurking-places. Peoples and races will have disappeared beneath the snow and ice, with the towns, the highways, the gardens of the old world. With pain and difficulty a few isolated families will keep alive. Women, children, old men, crowded pell-mell in their noisome caves, will peep through fissures in the rock and watch a sombre sun mount the sky above their heads ; dull yellow gleams will flit across his disk, like flames playing about a dying brand, while a dazzling snow of stars will shine on all the day long in the black heavens, through the icy air. This is what they will see ; but in their heavy witlessness they will not so much as know that they see anything. One day the last survivor, callous alike to hate and love, will exhale to the unfriendly sky the last human breath. And the globe will go rolling on, bearing with it through the silent fields of space the ashes of humanity, the poems of Homer and the august remnants of the Greek marbles, frozen to its icy

surfaces. No thought will ever again rise towards the infinite from the bosom of this dead world, where the soul has dared so much,—at least no thought of man's. For who can tell if another thought will not grow into consciousness of itself, and this tomb where we all shall sleep become the cradle of a new soul? What soul, I cannot tell. The insect's, perhaps.

Side by side with mankind, and in spite of him, the insects, bees for instance, and ants, have already wrought marvels. True, the ants and bees are like us in needing light and heat. But there are invertebrates less sensitive to cold. Who can foretell the future reserved for their activity and patience?

Who knows if the earth may not become good for them, when it has ceased to be habitable by us? Who knows if they may not one day develop consciousness of themselves and the world they live in? Who knows if in their time and season they too may not praise God?

TO LUCIEN MUHLFELD



WE cannot represent to ourselves with precision what exists no longer. What we call local colour is a dream. When we see how a painter has all the trouble in the world to reproduce anything like a true likeness of a scene, say, of the time of Louis Philippe, we may well despair of his ever giving us the faintest notion of an event that befell under St. Louis or Augustus. We waste endless pains in copying old armour and old oak chests. The artists of olden days never troubled their heads with such-like pedantry. They gave the heroes of legend or history the costume and appearance of their own contemporaries. Thus they depicted for us in natural colours their soul and their century. Can an artist do better? Each of their personages was someone of their own circle, and these figures, living pictures of their life and thought, remain for ever touching. They bear witness to future times of sentiments and emotions actually experienced. Paintings of archæological correctness testify only to the wealth of our museums.

If you would taste true art and see a picture that gives a broad and deep impression, examine the frescoes of Ghirlandajo in Santa-Maria-Novella at Florence, representing the *Birth of the Virgin*. The old painter shows us the room where the mother has been delivered. Anne, raised on the bed, is neither young nor beautiful; but we see at once she is a good housewife. She has ranged at the head of the bed a jar of sweetmeats and two pomegranates. A serving-maid, standing between the bed and the wall, offers her a ewer on a platter. The child has just been washed, and the copper basin still stands in the middle of the floor. The babe Mary is taking the breast; her wet-nurse for the nonce is a young and beautiful woman, a lady of the city, a mother herself, who has graciously offered to lend her bosom, to the end the child and her own, having imbibed life at the same fount, may keep the savour of it in common, and by force of their blood love each other like brother and sister. Near her stands another young woman, or we should rather say a young girl, like her in feature, perhaps her sister, richly dressed, wearing the hair drawn away from her brow and plaited at the temples like Æmilia Pia; she stretches out her two arms towards the infant with a charming gesture that betrays the awakening of the maternal instinct. Two noble

ladies, clad in the fashion of Florence, are coming in to offer their felicitations. They are attended by a serving-maid, carrying on her head a basket of water-melons and grapes. The figure is of a large, simple beauty ; draped in flowing garments confined by a girdle the ends of which float in the wind, she seems to intervene in this pious, domestic scene like a dream of pagan antiquity. Well, in this warm room, in these gentle womanly faces, I see expressed all the life of Florence and the fine flower of the early Renaissance. This goldsmith's son, this master of the Primitives, has revealed in his painting, which has the clearness and brilliancy of a summer dawn, all the secret of that courteous epoch in which he had the good fortune to live, and which possessed so great a charm of its own that his contemporaries themselves were wont to cry : "The Gods are good indeed ! Oh, thrice-blessed age !"

It is the artist's part to love life and show us it is beautiful. Without him, we might well doubt the fact !



IGNORANCE is the necessary condition, I do not say of happiness, but of life itself. If we knew everything, we could not endure existence a single hour. The sentiments that make it sweet to us, or at any rate tolerable, spring from a falsehood, and are fed on illusions.

If, like God, a man possessed the truth, the sole and perfect truth, and once let it escape out of his hands, the world would be annihilated there and then, and the universe melt away instantly like a shadow. Divine truth, like a last judgment, would reduce it to powder.



JEALOUS man is jealous indeed ; there is nothing he does not find food for umbrage in, nothing that is not a subject for self-torment. He knows a woman false from the first, from the mere fact that she lives and breathes. He fears those workings of the inward life, those varied impulses of the flesh and spirit which make the woman a creature apart and distinct from himself, a creature independent, instinctive, ambiguous, and at times inconceivable. He suffers because she blossoms forth, of her own sweet nature, like a beautiful flower, without the possibility of any love, no matter how masterful, capturing and holding all the perfume she sheds in that stirring moment that is youth and life. At heart, the one reproach he has against her is that,—*she is*. She is, she is alive, she is beautiful, she dreams dreams. What mortal disquietude in the thought ! He wants her, wants her whole body, wants it in more consummate fullness and perfection than Nature has permitted ; he wants her, body and soul !

Woman has none of these wild fancies. More often than not, what we take for jealousy in her is only rivalry. But as for this torment of the senses, this demoniacal possession by odious imaginings, this insane and piteous frenzy, this physical rage, she knows nothing of all this, or next to nothing. Her feelings, in such a case, are less definite and downright than our own. One kind of imagination is not highly developed in her, even in matters of love and the senses,—viz. the plastic imagination, the precise appreciation of definite outlines. A large vagueness clings about her impressions, and all her energies are equally agog for the struggle. Once her jealousy is roused, she fights with a fell obstinacy, at once violent and artful, of which a man is incapable. The same spur that tears our very vitals pricks her on to the contest. Her dethronement only makes her strive the more resolutely to win empire and domination. Her chagrin is more than counterbalanced by the access of insolent self-confidence she draws from her disappointment.

Look at Racine's Hermione. Her jealousy does not exhaust itself in black fumes of impotent passion; she displays little imagination; she does not weave her torments into a lurid epic of heart-breaking imaginings. She does not brood over her wrongs,—and what is jealousy without brooding?

What is jealousy without the demoniacal possession, the mad, monomaniacal obsession? Hermione is not jealous. Her mind is set on hindering a marriage. She is resolved to prevent it at any cost and win back a lover,—that is all.

And when Neoptolemus is killed for her sake, by her instrumentality, she is startled certainly; but her predominant feeling is chagrin, disappointment. Her marriage project has miscarried. A *man* in her place would have exclaimed: "So much the better; this woman I loved will never wed another now!"

Hermione



OCIETY is vain and frivolous. Granted. Nevertheless, it is no bad school for politicians. Indeed we may well regret it is so little frequented by our present-day statesmen. What constitutes society? Woman; she is its sovereign arbitress; it exists by her and for her exclusively. But Woman forms the great educating influence for men; she it is trains him in the gifts that charm,—courtesy, discretion, and the pride that shudders to be self-assertive. She it is teaches a few the art of pleasing, and all the useful art of not displeasing. From her we learn the lesson that human society is more complex and more delicately adjusted than is generally suspected by the politicians of the cafés. Last but not least, it is she brings home to us the great truth that the ideals of sentiment and the visions of faith are invincible forces, and that it is by no means reason that governs humankind.



THE comic soon becomes painful when it contains a human element. Does not *Don Quixote* sometimes make you weep? For my part, I greatly enjoy certain books that breathe a calm and contented disconsolateness, such as Cervantes' incomparable romance, or *Candide*,—works which are, if rightly regarded, manuals of tolerance and indulgent pity, holy bibles of benignity.



RUTH is not the objective of Art. It is the Sciences we must appeal to for that, as it is what *they* aim at; not to Literature, which has, and can have, no objective but beauty.]

The Chloe of Greek romance was never a real shepherdess, nor Daphnis a real goat-herd; yet they please us still. The subtle-minded Greek who narrated their story cared not a fig for sheep-folds or goats. All he thought of was poetry and love. So, being fain to unfold, for the gratification of his fellow cits, a tale of sensuous and graceful love, he took for setting the rustic country, where his readers never went. For who were they? Old Byzantine fellows, grown white in their palace chambers, amidst strange, barbarous mosaics, or behind the receipt of custom, whereat they had amassed endless wealth. To enliven these peevish greybeards the writer showed them a pair of beautiful children. Then, for fear they might confound his Daphnis and Chloe with the vicious little brats of boys and girls that swarm in the

streets of great cities, he took care to add : "The two I am telling you about lived once upon a time in Lesbos, and their history was depicted in a wood sacred to the Nymphs." In fact, he took the same excellent precaution which goodwives never fail to adopt before beginning a fairy-tale, when they say : "In the days when Berthe span," or "When the animals used to talk."

If we are to have a really pretty story, the bounds of everyday experience and usage must needs be a little overstepped.



WE count love among things infinite.
It is not the women's fault.



CANNOT think that twelve hundred individuals met together to hear a play constitute an assembly necessarily inspired with infallible wisdom ; still the public, it seems to me, does bring with it to the theatre a simpleness of heart and sincerity of mind that give a certain value to the feelings it experiences. Many people who find it impossible to frame an idea of anything they have read are capable of giving a very fairly exact account of what they have seen represented on the stage. When you read a book you read it how you please, you read in it, or rather into it, what you choose. A book leaves everything to the imagination. This is why uncultivated, common minds as a rule take only a feeble, ineffectual pleasure in reading. The stage is different ; it puts everything before the eyes and dispenses with any help from the imagination. This is why it satisfies the great majority, and likewise why it does not appeal very strongly to pensive, meditative minds. Such persons appre-

ciate a situation, a thought, only for the sake of the amplifications it suggests to them, the melodious echo it wakes in their own minds. Their fancies are unexercised in a theatre; the play gives them only a passive pleasure, to which they prefer the active one of reading.

What is a book? A series of little printed signs,—essentially only that. It is for the reader to supply himself the forms and colours and sentiments to which these signs correspond. It will depend on him whether the book be dull or brilliant; hot with passion or cold as ice. Or, if you prefer it put otherwise, each word in a book is a magic finger that sets a fibre of our brain vibrating like a harp-string, and so evokes a note from the sounding-board of our soul. No matter how skilful, how inspired, the artist's hand; the sound it awakes depends on the quality of the strings within ourselves. It is not quite the same with the stage. The little black marks are there replaced by living images. For the tiny printed characters, which leave so much to be guessed, are substituted men and women, who have nothing vague or mysterious about them. Everything is precisely fixed and determined. Hence the several impressions received by different spectators vary within the narrowest possible limits compatible with the fatal diversity of human points of view.

So too we see in all theatrical representations (when literary or political quarrels do not complicate matters) how true and genuine a sympathy is established among all present in the house. If, further, we remember that of all arts, the dramatic is the closest to life, we must see that it is the easiest to understand and appreciate, and conclude it to be the one of all others as to which the public is most in accord and most sure of its opinion.

Prose + theatre



DOES death put an end to us utterly and entirely? I am not prepared to deny it. It is highly possible. In that case there is no need to fear death :—

Je suis, elle n'est pas ; elle est, je ne suis plus.¹

But supposing that, while striking us down, it leaves us still in existence, be sure we shall find ourselves beyond the grave exactly the same as we were on earth. Doubtless we shall feel not a little abashed ; the thought is of a sort to spoil heaven and hell for us beforehand. It robs us of all hope, for the thing of all others we most earnestly desire is to become something quite different from what we are. But this is plainly forbidden us.

¹ I am, it is not ; it is, I cease to be.



HERE is a little German book entitled, *Notes to Illustrate the Book of Life*, the author's name Gerhard d'Amyntor,— containing much that is true, and consequently much that is sad. In it we see depicted the ordinary conditions of women's life. "It is in these daily cares that the mother of a family loses her buoyancy and strength, and is worn to the very marrow of her bones. The everlasting question, 'What must we have for dinner to-day?' the constantly recurring necessity of sweeping floors, beating and brushing clothes, dusting furniture, all this is the never-ceasing drip-drip of the water-drop that slowly but surely breaks down mind as well as body in the long run. It is in front of the kitchen range that, by a cruel, commonplace magic, the pretty pink-and-white fairy, with her crystal laugh, is transformed into a smoke-dried and dismal-looking black mummy. On the sooty altar where the *pot-au-feu* simmers are sacrificed youth, freedom, beauty, joy!" Such, as near as may be, are Gerhard Amyntor's words.

This is indeed the lot of the vast majority of women. Life is hard for them, as it is for men. If we ask why existence in these days is so painful and laborious, the answer is,—it cannot well be otherwise on a planet where the indispensable necessities of living are so scarce, and involve such toils and difficulties to produce and procure. Causes so deep-seated, and which depend on the very configuration of the earth, on its constitution, its flora and fauna, are, alas! permanent and necessary. Work, with whatever fairness it may be repartitioned, will always weigh heavy on the major part of men and women; few of either sex can have leisure to develop their beauty and intellect under æsthetic conditions. Only Nature is to blame.

[Meantime, what becomes of love? It fares as it may. Hunger is its great enemy.] And it is an incontrovertible fact that women are hungry. It seems likely that in the Twentieth, as in the Nineteenth Century, they will do the cooking,—unless, indeed, Socialism brings back the period when the hunters devoured their quarry while the flesh was still warm, and Venus coupled forest lovers in the wilds. Then woman was free. I am going to make a confession: If I had created man and woman, I should have framed them on a type widely different from that which has actually

prevailed,—that of the higher mammals. I should have made men and women, not to resemble the great apes as they do, but on the model of the insects which, after a lifetime as caterpillars, change into butterflies and for the brief final term of their existence have no other thought but to love and be lovely. I should have set youth at the end of the human span. Some insects, in their last metamorphosis, have wings and no stomach. They are reborn in this purified form only to love an hour and die.

If I were a god, or rather a *demiurge*,—for the Alexandrine philosophers teach that these minor works of creation are rather the business of the *demiurge*, or simply of some journeyman demon,—well, if I were *demiurge* or demon, it is these insects I should have chosen as models whereon to fashion mankind. I should have preferred man to accomplish, like them, in the preliminary *larva* stage the disgusting functions necessary to nutrition. In this phase, the sexes would not have been distinguished, and hunger would not have degraded love. Then I should have so arranged that, in a final metamorphosis, man and woman, unfurling glittering wings, lived awhile on dew and desire and died in a rapturous kiss. Thus I should have added love as crown and recompense of their mortal existence. Yes, it would have been better

so. However, I did not make the world, and the *demiurge* who undertook the task did not take advice from me. I have my doubts, between you and me, if he ever consulted the philosophers and men of parts at all.



It is a great mistake to suppose that scientific truths differ essentially from those of every day. The only distinction is their superior degree of extension and precision. From the point of view of practice, the difference is highly important. At the same time we must not forget that the savant's powers of observation are limited to appearances and phenomena, and can never penetrate the substance or know anything of the true nature of things. An eye armed with a microscope is only a human eye after all. It sees more than the naked eye does, but not in any different way. The man of science multiplies the points of contact between man and nature, but it is impossible for him to modify in any particular the essential character of the mutual relations between the two. He sees the manner of production of certain phenomena which escape us, but he is prohibited, just as much as we are, from inquiring why they are so produced.

To demand a system of morals from Science is to

invite cruel disappointments. Men believed, three hundred years ago, that the earth was the centre of creation. Nowadays we know it is only a coagulated drop of the sun. We know what gases burn at the surface of the most distant stars. We know that the universe, in which we are a wandering speck of dust, is for ever in labour, bringing to birth and devouring its offspring; we know that heavenly bodies are ceaselessly dying and being born. But wherein has our moral nature been altered by these prodigious discoveries? Have mothers come to love their little ones better or less ardently? Do we appreciate the beauty of women any more or any less in consequence? Does a hero's heart beat any differently within his bosom? No, no! Be the earth great or small, what matter is that to mankind? It is always great enough, provided it gives us a stage for suffering and for love. To suffer and to love, these are the twin sources of its inexhaustible beauty. Suffering, pain,—how divine it is, how misunderstood! To it we owe all that is good in us, all that makes life worth living; to it we owe pity, and courage, and all the virtues. The earth is but a grain of sand in the barren infinity of worlds. Yet, if it is only on the earth creatures suffer, it is greater than all the rest of the universe put together. Nay! it is everything, and the rest is nothing. For otherwise, without it, there is neither virtue

nor genius. What is genius, if not the art of charming away pain? Very great minds have, I know, cherished other hopes. Renan surrendered himself with smiling alacrity to the dream of a scientific morality. He reposed an almost unlimited confidence in Science. He believed it would change the world, because it can tunnel mountains. I do not think with him that it can make us gods. To say the truth, I do not very much want it to. I do not feel I have within me the stuff of a divinity, no matter how petty a one. My feebleness is dear to me. I cling to my imperfection, as the very essence of my being.



HERE is a small canvas of Jean Béraud's that possesses a strange interest for me. It is called the *Salle Graffard*, — representing a public meeting where we seem to see the superheated brains fuming alongside the smoking pipes and lamps. No doubt the scene has its comic side; but how deep and true is the comedy! And how sad! This amazing picture contains one figure that goes farther to make me understand the socialist workman than twenty books of history and economics. It is a little bald man, all head, no shoulders to speak of, who is seated at the committee-table in his woollen comforter,—an art workman, no doubt, and a man of ideas, sickly and physically impotent, an ascetic of the proletariat, a Sir Galahad of the workshop, as chaste, and as fanatical, as the Saints of the Church in the Ages of Faith. Verily the man is an Apostle, and as we look at him we feel a new Religion is come to birth among the masses.



AN English Geologist, a man of the finest and most unprejudiced intellect, Sir Charles Lyell, established, forty years or so ago, what is known as the theory of subsisting causes, or "causes now in operation."¹ He proved that the changes which have occurred in the course of ages on the earth's surface were not due, as was supposed, to sudden cataclysms, but were the result of slow, almost imperceptible causes that are equally in action at the present time. According to his argument, we see that these mighty changes, the traces of which surround us, appear so tremendous only because of the foreshortening effect of vast periods of time, whereas in reality they came about very gently and gradually. By slow degrees and without any violent disturbance the ocean changed its bed, and the glaciers crept

¹ The first volume of the "Principles" was published in 1830; its title is a summary of Lyell's work: "Principles of Geology: being an Attempt to explain the former changes of the Earth's surface, by reference to *Causes now in Operation.*"—A. A.

down over the plains, hitherto covered with forests of tree-fern. Similar transformations are being wrought under our eyes, without our so much as being able to observe them. In a word, where Cuvier beheld a series of sudden and appalling catastrophes, Charles Lyell makes us see only the slow, beneficent action of natural forces. It strikes one what benefits this theory of subsisting causes would bring in its train, if it could be transferred from the physical to the moral sphere, and made the basis of a system of conduct. The spirit of conservatism and the spirit of revolution would there find a common ground of reconciliation.

Convinced that alterations are not felt or noticed when they operate continuously, the opponent of change would cease to block necessary reforms, for fear of accumulating a reserve of destructive forces at the very spot where he had set up an obstacle. The revolutionary, on the other hand, would refrain from an imprudent and inopportune appeal to energies he knew to be always in operation. The more I think of it, the more I am persuaded, if only the moral theory of subsisting causes won a lodgment in the conscience of humanity, it would metamorphose all the peoples of the earth into a commonwealth of sages. The only difficulty is to effect that lodgment, and it must be allowed it is a formidable one.



HAVE been reading a book lately, in which a poet and philosopher shows us a race of men exempt from joy, grief, and curiosity. On quitting this new Utopia and coming back to earth, when we look round and see our fellows striving, loving, suffering, how one's heart goes out to them, and how content one is to suffer in sympathy! How surely we realize that here, and here only, is true joy to be found. It springs from suffering, as the healing balm flows from the wounded bark of the kindly tree. They have killed passion, and at one and the same blow slain joy and grief, suffering and pleasure, good, evil, beauty, everything in short, and virtue first and foremost. They are wise, yet they are worthless. { For what of worth is attained without effort? } What use that their life is long if they leave it empty, if they do not live?

The book goes far to make me, on reflection, well content with man's lot, hard as it is, to reconcile me with his painful existence, in a word to renew

my esteem for my fellow-creatures and my wide human sympathies. It has another excellence: it fosters our love of reality and enters a caveat against the spirit of vain imaginings and self-deception. By showing us a set of beings exempt from the ills of life, it lets us see for ourselves that these unfortunate favourites of fortune are actually our inferiors, and that it would be the height of folly to exchange (granting such a thing were possible) our own condition for theirs.

Truly a pitiful sort of happiness! Having no passions, they have no art, no poetry. How should they breed poets? They can savour—how should they?—neither the Epic muse, that is inspired by the wild frenzies of love and hate, nor yet the Comic, that laughs in merry concert with the vices and foibles of mankind. They have lost the power of imagining a Dido or a Phædra, poor emasculated minds! They cannot glimpse the divine shades, the immortal spectres, that wander by, shuddering, under the undying myrtles.

They are blind and deaf to the miracles of that art of poetry which makes the common earth divine. They have not Virgil; and we call them happy, because they have lifts and electric light. Yet, be sure, a single beautiful line has wrought the world more good than all the masterpieces of mechanism!

Inexorable progress ! it has given us a people of engineers that has neither passions, nor poetry, nor love ! Alas ! how should they know love, seeing they are happy ? Love blossoms only in pain. What are lovers' plaints if not cries of suffering ? "A god would be unhappy, how unhappy, in my place !" exclaims an English poet, with intense feeling ; "a god, my beloved, could not suffer, could not die, for you !"

We had best forgive pain, and frankly admit it is impossible to imagine a happiness greater than what we enjoy in this human life of ours, so sweet and so bitter, so bad and so good, at once ideal and real, a life that embraces all things and reconciles all opposites. Yes, that is our garden-plot, which we must dig zealously.



RELIGIONS are strong and beneficent because they teach man his *raison d'être*, the final causes of his existence. Those who have rejected the dogmas of theological morality, as almost all of us have done in this age of science and intellectual freedom, have no means left of knowing why they are in the world and what they are come there to do.

Fate envelops us entirely in the mysterious processes of her mighty alchemy, and really our one and only resource is to give up thinking altogether, if we are not to feel too cruelly the tragic absurdity of living. It is here, in our absolute ignorance of the why and wherefore of our existence, lies the root of our melancholy and sick disgust of life. Physical evil, moral evil, the miseries of the soul and the senses, the prosperity of the wicked, the humiliation of the just man, all this would still be endurable, if we could grasp the system and economy of it all, if we could divine a providence directing the chaos. The believer finds a perverse pleasure

in his sores ; his enemies supply him with the agreeable spectacle of their acts of violence and injustice ; even his misdeeds and crimes do not rob him of hope. But in a society where all faith is blotted out in darkness, sin and sorrow lose all their meaning, and only strike us as odious jests, ill-omened farcical impertinences.



HERE is always a moment when curiosity becomes a sin ; the Devil has always ranged himself on the side of the savants.



WHEN staying at Saint-Lô, ten or a dozen years ago, I met at the house of a friend, who resides in that hilly little town, a priest, a cultivated and eloquent man, in whose conversation I found no little pleasure.

Little by little, I won his confidence, and we enjoyed many talks on serious subjects, in which he revealed the acuteness and subtlety of his mind no less than the fine spiritual candour of his soul. He was a wise man and a saint. A finished casuist and a great theologian, he expressed himself with so much force and fascination that I found no pleasure so enthralling in the little place as listening to him.

Yet it was several days before I dared look at him. In stature, shape, and features he was a monster. Picture a dwarf, bandy-legged and deformed, the whole man twitching and jumping with a sort of St. Vitus's dance inside his *soutane*, as in a bag. Close curls of fair hair surmounted the brow, and by their revelation of youthfulness

made the general aspect of the man more horrifying still. At last, however, having plucked up courage to look him in the face, I found a sort of overmastering interest in contemplating his hideousness. I looked and pondered. While the lips, opening in a seraphic smile, displayed the blackened remains of three teeth, and the eyes, lifted to heaven, rolled horribly between blood-red lids, I looked at him in admiring wonder. Far from compassionating him, I envied a being so miraculously preserved, by the utter deformity of his person, from the trials of the flesh, the lapses of the senses, and the temptations night brings on its dusky wings. I deemed him happy among men.

Well, one day as we were walking together in the sun down the slope of the hills on which the town is built, discussing heavenly grace, suddenly the priest stopped dead, and laying a heavy hand on my arm, said in a ringing voice I can hear at this moment—

“I tell you this, I know it : chastity is a virtue that cannot be preserved without a special intervention of God’s good help.”

The speech showed me in a flash the unfathomable abyss of the sins of the flesh. What righteous soul is not sore tempted, if this man, who had no body, one would think, save as the vehicle of pain and nausea, if he too felt the pricks of desire ?



PERSONS of great piety or high artistic sensibility infuse into Religion or Art a refined sensuality. But then sensuality always implies some degree of fetish-worship. The poet makes fetishes of words and tones. He lends miraculous virtues to certain combinations of syllables and, like the devotee, is fain to believe in the potency of consecrated formulas.

There is more of ritual in verse-making than most people think. Indeed, to a poet grown grey in his art, writing verses is the fulfilment of a sacrosanct ceremony. Such a mind is instinctively opposed to novelty, and we need not wonder at the intolerance that is its natural outcome.

We are hardly entitled even to smile when we see the very men who, rightly or wrongly, lay claim to have been the boldest innovators the first to repudiate new ideas with the utmost indignation and disgust. This is one of the commonest inconsistencies of the human mind, and the history of religious reformation has some tragic instances to

show. We have seen a Henry Estienne forced to fly his country to escape the flames, and from the land of exile denouncing to the stake his own friends who did not see eye to eye with him ; we have seen Calvin hounding Servetus to death ; and all the world knows the extremity of intolerance displayed by Revolutionaries.

At one time I knew personally an old Senator of the Republic, who as a young man had been a member of all the Secret Societies that conspired against Charles X, had fomented fifty risings under the Government of July, then in later life had concocted plots to overturn the Empire and taken a hand in three successive Revolutions. He was a quiet, peaceable old man, whose face never lost its look of smiling geniality in the debates in the house. It seemed as though nothing could ever again disturb the equanimity he had purchased with so many years of weary turmoil. His whole personality breathed only complacency and contented acquiescence. Yet one day I saw him roused to furious indignation. A fire that seemed quenched long ago flamed up in his eyes. He was looking out of a window in the Luxembourg and saw a caucus of students filing in disorderly procession through the Gardens. The sight of this innocent revolt against authority stirred him to a veritable frenzy.

“Shameful, shameful, such a breach of order in a public place!” he cried out, his voice choking with anger and alarm,—and he sent for the police. He was a fine old fellow. But after being a leader of *émeutes* himself, he dreaded the merest shadow of rebellion. Men who have engineered revolutions cannot endure that others should take upon them to rise in revolt.

In the same way old poets, who have made their mark by some poetical innovation, are bitterly opposed to any further changes whatever. They are only human after all. It is a painful thing, to any but a great and wise philosopher, to see life going on the same after one has ceased to influence it, to feel oneself drowned in the flowing tide of events. Poet, Senator, or Cobbler, a man finds it hard to resign his claim to be the final cause of things, the supreme motive of the created universe.



PEAKING generally, we may say poets are not aware of the scientific laws which they obey when they make good verses. In matters of prosody they cling, very rightly, to the most artless "rule of thumb," and it would be far from wise to blame them for it. [In art as in love, instinct is an adequate guide, and any light science may throw on the subject only baffles the eyes.] Beauty is based ultimately on geometry, but yet it is only by the æsthetic sense we can grasp its delicate shades and shapes.

Yes, poets are lucky men; a part of their strength resides in the very fact of their ignorance. Only they must not be too keen to argue about the laws of their art; when they lose their innocence their charm goes with it, and like fish out of water they flounder helplessly in the arid regions of theory.



WHAT a foolish phrase, the "know thyself" of the Greek philosopher! Why, we can never know either ourselves or others. A fine task, indeed! To create a new world would be less impossible than to comprehend the old. Hegel had an inkling of this. Perhaps the human intellect may one day avail to frame a universe; it is for ever incompetent to conceive things as they are. So it is an iniquitous abuse of intelligence, nothing less, to employ it in searching after truth. Still less can it help us to set up a standard of justice, and weigh men and their works thereby. It is properly enough employed over those games, more complicated than shovel-board or chess, which we call Metaphysics, Ethics, *Æ*sthetics. But the way it serves us best and gives most gratification is by seizing here and there some salient angle, some bright spot of things existent, and making play with it, yet never spoiling the innocent frolic by a spirit of system and moral sententiousness.



YOU say that our habit of philosophizing is at the root of all our ills. But to hold it so disastrous as all this is surely a monstrous exaggeration of its importance and power. As a matter of fact, the reason trespasses far less than people think on the domains of the instincts and natural feelings, even in persons whose reasoning faculties are most highly developed, but who are every whit as selfish and greedy and sensual as the generality of mankind. We shall never find a Physiologist submitting his heart-beats and the rhythm of his respiration to the dictates of pure reason. No matter how advanced, how scientific the civilization, the operations that men undertake according to reasoned method are few in number and unimportant compared with such as instinct and common impulse perform of themselves. So little does our conscious will react against our reflex activities that I am afraid to say that human societies exhibit anything approaching an intellectual constitution as distinguished from a natural.

After all is said and done, a metaphysician is not so widely different from the rest of mankind as people think and as he wishes them to think.

And, then, what is thinking? and how do we think? We think with words; that by itself constitutes a sensible basis and brings us back to natural preconditions. Reflect a little; a Metaphysician possesses, to build up his system of the Universe with, only the perfected cries of apes and dogs. What he styles profound speculation and transcendental method is only setting in a row, arbitrarily arranged, the onomatopoetic noises where-with the brutes expressed hunger and fear and desire in the primeval forests, and to which have gradually become attached meanings that are assumed to be abstract only because they are less definite.

Never fear; this series of petty noises, deadened and enfeebled in the course of ages, that goes to make up a book of philosophy will never teach us too much of the Universe to permit us to inhabit it any longer. We are all in the dark together; the only difference is, the savant keeps knocking at the wall, while the ignoramus stays quietly in the middle of the room.

TO GABRIEL SÉAILLES



I CANNOT say whether this world of ours is the worst of all possible worlds. I hold it is gross flattery to grant it any pre-eminence, were it only the pre-eminence of evil.

What we can imagine of other worlds is very little, and physical astronomy affords us no very precise information as to the conditions of life on the surface even of those planets which are nearest to our own. All we know is that Venus and Mars bear a considerable resemblance to the Earth. This resemblance is enough warrant by itself for our believing that evil is in the ascendant there as it is here, and that our world is only one of the provinces of its vast empire. We have no reason to suppose that life is any better on the surface of those giant globes, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, and Neptune, which glide silently through the infinite spaces of the sky where the sun is already beginning to lose some portion of his heat and light. Who can tell what kind of beings inhabit these worlds shrouded in dense, swiftly

shifting vapours? Judging by analogy, we cannot help thinking that our whole solar system is one vast gehenna, where animal life is born only to suffer and to die. Nor can we comfort ourselves with the fancy that perhaps the fixed stars give light to planets of happier conditions. No, the stars are too much like our own sun for that. Science has decomposed the feeble ray they take years, centuries, to transmit to us; and the analysis of their light proves that the substances which burn on their surface are the very same that surge and eddy round the orb which, ever since men have been in existence, has lighted and warmed their life of misery and folly and pain. This analogy alone is enough to fill me with a sick disgust of the Universe.

The homogeneity of its chemical composition makes me expect with only too great assurance a rigorous monotony in the conditions of spirit and flesh that prevail throughout its inconceivably vast extent, and I have every reason to fear that all thinking beings are as wretchedly unhappy in the world of Sirius or the star-system of Altair as they are, within our own knowledge, on the Earth. But, you say, all this does not constitute the universe. Yes, I have a shrewd suspicion you are right; I feel these immensities are nothing, in fact I am convinced that, if there is anything, that anything is not what we see.

Yes, I feel we live surrounded by a mere phantasmagoria, that our glimpse of the universe is purely the effect of the nightmare that breaks the restless sleep that is our life. And this is the worst blow of all. For it is plain we can know nothing, that all things combine to deceive us, and that Nature is only making cruel sport of our ignorance and helplessness.

TO PAUL HERVIEU



I AM convinced in my own mind that humanity has always identically the same total of folly and dullness to spend. It is a capital that is bound to bear interest in one way or another. The great thing to know is whether, after all, the imbecilities that time has consecrated do not form the best investment a man can make of his stupidity. Far from feeling glad when I see some time-honoured fallacy exploded, I think of the new one that will come and take its place, and I ask myself the anxious question,—will it not perhaps be more inconvenient and dangerous than the other? On full and sufficient consideration, the old prejudices are less baneful than the new; time, by long usage, has given them a polish and made them almost innocent.



MEN of action, who have the knack and taste for affairs, even in their best-concerted plans, reckon with the part fortune will play, well knowing that all great enterprises are uncertain. Soldiers and gamblers are expert in this calculation of probabilities, and learn to seize such chances as come their way without wearing out their patience waiting for the concurrence of them all.



WHEN we say life is good, life is evil, we are stating a meaningless proposition. We ought to say it is good and bad at one and the same time, for it is through it, and it alone, we have the idea of good and bad at all. The truth is, that life is delightful, odious, charming, repulsive, sweet, bitter, in fact that it is everything. It is like the harlequin of our friend Florian ; one man sees it red, another blue, and both see it as it is, inasmuch as it is red and blue and all other colours. Here is a way to bring us all into agreement and reconcile the philosophers who are all tearing each other's eyes out. But there, we are so constituted that we *will* force others to feel and think as we do, and we cannot suffer our neighbour to be merry when we are sad ourselves.



VIL is necessary. If it did not exist, neither would good. Evil is the sole potential cause of good. What would courage be without danger, and pity without pain?

What would become of self-devotion and self-sacrifice in a world of universal happiness? Can we conceive of virtue without vice, love without hate, beauty without ugliness? It is thanks to evil and sorrow that the earth is habitable and life worth living. We should not therefore be too hard on the Devil. He is a great artist and a great savant; he has created at least one-half of the world. And his half is so cunningly embedded in the other that it is impossible to interfere with the first without at the same time doing a like injury to the second. Each vice you destroy had a corresponding virtue, which perishes along with it.

I enjoyed the pleasure of seeing, one day at a country fair, the life of St. Antony the Great represented by marionettes. As a lesson in philo-

sophy, such a show beats Shakespeare's tragedies hollow,—to say nothing of M. d'Ennery! Oh, how vividly it brings before us the two things working together to one end,—God's grace and the Devil's!

The stage represents a horrid desert, to be peopled presently with angels and demons. The action, as it proceeds, impresses the mind with a grim presentiment of fatality,—an impression partly resulting from the symmetrical alternation of demons and angels as participators, partly from the gait and bearing of the characters, who are moved by strings manipulated by an invisible hand. Nevertheless, when, after his orisons, St. Antony, still on his knees, lifts his brow,—which has grown as hard and humpy as a camel's knees by dint of so many, many prostrations on the stones,—and raising his tear-worn eyes, sees the Queen of Sheba standing there before him in her golden robe, opening her arms invitingly and smiling at him, we shake and shiver with apprehension lest the Saint yield to temptation, and we follow with anguished anxiety the harrowing spectacle of his trials and tribulations.

The fact is, we all see ourselves in him, and when he has finally won the day, we feel ourselves personally interested in his victory. It is the triumph of humanity as a whole in its everlasting

strife and struggle. St. Antony is a great Saint only because he has successfully resisted the Queen of Sheba. Well, is it not obvious then, that in sending this beautiful lady, who hides her cloven hoof under a trailing skirt embroidered with pearls, to visit the Hermit, the Devil performed an act which was indispensably necessary to constitute his Saintship.

Thus the marionettes confirmed me in my belief that evil is an indispensable pre-condition of good and the Devil a necessity to the moral beauty of the universe.



I HAVE known savants as simple and unassuming as children, and every day we meet ignoramuses who deem themselves the axis of the world. Alas! each one of us regards himself as the hub of the universe. It is a delusion common to all mankind. The crossing-sweeper is not exempt. His eyes tell him so; as he looks around him, he sees the vault of heaven rounding him about on every side, making him the very centre of heaven and earth. It may be the presumption is a little shaken in the mind of the man who has thought deeply. Humility, a rare thing among the learned, is rarer still with the ignorant.



PHILOSOPHICAL theory of the universe is as much like its prototype as a sphere, in which merely the lines of latitude and longitude are traced, would be like the actual earth. Metaphysics has one admirable peculiarity; it takes away from the universe whatever it has and gives it what it had not,—a wondrous work no doubt, and a finer game, an incomparably nobler one, than draughts or chess, but, when all is said, of a like sort. The universe as plotted by the metaphysicians is resolved into geometrical lines, the arrangement of which is a diverting amusement. A system like that of Kant or Hegel does not differ essentially from those combinations of cards with which women foretell fortunes, and so cheat the monotony of their lives.



O think it is possible, I tell myself, as I read this book, to charm us thus, not with forms and colours, as Nature does in her happy moments,—which are few and far between,—

but just with little conventional signs borrowed from language! These signs awake in us divine images. That is the miracle. /A beautiful verse is like a violin-bow drawn across the resonant fibres of our soul. /It is not his own thoughts, but ours, that the Poet sets singing within us. When he tells us of a woman he loves, it is our loves and griefs he awakes entrancingly in our souls. He is an evoker of spirits. When we understand him, we are as much poets as he. We have in us, every one of us, a copy of each of our poets which no man knows of and which will perish utterly and for ever with all its variants when we shall cease to feel and know. And do you suppose we should love our lyric bards so fondly, if they spoke to us of aught else but our own selves? It is all a happy misapprehension! The best of them

are sheer egoists. They are thinking of themselves all the time. It is only themselves they have put into their verses—and it is only *ourselves* we find there. The poets help us to love ; that is all they are for. And surely it is a good and sufficient use to put their delightful vanity to. Their stanzas are in like case with women,—nothing more unprofitable than to praise them ; the best loved will always be the loveliest. As to compelling the public to confess the object of our special choice to be incomparable, that is a task better befits a knight-errant than a man of sober sense.



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LIFE is an ordeal, a test,—so say the Theologians. I am sure I do not know; at any rate it is not one we submit to voluntarily. The conditions are not laid down with sufficient clearness. In fact, it is not fair and equal for all. How can life be a test, for children who die directly after birth, and idiots, and madmen? Ah! these are objections that have been answered long ago. Yes, they are always being answered, and I am bound to say the answer cannot be very convincing, if it has to be repeated so often. Life does not bear the look, somehow, of an examination-room. It is much more like a vast pottery-works, where they manufacture all sorts of vessels for unknown purposes, a good many of which get broken in the making and are tossed on one side as worthless potsherds, without ever having been used. Others again are only employed for ridiculous or degrading ends. That is the way with us too.

TO PIERRE VÉBER



THE fate of Judas Iscariot fills us with endless amazement. For, after all, the man of Kerioth came into the world to fulfil the prophecies; he was bound to sell the Son of God for thirty pieces of silver. And the traitor's kiss is, just as much as the spear and the nails all Christians venerate, one of the necessary instruments of the Passion. Without Judas, the mystery were not accomplished nor the human race saved. And nevertheless it is an established dogma with Theologians that Judas is damned. They base it on the words of the Christ: "Good were it for that man if he had never been born." This thought, that Judas lost his soul while working for the salvation of the world, has tormented not a few Christian mystics, and amongst the number the Abbé Œgger, Senior Vicaire of the Cathedral Church of Paris. The good priest, whose soul was full of tender pity, could not endure the idea that Judas was in Hell, suffering everlasting torments. He thought and

thought, and the more deeply he pondered, the more baffling grew his doubts and difficulties.

He came to the conclusion that the redemption of this unhappy soul was under consideration of the Divine clemency, and that, despite the dark saying of the Gospel and the tradition of the Church, he of Kerioth was finally to be saved. His doubts were beyond bearing, and he longed fervently for enlightenment. One night, as he could not sleep, he got up and, passing through the sacristy, entered the great empty church, where the lamps of perpetual adoration were burning in the thick darkness. Falling on his face before the high altar, he began to pray :

“O God! Thou God of love and pity, if it is true Thou hast received into Thy glory the most unhappy of Thy disciples ; if it is true, as I hope and would fain believe it is, that Judas Iscariot is seated at Thy right hand, command him to come down to me and proclaim to me himself the chiefest masterpiece of Thy clemency.

“And thou, whose name all men have cursed for eighteen hundred years, and whom I revere because, methinks, thou hast chosen Hell for thyself alone in order to leave Heaven free to us, scape-goat of all traitors and cowards and deceivers, O Judas, come and lay thy hands on me for consecration to the priesthood of pity and loving-kindness !”

Then, as he lay there after his prayer was ended, the priest felt two hands laid upon his head, like the Bishop's at the ceremony of ordination. Next day he went to the Archbishop and announced his vocation.—“I am,” he told him, “consecrated Priest of Pity, after the Order of Judas, *secundum ordinem Judas.*”

And, that very day, M. Œgger set forth to preach through the world the Gospel of the Infinite Pity, in the name of Judas redeemed. His mission ended in mere misery and madness. M. Œgger turned Swedenborgian and died at Munich. He was the last and most gentle-hearted of the Cainites.



MONSIEUR ARISTIDE, who is a great sportsman,—a fine shot and a keen rider to hounds, saved a brood of young goldfinches just hatched in a rosebush below his window. A cat was clawing up into the bush. It is a good thing, when it comes to action, to believe in final causes, and hold that cats are made for killing mice or else for receiving a charge of lead in the ribs. M. Aristide picked up his revolver and fired at the cat. At first blush, one is pleased to see the nestlings saved and their enemy punished. But this revolver-shot is like all other human acts,—you somehow cease to see the justice of it when you look too close. Because, if you think of it, the cat, which had its sporting instincts like M. Aristide, might very well believe with him in final causes, and in that case feel quite sure goldfinches were hatched for him. It was a very natural mistake. The revolver-charge taught him rather late in the day that he was in error as to the final cause of the little nestlings twittering in the rose-bushes. What living being

but deems himself the end and aim of the universe, and acts as if he were so? It is the very cornerstone of life. Each one of us thinks the world has himself for its object. When I say us, I am not forgetting the brutes. There is not an animal that does not feel itself the supreme end for which things were created. Our neighbours, like M. Aristide's revolver, never fail to undeceive us sooner or later,—our neighbours, or just a dog, a horse, a microbe, a grain of sand.



WHATEVER wins its vogue only by some trick of novelty and whim of æsthetic taste ages fast. Fashions change in Art as in everything else. There are catch-words that come up and profess to be new, just like the frocks from the great dressmakers' in the Rue de la Paix; like them, they only last a season. At Rome, in the decadent periods of Art, the statues of the Empresses showed the hair dressed in the latest mode. Soon these coiffures looked ridiculous; so they had to be changed, and the figures were given marble wigs. It were only fitting that a style as rococo as these statues should be reperiwigged every year. The fact is, in these days when we live so fast, literary schools last but a few years, sometimes but a few months. I know young writers whose style is already two or three generations out of date, and seems quite archaic. This is the result, doubtless, of the marvellous progress in industry and machinery that carries modern communities along in its dizzy sweep. In

the days of MM. de Goncourt and railways, we could still spend a fairly long time over an artistic piece of writing. But since the telephone, Literature, which depends on contemporary manners, renews its formulas with an altogether disconcerting rapidity. So we will merely agree with M. Ludovic Halévy that the simple form is the only one adapted to travel peacefully, we will not say down the centuries, that is assuming too much, but at any rate down the years.

The only difficulty is to define what the simple form is,—and it must be allowed to be a great one.

Nature, at any rate as we can know her, and in an environment adapted for organic life, offers us nothing simple, and Art cannot aspire to more simplicity than Nature. Yet we understand well enough what we all mean, when we say such and such a style is simple, and such and such another is not.

I will say this much then, that if properly speaking there is no simple style, there are styles which appear simple, and it is just these that carry youth and power of duration with them. It is only left now to inquire whence they get this lucky appearance. Doubtless we shall conclude they owe it, not to the fact of their being less rich than others in divers elements, but rather because they form a whole in which all the parts are so thoroughly

blended that they cannot be distinguished separately. A good style, in fact, is like yonder beam of light that shines in at my window as I write, and which owes its pure brilliancy to the intimate combination of the seven colours of which it is made up. A simple style is like white light. It is complex, but does not seem so. This is only a simile after all, and we know what such parallels are worth when it is not a poet that draws them. What I wanted to make plain is this : in language, true simplicity, the simplicity that is good and desirable, is only apparent, and results solely from the fine co-ordination and sovereign economy of the several parts of the whole.



SI I cannot conceive beauty independent of time and space, I only begin to take pleasure in works of the imagination when I discover their connexion with life; it is the point of junction between the two that fascinates me. The coarse pottery-ware of Hissarlik has made me love the *Iliad* more, and I can better appreciate the *Divine Comedy* for what I know of Florentine life in the Thirteenth Century. It is the man, and the man only, I look for in the artist. The finest poem, what is it but a replica? Goethe has an illuminative phrase: "The only durable works are works of *circumstance*." But it is not too much to say that all works are works of circumstance, because all depend on the place and particular time when they were created. We cannot understand them nor love them with an intelligent love, unless we know the place, time, and circumstances of their origin.

A man is *ipso facto* convicted as a vain-glorious fool who supposes he has produced a work that can

stand alone and self-sufficing. } The highest has
value only in virtue of its relations with life. The
better I grasp these relations, the more interest I
feel in the work.

v



It is possible, and it is right, to tell everything, when you know how to do it. It would be so profoundly interesting to listen to a confession that was absolutely sincere! Yet since the world began, nothing of the kind has ever been heard. No man has told everything,—not even the fiery Augustine, more concerned to confound the Manichæans than to lay bare his soul, not even poor Rousseau, a great man, whom his own disordered brain led to vilify himself.



THE secret influences of daylight and atmosphere, the thousand pangs emanating from all Nature, are the ransom of sensuous beings, prone to find their delight in the shapes and colours of things.



INTOLERANCE is of all periods. There is no Religion but has had its Fanatics. We are all prone to unreasoning admiration. Everything seems excellent to us in what we love, and it angers us when we are shown the clay feet of our idols. Men find it very hard to apply a little criticism to the sources of their beliefs and the origin of their faith. It is just as well ; if we looked too close into first principles, we should never believe at all.



ANY people in these days are convinced that we have reached the last word of all the civilizations, and that after us the world will come to an end. They are millenarians like the Saints of the early Christian ages,—but reasonable, reflecting millenarians, in the taste of the period. It is perhaps a consolation of a sort to tell ourselves that the universe will not survive us.

For my own part, I see no sign of decay in mankind. I have heard talk about decadence, but I do not believe a word of it. I do not even think we have yet come to the highest point of civilization. I consider that the evolution of humanity is extremely slow, and that the differences in manners and morals that come about from one century to the next are, measured by a true scale, much less than is generally supposed. Only they strike us; while the innumerable points of resemblance we share with our fathers pass unnoticed. The world moves very slowly. Man has a natural

genius for imitation. He hardly ever invents. There is, in psychology no less than in physics, a law of gravitation that binds us down, as ever, to the ground. Théophile Gautier, who was a philosopher in his way, with something of the Grand Turk in his attitude of mind, would remark, with a look of melancholy, that men had not so much as managed to invent an eighth mortal sin. This morning, as I walked the streets, I saw some masons who were building a house, and they raised the stones exactly as the slaves of Thebes and Nineveh did. I saw a newly-married pair leave the church on their way to the tavern, followed by their friends and relations; they were accomplishing cheerfully enough rites that are centuries and centuries old. I met a lyric poet who stopped me and recited some of his verses, which he deems immortal; and as we stood there, horsemen were passing by along the road, wearing a helmet,—the helmet of the Roman legionaries and the Greek hoplites, the helmet of shining bronze of the Homeric warriors, from which still hung, to terrify the foe, the waving mane that frightened the child Astyanax in the arms of his “well-girdled nurse.” They were a detachment of the *Gardes Républicains*. Seeing these things and remembering how the Paris bakers still bake bread in ovens, as in the days of Abraham, I repeated to myself the words

of the Book : "There is no new thing under the sun." And I ceased to think it strange to submit to civil laws that were already ancient when the Emperor Justinian embodied them in a venerable code.



HERE is one thing in especial that gives a charm to men's reflexions, —and that is a sense of disquietude. A mind that is not anxious I find either irritating or tiresome.



WE call men *dangerous* whose minds are made differently from our own, and *immoral* those who profess another standard of ethics. We condemn as *sceptics* all who do not share our own illusions, without ever troubling our heads to inquire if they have others of their own.



UGUSTE COMTE has by this time taken his proper place beside Descartes and Leibnitz. That part of his philosophy which deals with the mutual relations of the sciences and their several subordinations to each other, and that too in which he disentangles from the mass of historical facts a positive system of sociology, constitute from henceforth one of the most precious and fruitful possessions of the human mind. On the contrary, the scheme formulated by that great thinker, towards the end of his life, with a view to a new organization of society, has found no favour outside the bounds of the Positivist Church ; it forms the religious part of the work. Auguste Comte conceived it under the influence of a pure and mystical love. The woman who inspired him, Clotilde de Vaux, died within a year of her first meeting the philosopher, who vowed to her memory a cult to be observed for ever by his faithful disciples. The religion of Auguste Comte was inspired by love. Yet it is gloomy and tyrannical.

In it every act of life and thought is strictly regulated. It confines existence within a geometrical figure. All curiosity of mind is sternly reprobated. It tolerates only the useful branches of knowledge, and entirely subordinates intellect to sentiment. It is noteworthy, this! From the very fact of the doctrine being based on science, it assumes science to be definitely constituted, and far from encouraging the further prosecution of researches, it actually disapproves and censures any that have not for their object the direct advantage of mankind. This alone would be enough to prevent my donning the neophyte's white robe and going to knock at the door of the temple in the Rue Monsieur-le-Prince. To banish caprice and curiosity, what ruthless cruelty!

What I complain of is not that the Positivists choose to forbid us all investigation into the essence, origin and end of things. I am quite content to remain for ever ignorant of the cause of causes and the end of ends. I have always regarded the books I read on metaphysics in the light of romances, more diverting than most novels, but not a whit more authoritative. But what does make Positivism so bitter and disheartening is the severity with which it bars the useless sciences,—which are the most fascinating! To live without them, would that be to go on

living? It will not suffer us to play at our own free will with phenomena and intoxicate ourselves with the vain shows of things. It condemns the agreeable mania for exploring the remote regions of the heavens. Auguste Comte, who taught astronomy for twenty years, was for confining the study of the science to the visible planets of our own system,—the only heavenly bodies, he declared, that could exercise an appreciable influence on the Great Fetish. That was the name he gave to the Earth. But, let me tell him, the Great Fetish would not be habitable to certain minds, if life on it were regulated hour by hour, and if no one was allowed to do useless things, as for instance to ponder on the double stars.



MUST act because I live," says the homonculus that issued from Doctor Wagner's alembic. And, in very truth, to live is to act. Unfortunately, the speculative turn of mind unfits men for acting. The empire of this world is not for such as long to understand everything. It is a disabling weakness to see beyond the immediate object in view. It is not horses and mules only that need blinkers to keep them from shying. Philosophers *will* stop in the road and loiter out of the path, on an errand. The story of Little Red Ridinghood is a great lesson to Statesmen who carry the little pot of butter and are so much better for not knowing if there are nuts along the woodland ways.



THE more I think over human life the more I am persuaded we ought to choose Irony and Pity for its assessors and judges, as the Egyptians called upon the goddess Isis and the goddess Nephtys on behalf of their dead. Irony and Pity are both of good counsel ; the first with her smiles makes life agreeable ; the other sanctifies it to us with her tears. The Irony I invoke is no cruel deity. She mocks neither love nor beauty. She is gentle and kindly disposed. Her mirth disarms anger, and it is she teaches us to laugh at rogues and fools, whom but for her we might be so weak as to hate.



THE man will always have the crowd with him who is sure of himself as he is of the world at large. That is what the crowd likes ; it demands categorical statements and not proofs. Proofs disturb and puzzle it. It is simple-minded and only understands simplicity. You must not tell it how or in what way, but simply yes or no.



THE dead are very readily open to reconciliations. It is a good instinct to join indiscriminately in glory and affection the workers who, albeit enemies, yet worked in common at some great moral or social task. Legend brings about these posthumous reunions, which gratify a whole people's wishes. Legend possesses marvelous resources for bringing Peter and Paul and everybody into unison.

But the Legend of the Revolution has a hard task to get itself into shape.



THE love of books is really a commendable taste. Bibliophiles are often made fun of, and perhaps, after all, they do lend themselves to raillery. But we should rather envy them, I think, for having successfully filled their lives with an enduring and harmless pleasure. Detractors think to confound them by declaring they never read their books. But one of them had his answer pat: "And you, do you eat off your old china?" What more innocent hobby can a man pursue than sorting away books in a press? True, it is very like the game the children play at when they build sand castles on the seashore. They are mighty busy, but nothing comes of it; whatever they build will be thrown down in a very short time. No doubt it is the same with collections of books and pictures. But it is only the vicissitudes of existence and the shortness of human life that must be blamed. The tide sweeps away the sand castles, the auctioneer disperses the hoarded treasures. And yet, what better can we

do than build sand castles at ten years old, and form collections at sixty? Nothing will remain in any case of all our work, and the love of old books is not more foolish than any other love.



VERY brief acquaintance with the savants is enough to show us that they are the least curious of mankind. Chancing some years ago to be in one of the great towns of Europe, I visited the Natural History Galleries under the escort of one of the Conservators, who described the collection of fossils to me with great pride and pleasure. He gave me much valuable information up to and including the pleiocene beds. But directly we found ourselves in face of the first traces of man, he looked another way, and, in reply to my questions, told me that was outside his show-case. I saw I had been indiscreet. One should never ask a savant the secrets of the universe which are not in his particular show-case. He takes no interest in them.



TIME, as it flies, wounds or kills our most ardent and tenderest sentiments. It tones down admiration, robbing it of its two staple aliments—surprise and wonder; it destroys love and love's pretty follies, it shakes the foundations of faith and hope, it strips bare of blossom and leaf every growth of simple innocence. At any rate, may it leave us pity, that we be not imprisoned in old age as in a charnel-house.

It is through pity we remain truly men. Let us not change into stone like the defiers of the gods in the old myths. Let us commiserate the weak because they suffer persecution, and the fortunate of this world, because it is written: "Woe unto you that laugh." Let us choose the good part, which is to suffer with them that suffer, and let us say with lips and heart to the victims of calamity, like the good Christian to Mary, "Fac me tecum plangere,"—Make me to lament with thee.



Do not be over chary in attributing to the artists of older days an ideal they never really had. No one ever admires a work of art without some self-delusion ; in a word, to understand a masterpiece is to recreate it in oneself over again. The same works are reflected diversely in the souls of those who contemplate them. Each generation of men seeks a fresh emotion in face of the productions of the old masters. The best-endowed spectator is the one who finds, at the cost of some fortunate misunderstanding, the purest and strongest emotion. Hence it is that humanity is hardly ever passionately attracted by works of art or poetry which are not in some part or degree obscure and capable of various interpretations.



AST social changes are imminent, we are told ; the prophets confidently expect them, see them already come. This is a mistake the prophetic spirit is always prone to. Instability no doubt is the first condition of life ; all living matter undergoes ceaseless modification,—but imperceptibly, almost without our knowing it.

All progress, the best as well as the worst, is slow and regular. There will be no vast changes, and there never have been,—I mean rapid and sudden changes. All economic transformations have the kindly gradual operation characteristic of all natural forces.

Our social condition is the effect of those which have preceded it, as it is the cause of those that will succeed it. It depends on the former, as those that follow will depend on it. And this interconnexion determines for long periods the persistency of the same type ; this orderly succession guarantees the tranquillity of existence. True, it fails to satisfy minds that are set eagerly on novelties and hearts

that are athirst with love of humanity. But it is the order of the universe, and we must make the best of it. Let us keep a zealous heart and cultivate the needful illusions ; let us work at whatever we deem useful and good,—but not in the hope of any sudden and marvellous success, not buoyed up by any dreams of a social apocalypse ; all visions of the sort serve only to dazzle and deceive. We must look for no miracle ; but resign ourselves to do our own infinitesimal part in making the future better—or worse, the future we shall never see.



IN life we must make all due allowance for chance. Chance, in the last resort, is God.



PHILOSOPHICAL systems are interesting only as psychical documents well adapted to enlighten the savant on the different conditions which the human mind has passed through. Valuable for the study of man, they can afford us no information about anything that is not man.

They are like those thin threads of platinum that are inserted in astronomical telescopes to divide the field into equal parts. These filaments are useful for the accurate observation of the heavenly bodies, but they are not part of the heavens. It is good to have threads of platinum in telescopes ; but we must not forget it was the instrument-maker put them there.



WAS seventeen when I saw Alfred de Vigny one day in a public reading-room in the Rue de l'Arcade. I shall never forget the incident. He wore a voluminous cravat of black satin fastened with a cameo, and over it a turned-down collar with rounded corners. He carried in one hand a thin Malacca cane with a gold knob. I was very young, and still he did not strike me as old. His face was calm and kindly. His hair, turning grey but still fine and silky, fell in ringlets about his round cheeks. He held himself very upright, walked with short steps, and spoke in a low voice. After he was gone, I handled the book he had returned with feelings of respectful admiration. It was a volume of the *Collection Petitot*, the *Mémoires de La Noue*, I think. I found a book-mark left behind in it, a narrow slip of paper on which the poet, in his large handwriting, tall and pointed and reminding one of Madame de Sévigné's, had traced a single word in pencil, a name, "Beller-

phon." Hero of mythology or historic ship, which did the name point to? Was de Vigny, when he wrote the word, thinking of Napoleon confronted with the limits of human ambition, or was he telling himself: "The ill-starred rider who bestrode Pegasus, has not, for all the Greeks have fabled, slain the terrible and alluring monster which, with sweating brow and burning throat and bleeding feet, we pursue so frenziedly, the Chimæra"?



PHILOSOPHIC melancholy has more than once found expression in words of gloomy magnificence. As believers who have attained a high degree of moral perfection taste the joys of renunciation, so the savant, persuaded that all about us is but vain show and pretence, drinks deep of this philosophic sadness, and forgets himself in the delights of a calm despair—a profound and noble mournfulness, which those who have once tasted it would not exchange for all the frivolous gaieties and empty hopes of the vulgar herd. Even objectors who, despite the æsthetic beauty of these thoughts, might be tempted to pronounce them a poison to men and nations, will perhaps suspend their anathema, when we show them how the doctrine of universal illusion and the flux of things arose in the golden age of Greek philosophy with Xenophanes, and was perpetuated through the ages of most refined civilization by the highest, the most serene and

sensitive minds, by a Democritus, an Epicurus,
a Gassendi.¹

¹ Pierre Gassendi, French philosopher, 1592-1655, opponent of the Aristotelian philosophy.



HERE is a little girl of nine who I am sure is wiser than all the sages. She said to me just now :—


“One sees in books what one cannot see in reality, because it is too far off or because it is past. But what one sees in books one sees badly or sadly. I think children ought not to read books. There are so many things in the world which are good to see, and which they have not seen,—lakes, mountains, rivers, towns and fields, the sea and ships, the sky and the stars !”

I am quite of her opinion. We have an hour to live; why trouble our heads about so many things? Why learn everything, seeing we know we shall never know anything? We live too much in books and not enough in nature, and we are very like that simpleton of a Pliny the Younger who went on studying a Greek author while before his very eyes Vesuvius was overwhelming five cities beneath the ashes.



IS there such a thing as an impartial history? And what is History? The written representation of past events. But what is an event? Is it a fact of any sort? No! it is a notable fact. Now, how is the historian to discriminate whether a fact is notable or no? He decides this arbitrarily, according to his character and idiosyncrasy, at his own taste and fancy,—in a word, as an artist. For facts are not divided by any hard and fast line of nature into historical facts and non-historical. A fact is a something of infinite complexity. Is the historian to present the facts in all their complexity? That is an impossibility. He will represent them stripped of almost all the individual peculiarities that constitute them facts,—maimed, therefore, and mutilated, other than what they really and truly were. As to the mutual connexions of the facts one with another, what can we say? If a historical fact, so called, is brought about, as is possible, as is probable indeed, by one or more non-historical

facts, and because non-historical therefore unknown, how can the historian mark the relation of these facts to each other and their interconnection? Then I am assuming in all this I am saying that the historian has under his eyes trustworthy evidence, whereas in reality he is constantly deceived, and he gives credence to such and such a witness only for sentimental reasons of his own. History is not a science, it is an art. A successful history can only be written by dint of imagination.

“T is superb, a superb crime !” So wrote J. J. Weiss one day in the pages of a famous journal. The exclamation raised a storm of scandalized protest among the regular readers of the paper. I know of one worthy fellow, a magistrate and a well-meaning, kind-hearted old man, who next day refused to take in his copy of the offending sheet. He had been a subscriber for over thirty years, and he had reached an age when a man is not fond of changing old habits. Yet he did not hesitate to make the sacrifice to professional morality. It was, I think, the *affaire Fualdès* that had roused the writer to this burst of generous admiration. I am for scandalizing no man ; I could not do it. It calls for a fascinating recklessness I do not possess. But I confess the master was right, and that it *was* superb, a superb crime.

Celebrated crimes have an irresistible attraction for all of us. It is not too much to say that bloodshed plays a great part, the major part, in the epic

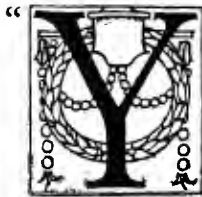
of humanity. Macbeth and Chopart, surnamed *the Amiable*, are the heroes of the scene. The love of legends of crime and horror is innate in human-kind. Ask the children; they will tell you if Blue Beard had not killed his wives his story would not be half so entrancing. In presence of a dark and baffling murder case the mind feels a thrill of surprised curiosity.

It is surprised, because crime is of its very nature abnormal, mysterious, and monstrous; it is curious and interested, because in every crime it finds the same world-old motives of hunger and love, which are at the bottom of all our actions, good or bad. The criminal strikes us as a survival from a remote past, suggesting a horrid image of our savage ancestors of the woods and caves. The genius of prehistoric races lives again in him. He preserves wild instincts we thought abolished; he has wiles our milder manners know nothing of. He is stirred by primitive appetites that are asleep in us moderns. He is still a brute beast, yet already a man. Hence the feeling of indignant admiration he inspires in us. The spectacle of crime is at once dramatic and philosophical. It is picturesque, moreover, and fascinating by virtue of a hundred things,—odd, fantastic groupings, weird shadows thrown momentarily on walls, when all the world is sleeping, tragic rage, inscrutable looks

the mystery of which baffles and irritates. In country places, crawling on the bosom of mother earth, which it has fed with blood for so many centuries, crime is associated with the black magic of dark nights, the favouring silence of the moonlight, the vague terrors of wild nature, the gloomy expanses of field and flood. In town and lurking amid crowds it assails the nerves with a reek of poisoned air and alcohol, a nausea of putrid filth, and accents of unspeakable foulness. In society, I mean respectable middle-class society, where it is rarely seen, it dresses like us, speaks like us; and it is perhaps under this equivocal and commonplace aspect it takes the strongest hold on men's minds. Crime in a black coat is what most strongly appeals to the popular imagination.



OF all charms that touch our souls the most moving is that of the mysterious. Beauty undraped is no beauty, and what we love the best is always the unknown. Existence would be intolerable, were we forbidden all dreams. Life's best gift is the feeling it affords us of an ineffable something that is no part of it. The real helps us, more or less imperfectly, to frame some scrap of ideal. It may be this is its chiefest use.



“YES, it is a sign of the times,” we are for ever saying. But it is a very difficult matter to distinguish the true signs of the times. It requires a knowledge of the present as well as of the past and a wide philosophical outlook that none of us possess. It has often happened to me to note certain trivial events passing before my eyes as showing a quite original aspect, in which I fondly hoped to discern the spirit of the period. “This,” I would tell myself, “was bound to happen to-day and could not have been other than it is. It is a sign of the times.” Well, nine times out of ten, I have come across the very same event with analogous circumstances in old Memoirs or old History books. There is a basis of human nature in us all which alters less than we are apt to think. We differ, in fact, very little from our grandfathers. For our tastes and sentiments to change appreciably, the organs which produce them must be changed too,—and that is the work of ages.

Hundreds and thousands of years are needed to modify some of our characteristics to any sensible degree.



WE have ceased to confine our belief within the old dogmas. For us, the Word has not been revealed only on the holy Mount the Scriptures speak of. The heaven of the theologians seems to us moderns peopled with vain phantoms. We know that life is short, and to prolong it, we add the remembrance of the times that are no more.

We have abandoned hope in the immortality of the human individual; to console us for this dead faith, we have only the dream of another immortality, intangible and diffuse, only to be enjoyed by anticipation, and which moreover is promised only to a very few of us,—the immortality that consists in the memory mankind cherishes of us.



HERE is nothing else for us to do in this world but resign ourselves to circumstances. But the nobler natures know how to give resignation the fine name of content. High souls resign themselves with a holy joy. In the bitterness of doubt, amidst the general woe, under the empty sky, they still contrive to keep intact the antique virtues of the Faithful. They believe, they are determined to believe. Love of the human race warms their hearts. Nay! more than this; they cherish with pious care that virtue which Christian Theology in its wisdom set above all the rest, because it presupposes and replaces them,—to wit, hope. Let us hope then,—not in humanity, which for all its august efforts, has not abolished the evil that is in the world; rather let us set our hopes on the creatures our minds cannot conceive, that shall one day be developed out of mankind, as man has been evolved from the brute. Let us greet reverently these super-human beings of a future era. Let us found our

hopes on the universal pain and travail whose material law is transformation. Yes, we can feel this life-giving anguish working within us ; it is the impulse that urges us on our forward march to an inevitable, a divine consummation.



OLD men hold far too obstinately to their own ideas. That is why the natives of the Fiji Islands kill their parents when they grow old. In this way they facilitate evolution, while we retard its advance by founding Academies.



THE poets' world-weariness has its golden alleviations; no need to waste too much pity on them. These singers know a spell to charm away their despair; there is no art magic so compelling as the magic of words. The poets find consolation, as children do, in pictures.



IN love, men demand forms and colours ; they *will* have visible images. Women only crave sensations. They love better than we ; they are blind. And if you say : but think of Psyche's lamp and the spilt drop of oil, I reply, Psyche does not represent woman. Psyche is the soul. It is not the same thing ; indeed it is just the opposite. Psyche was curious to see, and women are only curious to feel. Psyche was searching after the unknown ; when women search, it is never the unknown they are in quest of. They long to recover something lost, that is all,—to recall something dreamt or something recollected, to renew some past sensation, nothing more. If they *had* eyes, how should we ever explain their loves ?

ON NUNNERIES

TO ÉDOUARD ROD

ON NUNNERIES



IT is painful to see a young girl die voluntarily to the world. The Nunnery is terrifying to all who do not enter its doors. In the middle of the Fourth Century of the Christian era, a young Roman lady, Blæsilla by name, undertook such a severe course of fasting in a Convent that she died of the effects. The populace followed her coffin to the grave, shouting furiously : “Drive out, drive out this odious tribe of Monks from the city ! Why do we not stone them ? Why do we not throw them into the Tiber ?” And when, fourteen hundred years afterwards, Chateaubriand, by the mouth of the Père Aubry, extolled the women who have “sanctified their beauty to the masterpieces of repentance and mortified the rebellious flesh whose pleasures are only pains,” the Abbé Morellet, an old man and a philosopher, listened with impatience to this panegyric of the cloistered life, and exclaimed : “If this is not fanaticism, I ask the author to give me his definition of what fanaticism is !” What do we

learn from these interminable disputes, if not that the religious life alarms the natural man, but that nevertheless it has reasons for its existence and continuance? Neither populace nor philosophers always appreciate these reasons. They are deep-seated and touch the greatest mysteries of human nature. The Cloister has been taken by storm and its walls thrown down. Its deserted ruins have been re-peopled afresh. There are certain souls that gravitate thither by a natural bias; *claustral* souls they are. Because they are innately unhuman and pacific, they quit the world and go down rejoicing into silence and peace. Many souls are born weary; they have no curiosity; they drag out a sluggish existence without a wish for one thing more than another. Not knowing either how to live or die, they embrace the religious life as a lesser life and a lesser death. Others are led to the Cloister by indirect motives; they never foresaw whither they were going. Wounded innocents, an early disappointment, or secret grief, has spoilt the scheme of things for them. Their life will never bear fruit; the cold has blighted the blossom. They have realized too soon how evil the world is. They hide away in corners to weep. They would fain forget. . . . Or rather, they cherish their grief and set it in a place of shelter away from men and men's activities. Yet again there are others attracted to the Convent

by the zeal of sacrifice, souls that are eager to give themselves wholly to heaven, in a self-abandonment more ardent than love itself knows. These last, the smallest class of all, are the true brides of Christ. The grateful Church bestows on them the sweet names of *lily* and *rose*, *dove* and *lamb*, promising them, by the mouth of the Queen of Virgins, the crown of stars and the throne of purity. But we should beware of going further than the theologians warrant. In the Ages of Faith, there was no great enthusiasm about the mystic virtues of Nuns. I am not speaking of the people, who always looked upon the denizens of Convents with a certain suspicion and told facetious tales about them. I speak of the Secular Clergy, whose opinions were very mixed. We must not forget that the poetry of the Cloistered life only dates from Chateaubriand and Montalembert.

Another point to be considered,—religious communities differ altogether according to the varying conditions of period and country ; they cannot all be massed together in one and the same judgment. The Religious House was for centuries, in the West of Europe, farm, school, hospital, and library combined. There were Houses for the preservation of knowledge, others for the encouragement of ignorance. Some were designed for work, as others were for a life of idleness.

I visited some years ago the hill on which St. Odile, daughter of a Duke of Alsace, raised in the middle of the twelfth century a Convent, the memory of which has lingered ever since in the soul of the Alsatian people. She was a brave and good woman, who sought and found means to soften for those about her the curse of living, which then weighed sore on poor folks. Aided by clever fellow-workers of her own sex and served by numerous serfs, she cleared the ground, tilled the fields, reared stock, secured the harvests against pillagers. She was a special providence to the improvident. She taught the mead-drinkers sobriety, the violent gentleness, all men carefulness and good management. What resemblance can we discern between these robust, pure-hearted virgins living in a barbarous age,—these daughters of kings and tillers of the soil, and the dainty Lady Abbesses who, under Louis XV, went to Mass in paint and patches, and left a scent of *poudre à la maréchale* on the lips of the Abbés who kissed their fingers?

And even then, even in those scandalous days, when the Abbeys served as refuge and prison for the younger daughters of noble houses who had proved recalcitrant, there were good, pious souls to be found behind the bars of Convents. It so happens I have surprised the secrets of one of them. It

was last year at Legoubin's, the bookseller on the Quai Malaquais, amongst whose treasures I lighted on an old Manual of Confession for the use of nuns. An inscription on the title-page written in a formal hand informed me that in 1779 the book was the property of the Sœur Anne, a Nun of the Order of the Feuillantines. It was in French, and had this special peculiarity,—that each sin was printed on a little square slip attached to the leaf by the edge merely. While examining her conscience in the Convent Chapel, the penitent needed neither pen nor pencil to dot down her faults, whether grave or venial. All she had to do was to turn down the little strip mentioning any particular sin she had committed. Then in the Confessional, by help of her book, which she went through systematically from one turned-down slip to another, Sœur Anne ran no risk of forgetting any breach of God's commandments or the Church's ordinances.

Now, at the time when I discovered the little book on my friend Legoubin's shelves, I noticed that a number of offences showed only a single crease where they had been turned down. These were Sœur Anne's extraordinary sins. Others had been folded in again and again, so that the corners of the paper were all worn and dog's-eared. Here we had Sœur Anne's pet peccadilloes.

There was no doubt about it. The book had never been used since the dispersion of the Nuns in 1790. It was still stuffed with religious pictures and illuminated prayers, which the good Nun had slipt in between the pages.

In this way I came to know Sœur Anne's soul. I found it held only the most innocent of sins, and I have great hopes that Sœur Anne is seated to-day at the right hand of the Father. No purer heart ever beat beneath the white robe of the Feuillantine Sisters. I can picture to myself the pious sister with her clear eyes and stoutish figure, as she walks slowly up and down between the cabbage beds of the Convent garden. She is quite calm and self-possessed as her white hand marks down in her book her sins, which are as regular and as orderly as her life,—vain words, wandering thoughts in Chapter and in Church, trivial acts of disobedience, and greediness at meals. This last touch moved me to tears ; Sœur Anne was greedy at her repast of roots boiled in plain water ! She was not unhappy. She had no doubts. She never tempted God. Sins such as these have left no mark in the little book. She was a Nun, and her heart was in the Convent. Her destiny was in accord with her nature. That is the secret of Sœur Anne's good life.

I do not know, but I quite think there are many Sœur Annes at the present day in Nunneries. I

could find not a few things to say against the Monks ; I think it best to own frankly I am not very fond of them. As to the Nuns, I believe they have most of them, like the Sœur Anne, a conventual spirit, in which the graces of their estate flourish and abound.

Why otherwise should they have taken the veil ? In these days they are not driven into the Cloister by the pride and avarice of relations. They take the vows because they like to. They could repudiate them, if they chose ; yet you see they do not. The free-thinking dragoons we see in farces of the Revolutionary period breaking down Convent doors soon had enough of invoking nature and marrying the Nuns. Nature is of vaster scope than free-thinking dragoons quite realize ; she unites the sensuous and the ascetic both in her comprehensive bosom. For the Cloister, the monster must needs be lovable, seeing it is loved, and no longer devours any but voluntary victims. The Convent has charms of its own. There is the Chapel, with its gilded vessels and paper roses, a Blessed Virgin painted in the colours of life and bathed in a pale, mysterious radiance as of moonlight, the chants and the incense and the Priest's voice ; these are some of the most obvious fascinations of the Cloister, and they often carry the day against the attractions of the world.

After all, there is a soul in these things, and they contain the sum total of poetry certain natures are capable of. Sedentary by nature and disposed to a discreet, unassuming, retiring life, women are from the first in their element in a Convent. The atmosphere is cosy and comforting, a trifle stifling; it affords the pious dames who breathe it all the delights of a long-drawn asphyxiation. They fall into a half-sleep, and soon lose the habit of thinking. This is a fine thing to get rid of. In exchange, they gain certainty. An excellent transaction, surely, from the practical point of view!

I do not lay much stress on titles such as the *bride of Jesus*, *vessel of election*, *immaculate dove*. Enthusiasm, mysticism, plays no great part in religious communities. The virtues jog quietly along a humdrum path. Everything, even including the sentiment of the divine, keeps a judicious course near the ground, attempts no heavenward flights. Spirituality is worldly-wise and takes a material form so far as it can, and the possibilities in this direction are far greater than is commonly supposed. The great business of life is so minutely divided up into a series of little trivial transactions that punctuality satisfies all needs. Nothing ever breaks the even thread of existence. Duty is reduced to its simplest terms; the rule of the House

defines it. There is much in this to satisfy timid souls, gentle, tractable natures. Such a life kills imagination, but not gaiety of heart. It is a rare thing to see an expression of deep-seated melancholy on a Nun's face.

At the present day, we should search in vain in the Convents of France for a *Virginie de Leyva* or a *Giulia Carraciolo*, unwilling victims of a hated system, craving frantically for a breath through the Cloister gratings of the free air of nature and the world of men. Nor yet should we find, I think, a *St. Theresa* or a *St. Catherine of Siena*. The heroic age of the Cloister is gone for ever. The mystic ardour of an earlier time waxes faint. The motives that impelled so many men and women to adopt the monastic life have ceased to exist. In those times of violence, when a man was never sure of reaping the fruits of his labour, when he was liable to be awakened at any moment by the screams of the dying and the flames of burning homesteads, when life was a nightmare, souls of softer temper were fain to retire to dream of heaven in the Religious Houses that rose like great arks above the waves of hate and malice. But these days are past. The world has grown almost bearable, and people are more willing to stay in it. At the same time, such as find it still too rough and too insecure are at liberty, after all, to leave it. The

Constituent Assembly was wrong to dispute the right, and we have done well to allow it in principle.


I have the privilege to know the Lady Superior of a Community the Mother House of which is in Paris. She is a woman of excellent principles who inspires me with sincere respect. She was telling me, a little while since, about the last moments of one of her Nuns, whom I had known as a merry-hearted and pretty girl in society, and who had entered the Convent to die a lingering death from consumption.

“She made an edifying end,” the Lady Superior told me. “She used to get up every day all through her long illness, and two lay sisters would carry her to the Chapel. She was praying there on the very morning of her release. A taper burning before the image of St. Joseph was guttering on to the pavement. She directed one of the lay sisters to set the candle straight. Then she threw herself back, heaved a deep sigh, and the death agony began. She received the last consolations of religion. She could only testify by the movement of her eyes to the pious satisfaction the sacraments of the dying afforded her.”

The little narrative was given with an admirable simplicity. Death is the most important transaction of the religious life. But so good a preparation

for it is the existence of the Cloister that nothing more momentous is left to do at that hour than at any other. The dying Nun sets a taper straight—and expires. It was the one act lacking to round off the blessedness of a minute and meticulous piety.

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HOW I DISCOURSED ONE NIGHT WITH AN
APPARITION ON THE FIRST ORIGINS OF THE
ALPHABET

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IN the silence of midnight I sat writing at my desk, where I had been so employed for hours. I pushed back my lamp, the shade of which left in semi-darkness the books that rise in tiers on all four walls of my study. The dying fire showed a few sparks still glowing like rubies amid the cinders. The air was heavy with the pungent fumes of tobacco ; in a bowl in front of me, on top of a little heap of ash, lay a last cigarette, from which its tiny column of blue vapour rose straight upwards. The shadows of the room were full of mystery, as one felt vaguely conscious of the soul of all the slumbering books around. My pen hung suspended in my fingers, and I was dreaming of very far-off days, when rising from the smoke of my cigarette, as from the fumes of a witches' cauldron, emerged a strange, weird figure. His ringleted hair, his long, flashing eyes,

his beaked nose, his thick lips, his black beard, close-curved in the Assyrian fashion, his clear bronze complexion, the look of guile and cruel sensuality that marked his countenance, the thick-set contours of his limbs, the richness of his flowing robes, all proclaimed one of those natives of Asia whom the Hellenes called Barbarians. He wore a blue cap shaped like a fish's head and dotted with stars. He was wrapped in a purple robe, and carried in one hand an oar, in the other writing-tablets. I was not disconcerted at sight of my visitor. What place more likely than a library to be haunted by apparitions? Where should the spirits of the dead appear, if not amid the signs that preserve our memory of them? I invited the stranger to be seated; but he took no notice.

"Let be," he addressed me presently, "and act just as if I were not here, I beg. I have come to look at what you were writing on that bad paper yonder. I like to watch you at work; not that I care one jot for the ideas you may be able to express, but the characters you trace interest me beyond measure. In spite of the alterations they have suffered in eight-and-twenty centuries of use, the letters that flow from your pen are not unfamiliar to me. I recognize that B, which in my day was called *beth*, that is to say *house*. Here is

the L, which we knew as *lamed*, because it was shaped like a goad. That G comes from our *gimel*, with the camel's neck, and that A springs from our *aleph*, in shape of an ox's head. As for the D I see there, it once represented as faithfully as the *daleth* which was its original, the three-cornered opening of the tent pitched on the desert sands, if you had not, with a cursive stroke, rounded the angular outlines of that emblem of an old-world, nomad existence. You have modified the *daleth*, as you have all the other letters of my alphabet. But I do not blame you. It was to go faster. Yes, time is precious. Time is gold dust, and elephants' tusks, and ostrich feathers. Life is short. Without losing one moment, we must be ever bargaining and sailing the seas, to win riches, that we may enjoy a happy and respected old age."

"Sir," I told him, "by your looks as well as your words, I know you for an old Phœnician."

He answered me simply :

"I am Cadmus,—the shade of Cadmus."

"In that case," I replied, "you do not exist, properly speaking. You are mythical and allegorical. For it is impossible to give credence to all the tales the Greeks have told of you. They say you slew, beside the fountain of Ares, a dragon whose jaws vomited flames of fire, and that having plucked out the monster's teeth, you sowed them in

the ground, where they changed into men. These are fairy-tales, and you yourself, sir, are fabulous."

"I may indeed have become so in the course of ages, that is very possible, and those big children you call the Greeks may have mingled fables with history, I can quite believe it ; but I care not a jot. I have never troubled my head about what folk would think of me after my death ; my hopes and fears never went beyond this life which we enjoy on earth, and which is the only one I know aught of even now. For I do not call it living to float like an empty shade in the dust of libraries and appear vaguely to M. Ernest Renan or M. Philippe Berger. And this phantom existence seems all the more mournful to me, seeing how my days, when I was alive, were the most stirring and busy any man could enjoy. I had no time to go sowing serpent's teeth in the plains of Bœotia, unless mayhap those teeth were the hate and jealousy roused in the bosoms of the shepherds of Cythæron by my wealth and power. I sailed the seas all my life. In my black ship, which carried at the prow a red dwarf of monstrous ugliness, the guardian of my treasures, observing the Cabiri who navigate the sky in their glittering barque, steering my course by that fixed star the Greeks named, after me, "the Phœnician," I ploughed every sea and touched at every shore ; I went to find the

gold of Colchis, the steel of the Chalybes, the pearls of Ophir, the silver of Tartessus ; in Bætica I shipped iron, lead, cinnabar, honey, wax, and pitch, and pushing beyond the confines of the world, I ran on under the fogs of the Ocean till I came to the dim isle of the Britons. Thence I returned an old man with white hair, with a rich cargo of tin that the Egyptians, the Hellenes, and the Italiotes bought of me at its weight in gold. The Mediterranean in those days was my lake. I founded on its still savage shores hundreds of trading factories, and the famed Thebes was only a stronghold where I kept a store of gold. I found Greece inhabited by savages armed with stags' horns and split flints. I gave them bronze, and it was through me they learnt all the arts."

Both looks and words were imbued with an offensive hardness, and I answered him coldly :

"Oh ! you were a keen trader and a clever. But you had no scruples, and you behaved, on occasion, like a regular pirate. When you landed on a sea-beach of the Greek mainland or islands, you took care to spread a tempting array on the sands of gewgaws and precious stuffs, and if the girls of the countryside, drawn by an irresistible attraction, came down alone, without their kinsmen's privity, to gaze at the fascinating display, your mariners would carry off the maidens despite their frantic cries and

tears, and throw them, bound and shuddering, into the hold of your ships, under guard of the red dwarf. Did you not in this fashion, you and your men, kidnap young Io, daughter of King Inachos, to sell her in Egypt?"

"'Tis very likely. This King Inachos was chieftain of a petty clan of savages. His daughter was white-skinned, with pure, delicately cut features. The relations between savages and civilized men have been the same in all ages."

"That is true ; but your Phœnicians committed thefts unparalleled in the world for odiousness. They did not fear to rob the tombs of the dead and strip the Egyptian burial vaults to enrich their necropolis of Mount Gebal."

"Upon my faith, sir, are these fitting reproaches to throw at a man of ancients like mine, one whom Sophocles, even in his day, called the Ancient Cadmus? It is barely five minutes we have been talking together in your chamber, and you forget altogether I am your elder by eight-and-twenty centuries. See in me, dear sir, an aged Canaanite whom you should not cavil at over a few mummy cases and a few savage wenches stolen in Egypt or Greece. Rather admire the vigour of my intelligence and the beauty of my industry. I have spoken to you of my ships. I could show you my caravans wending to fetch incense and myrrh from

the Yemen, precious stones and spices from the Harran, ivory and ebony from Ethiopia. But my activity was not limited to trade and barter. I was a cunning handicraftsman in an age when the peoples round me all lay fast asleep in barbarism. Metal-worker, dyer, glass-blower, jeweller, I exercised my genius in those arts of the fire and furnace that are so marvellous they seem magic. Look at the bowls I have chiselled, and admire the dainty cunning of the old Canaanitish artificer ! Nor was I less excellent in the works of the field. Out of that narrow strip of land confined betwixt the Libanus and the sea I made a very garden of delight. The cisterns I dug are to be seen there to this day. One of your masters has said : ‘ Only the man of Canaan could build wine-presses for eternity.’ Nay ! sir, think better of old Cadmus. It was I carried all the Mediterranean peoples onward from the Stone Age to the Bronze. It was I taught your Greeks the rudiments of all the arts. In barter for corn and wine and hides which they brought me, I gave them goblets whereon were wrought doves billing and little earthenware figures, which they copied themselves afterwards, arranging them to suit their own taste. Above all, I gave them an alphabet, without which they could neither have fixed nor set down correctly their thoughts which you admire. Such the achievements of old

Cadmus. All this he did, not for affection of the human race nor any desire of empty fame, but for the love of lucre and in expectation of tangible and certain gain. He did it to win wealth withal, that in his old age he might drink wine out of cups of gold on a silver table amid fair, white women dancing voluptuous dances and playing on the harp. For old Cadmus believes neither in generosity nor virtue. He knows that men are bad, and that the gods, being more powerful than men, are worse. He fears them; he strives to appease them by bloody sacrifices. He does not love them; he loves only himself. I paint myself as I am. But remember this, had I not craved after fierce pleasures of the senses, I should not have toiled to grow rich, I should never have invented the arts you reap the joy of to this very day. And, a last word to you, my good sir,—seeing you had not wit enough to become a trader, and are therefore a scribe, and indite writings after the fashion of the Greeks, you should surely revere me as a god almost, seeing it is to me you owe the alphabet. It was my invention. Be assured I created it only for the convenience of my traffic and without the smallest inkling of the use the literary nations would some day put it to. What I wanted was a system of ready and rapid notation. Gladly would I have borrowed it from

my neighbours, being well used to take whatever of theirs suited my purpose. I make no boast of originality ; my language is the Semites', my sculpture is part Egyptian, part Babylonian. If I could have laid my hand on a good method of writing, I should never have been at the pains of inventing at all. But neither the hieroglyphics of the peoples you nowadays, without knowing anything of their true history, name Hittites or Hetæans, nor the sacred script of the Egyptians fulfilled my needs. These were slow and complicated modes, better fitted for tedious inscriptions on the walls of temples and tombs than for marking the tablets of a busy trader. Even when abbreviated and cursive, the writing of the Egyptian scribes still retained traces of the ponderousness, confusion, and vagueness of the primitive type. The whole system was bad. The hieroglyph, albeit simplified, was still a hieroglyph, that is to say, something dreadfully confused. You know how the Egyptians mixed up in their hieroglyphs, whether complete or abbreviated, the signs that stood for ideas with those representing sounds. By a stroke of genius, I chose twenty-two of these numberless signs, and made of them the twenty-two letters of my alphabet. Yes, letters,—that means signs corresponding each to one single sound, and providing by their quick and easy combination means of depict-

ing faithfully all sounds! Was it not truly ingenious?"

"Yes, no doubt it was ingenious, and even more so than you think. We owe to you a gift of incalculable price. For without an alphabet, no accurate record of speech is possible; there can be no style, and therefore no thinking of any precision and refinement, no abstractions, no subtle speculation. It would be as absurd to imagine Pascal writing the *Lettres Provinciales* in cuneiform characters as to believe the Olympian Zeus to have been carved by a seal. Originally invented for keeping a trader's books, the Phœnician alphabet has become throughout the whole world the necessary and perfect instrument of thought, and the history of its transformations is intimately bound up with that of the development of the human mind. Your invention was infinitely fine and precious, although still incomplete. For you never thought of the vowels, and it was those ingenious fellows, the Greeks, who hit upon them. Their part in the world was always to bring things to perfection."

"The vowels; yes, I will allow I have always had a bad habit of jumbling and confusing them together. You may very likely have noticed as much to-night; the old Cadmus has something of a throaty way of speaking."

“I can excuse it ; I could almost forgive him the rape of the virgin Io, for after all her father Inachos was but a savage princeling, whose sceptre was a stag’s horn rudely carved with a pointed flint. I could even forgive his teaching the Bœotians, a poor and virtuous folk, the frenzied dances of the Bacchantes. I could forgive him everything, for having given Greece and the world the most precious of talismans, the twenty-two letters of the Phœnician alphabet. From these twenty-two characters have come all the alphabets of all countries. There is never a thought on this earth they do not fix and preserve. From your alphabet, divine Cadmus, arose the Greek and Italiote scripts, which in turn have given birth to all the European types of writing. From your alphabet arose all the Semitic scripts, from the Aramaic and Hebrew to the Syriac and Arabic. Nay, this same Phœnician alphabet is the father of the Hymiaritic and Ethiopian and all those of Central Asia, Zend and Pehlevi, and even of the Indian alphabet, which has given birth to the Devanagâri and all the alphabets of Southern Asia. What a triumph ! What a world-wide success. There is not, at this present hour, on all the surface of the globe, one single form of writing that does not descend from the Cadmean. Whosoever in our world writes a word is indebted to the old Canaanitish merchants. The thought

makes me fain to render you the most signal honours, Sir Cadmus, and I cannot pay enough thanks for the favour you have done me by spending a brief hour in the dead of night in my study, you, Baal Cadmus, inventor of the Alphabet !”

“Nay, dear sir, moderate your enthusiasm. I am far from dissatisfied with my little invention. But my visit means nothing especially complimentary to you personally. The fact is I am bored to death since I have become a fleeting shade, and there is no more buying and selling for me either of tin, gold dust, or ivory ; nay, even on the subject of that Continent where Mr. Stanley followed my example in his paltry way, I am reduced to an occasional conversation with some savant or traveller who is pleased to take an interest in me. Hark ! I hear the cock crow ; farewell, and try, try to win wealth ; the only good things of this world are riches and power.”

He spoke, and vanished. My fire was gone out, the chilliness of the night was getting into my bones, and I had a racking headache.

CAREERS FOR WOMEN

CAREERS FOR WOMEN



HAVE no sympathy with the gibes levelled by our farce writers at lady doctors. If a woman has a vocation for science, what right have we to upbraid her for following her bent? Can we blame the noble-hearted and wise and gentle Sophie Germain, who, in preference to the cares of household and family, chose to devote herself to the studious speculations of algebra and metaphysics? May not Science, like Religion, have her virgins and deaconesses? It is hardly reasonable to wish to make all women learned. Is it any more so to want to warn them off the domains of high thinking? And again, from a purely practical point of view, are there not cases where science is a precious stand-by for a woman? Because there are more governesses nowadays than are needed, are we to find fault with the young women who take up teaching as a career, in spite of the cruel futility of the prescribed studies and the monstrous unfairness of the examinations?

Women have always been credited with an exquisite tact in the management of the sick ; they have been known in all ages as sweet consolers and “ministering angels” ; they supply the world with hospital nurses and midwives. Then why refuse our approval to those who, not satisfied with the bare, indispensable apprenticeship, pursue their studies further and qualify for a medical degree, thus gaining increased dignity and authority ?

We must not let ourselves be carried away by our hatred of female preciosity and pedantry. Granted there is nothing so odious as a blue-stocking ; still we must draw a distinction in favour of the *précieuse*. Airs and graces are not always unbecoming, and a certain predilection for speaking well and correctly need not spoil a woman. If Madame de Lafayette was a *précieuse* (and in her day she passed for such) I for one cannot utterly abominate the class. All affectation is detestable, that of the dish-clout no less than that of the pen ; and there would be small enjoyment to be got out of life in a society such as Proudhon imagined, where all the women would be cooks and darners of stockings. I am ready to admit women are less in their element, and therefore less charming, composing a book than acting a play. Nevertheless, a woman who can write would not be justified in refusing to use her pen if its exercise does not

interfere with her life, not to mention that her inkstand may prove a good friend to her when she comes to take the difficult step that inaugurates the epoch of retrospection. There is no doubt of this : if women do not write better than men, they do write differently, and contrive to leave on the paper something of their own divine grace. For my part, I am deeply grateful to Madame de Caylus and Madame de Stael-Delaunay for having left behind them sundry immortal pen scrawls.

Nothing could well be more unphilosophical than to regard knowledge as entering into the moral system of a woman or girl like a foreign body, a disturbing element, an incalculable force. But, granting it is a natural and legitimate aspiration to educate young girls, it is very certain we have adopted a bad way of doing so. Fortunately we are beginning to recognize as much. Knowledge is the bond of union between man and nature. Like ourselves, women require their share of learning ; but by the methods chosen for their instruction, far from multiplying their points of contact with the Universe, we have separated and as it were fenced them off from Nature. We have taught them words and not things, and stuffed their heads with lists of names in History, Geography, and Zoology that by themselves possess no meaning whatever. The innocent creatures have borne their burden

and more than their burden of those vicious schemes of study which democratic self-complacency and bourgeois patriotism erected like so many Babels of priggishness and pedantry.

These wiseacres started originally with the ridiculous fallacy that a people is learned when everybody has learned the same things, as if the variety of human pursuits did not involve a corresponding variety of accomplishments, and as if a trader could advantageously know just what a doctor does! This misconception was fertile in mistakes; in particular, it gave birth to another yet more mischievous than itself. It was supposed that the elements of the special sciences were useful to persons never intended to follow these up either in their applications or their theory. It was supposed that the terminology of Anatomy, for instance, or Chemistry had a value of its own, and that it was a desirable thing to learn it quite independently of any use surgeons and chemists make of it. Surely as foolish a superstition as ever the old Scandinavians cherished, who used to write their runes and imagine there are words of power so tremendous that, if once pronounced, they will quench the sun and reduce the earth to dust.

A smile of pity rises to the lips as one thinks of generations of schoolmasters teaching children the words of a language their pupils will never hear or

speak. They profess, these pedagogues, that this is the way to teach the elements of all the sciences, and diffuse a broad light over girls' minds. But it is only darkness they are disseminating, as any one can see for himself; to put ideas in these young heads, so malleable and volatile, a totally different method must be followed. Show in a few well-chosen words the main aims of a science, draw attention to its achievements by some striking examples. Deal in broad generalities, be philosophical, but hide your philosophy so skilfully that you appear as artless as the minds you address. Avoiding technical jargon, expound in the vulgar tongue all share alike a small number of great facts that strike the imagination and satisfy the intelligence. Let your language be simple, noble, magnanimous. Never pride yourselves on teaching a great number of things. Rest content to rouse curiosity. Be satisfied with opening your scholars' minds, and do not overload them. Without any interference of yours, they will catch fire at the point where they are inflammable.

And if the spark dies out, if some intellects remain unilluminated, at any rate you will not have burnt them. There will always be dunces amongst us. We must respect all natures, and leave in their native simplicity such as are made that way. This is especially necessary for girls, who for the most

part spend their time in the world in employments where the last thing called for is general ideas and technical accomplishments. I would have the education we give girls consist essentially in a gentle and discreet stimulation of the faculties.

MIRACLE

MIRACLE



WE should not say: There are no miracles, because none has ever been proved. This always leaves it open to the Orthodox to appeal to a more complete state of knowledge. The truth is, no miracle can, from the nature of things, be stated as an established fact; to do so will always involve drawing a premature conclusion. A deeply rooted instinct tells us that whatever Nature embraces in her bosom is conformable to her laws, either known or occult. But, even supposing he could silence this presentiment of his, a man will never be in a position to say: "Such and such a fact is outside the limits of Nature." Our researches will never carry us as far as that. Moreover, if it is of the essence of miracle to elude scientific investigation, every dogma attesting it invokes an intangible witness that is bound to evade our grasp to the end of time.

This notion of miracles belongs to the infancy of the mind, and cannot continue when once the

human intellect has begun to frame a systematic picture of the universe. The wise Greeks could not tolerate the idea. Hippocrates said, speaking of epilepsy: "This malady is called divine; but all diseases are divine, and all alike come from the gods." There he spoke as a natural philosopher. Human reason is less assured of itself nowadays. What annoys me above all is when people say: "We do not believe in miracles, because no miracle is proved."

Happening to be at Lourdes, in August, I paid a visit to the grotto where innumerable crutches were hung up in token of a cure. My companion pointed to these trophies of the sick-room and hospital ward, and whispered in my ear:

"One wooden leg would be more to the point."

It was the word of a man of sense; but speaking philosophically, the wooden leg would be no whit more convincing than a crutch. If an observer of a genuinely scientific spirit were called upon to verify that a man's leg, after amputation, had suddenly grown again as before, whether in a miraculous pool or anywhere else, he would not cry: "Lo! a miracle." He would say this: "An observation, so far unique, points us to a presumption that under conditions still undetermined, the tissues of a human leg have the property of reorganizing themselves like a crab's or lobster's

claws and a lizard's tail, but much more rapidly. Here we have a fact of nature in apparent contradiction with several other facts of the like sort. The contradiction arises from our ignorance, and clearly shows that the science of animal physiology must be reconstituted, or to speak more accurately, that it has never yet been properly constituted. It is little more than two hundred years since we first had any true conception of the circulation of the blood. It is barely a century since we learned what is implied in the act of breathing." I admit it would need some boldness to speak in this strain. But the man of science should be above surprise. At the same time, let us hasten to add, none of them have ever been put to such a proof, and nothing leads us to apprehend any such prodigy. Such miraculous cures as the doctors have been able to verify to their satisfaction are all quite in accordance with physiology. So far the tombs of the Saints, the magic springs and sacred grottoes, have never proved efficient except in the case of patients suffering from complaints either curable or susceptible of instantaneous relief. But were a dead man revived before our eyes, no miracle would be proved, unless we knew what life is and death is, and that we shall never know.

What is the definition of a miracle? We are told: a breach of the laws of nature. But we do

not know the laws of nature ; how, then, are we to know whether a particular fact is a breach of these laws or no ?

“ But surely we know some of these laws ? ”

“ True, we have arrived at some idea of the correlation of things. But failing as we do to grasp all the natural laws, we can be sure of none, seeing they are mutually interdependent.”

“ Still, we might verify our miracle in those series of correlations we *have* arrived at.”

“ No, not with anything like philosophical certainty. Besides, it is precisely those series we regard as the most stable and best determined which suffer least interruption from the miraculous. Miracles never, for instance, try to interfere with the mechanism of the heavens. They never disturb the course of the celestial bodies, and never advance or retard the calculated date of an eclipse. On the contrary, their favourite field is the obscure domain of pathology as concerned with the internal organs, and above all nervous diseases. However, we must not confound a question of fact with one of principle. In principle the man of science is ill-qualified to verify a supernatural occurrence. Such verification presupposes a complete and final knowledge of nature, which he does not possess, and will never possess, and which no one ever did possess in this world. It is just because I would not

believe our most skilful oculists as to the miraculous healing of a blind man that *à fortiori* I do not believe Matthew or Mark either, who were not oculists. A miracle is by definition unidentifiable and unknowable.

The savants cannot in any case certify that a fact is in contradiction with the universal order, that is with the unknown ordinance of the Divinity. Even God could do this only by formulating a pettifogging distinction between the general manifestations and the particular manifestations of His activity, acknowledging that from time to time He gives little timid finishing touches to His work and condescending to the humiliating admission that the cumbersome machine He has set agoing needs every hour or so, to get it to jog along indifferently well, a push from its contriver's hand.

Science is well fitted, on the other hand, to bring back under the data of positive knowledge facts which seemed to be outside its limits. It often succeeds very happily in accounting by physical causes for phenomena that had for centuries been regarded as supernatural. Cures of spinal affections were confidently believed to have taken place at the tomb of the Deacon Paris at Saint-Médard and in other holy places. These cures have ceased to surprise since it has become known that hysteria

occasionally simulates the symptoms associated with lesions of the spinal marrow.

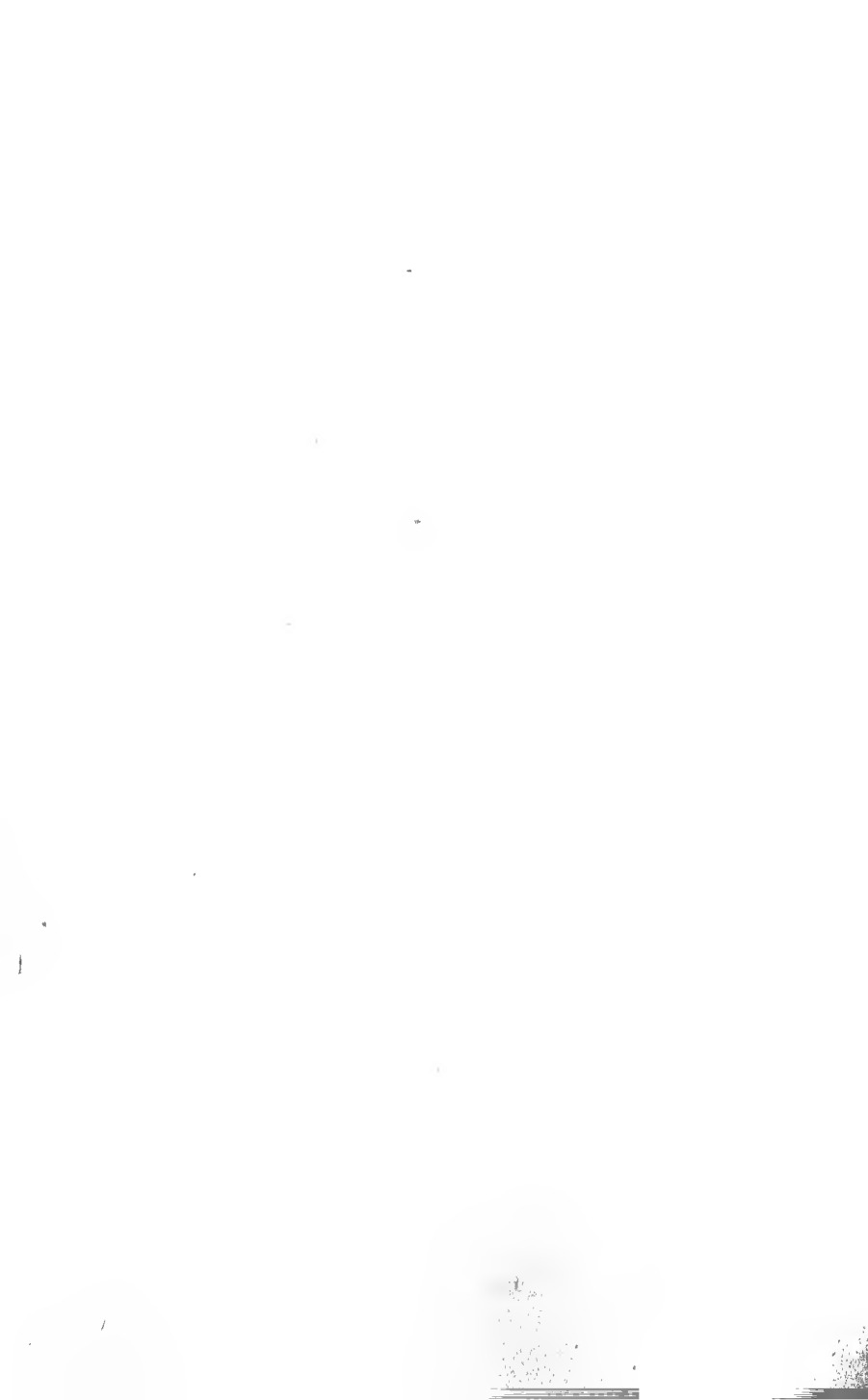
The appearance of a new star to the mysterious personages whom the Gospels call the "Wise Men of the East" (I assume the incident to be authentic historically) was undoubtedly a miracle to the Astrologers of the Middle Ages, who believed that the firmament, in which the stars were stuck like nails, was subject to no change whatever. But, whether real or supposed, the star of the Magi has lost its miraculous character for us, who know that the heavens are incessantly perturbed by the birth and death of worlds, and who in 1866 saw a star suddenly blaze forth in the Corona Borealis, shine for a month, and then go out.

It did not proclaim the Messiah ; all it announced was that, at an infinitely remote distance from our earth, an appalling conflagration was burning up a world in a few days,—or rather had burnt it up long ago, for the ray that brought us the news of this disaster in the heavens had been on the road for five hundred years and possibly longer.

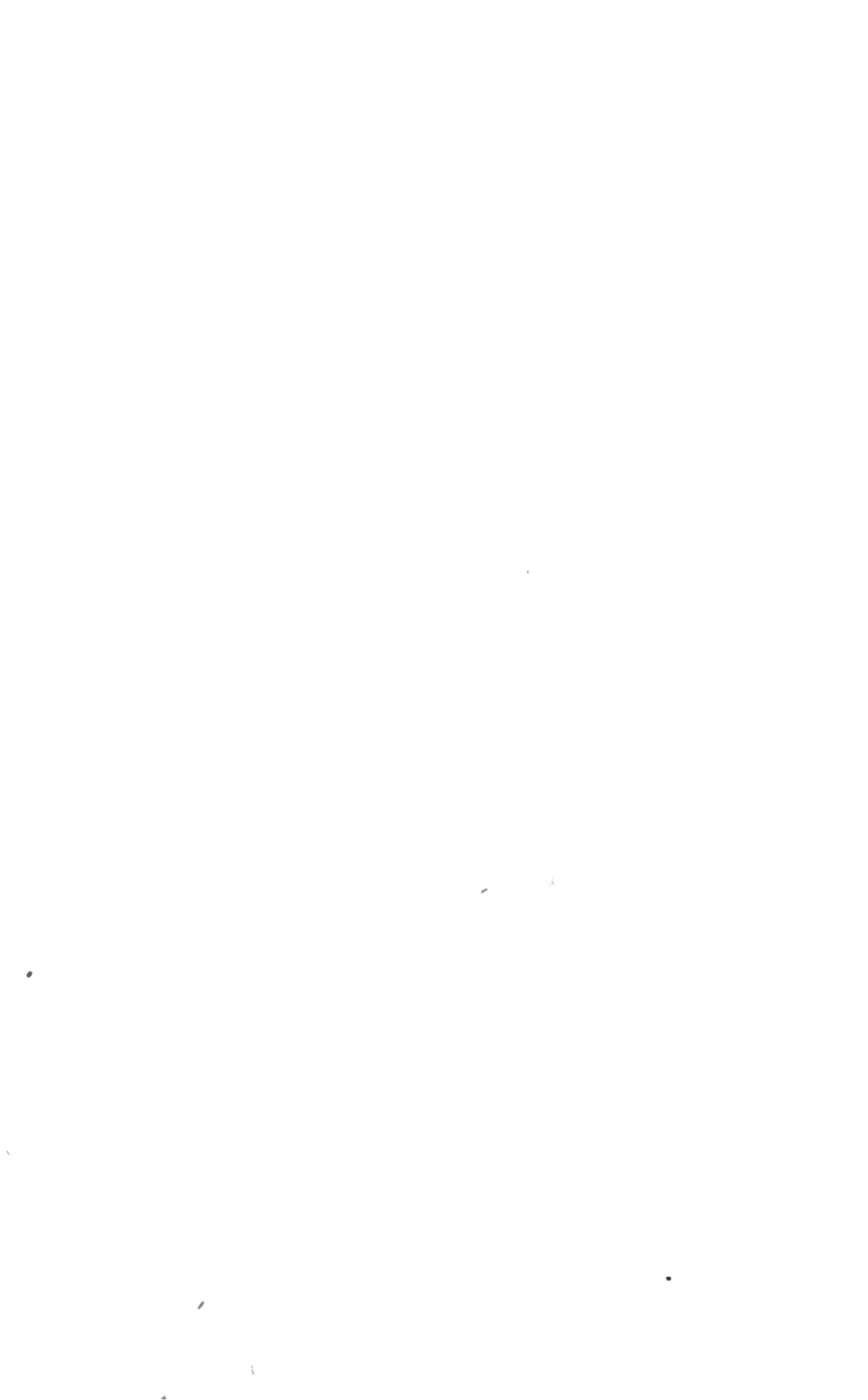
The miracle of Bolsena is familiar to everybody, immortalized as it is in one of Raphael's *Stanze* at the Vatican. A sceptical priest was celebrating Mass ; the host, when he broke it for Communion, appeared bespattered with blood. It is only within

the last ten years that the Academies of Science would not have been sorely puzzled to explain so strange a phenomenon. Now no one thinks of denying it, since the discovery of a microscopic fungus, the spores of which, having germinated in the meal or dough, offer the appearance of clotted blood. The naturalist who first found it, rightly thinking that here were the red blotches on the wafer in the Bolsena miracle, named the fungus *micrococcus prodigiosus*.

There will always be a fungus, a star, or a disease that human science does not know of ; and for this reason it must always behove the philosopher, in the name of the undying ignorance of man, to deny every miracle and say of the most startling wonders, —the host of Bolsena, the star in the East, the cure of the paralytic and the like : Either it is not, or it is ; and if it is, it is part of nature and therefore natural.



CARD HOUSES



CARD HOUSES



WHAT makes one mistrust the conclusions of æsthetics is that everything is demonstrable by reasoning. Zeno of Elea found that the flying arrow is motionless. One might equally well prove the contrary, though to tell the truth, that would be harder. For argument shies at ocular evidence, and it may be said generally that everything can be demonstrated,—except what we feel to be true. A consecutive train of argument on a complex subject will never prove anything but the intellectual capacity of the arguer. Men must surely have some lurking suspicion of this great truth, seeing they never govern their conduct by reason. It is instinct and sentiment lead them. They obey their passions,—love, hate, and above all wholesome fear. They prefer Religions to Philosophies, and only resort to reason to find justification for their evil inclinations and bad actions,—which is venial, if a trifle ridiculous. The most instinctive acts are as a rule those in which they succeed the best, and on

these Nature has based the preservation of life and the perpetuation of the species. The philosophical systems have flourished in virtue of the genius of their originators, without its ever having been within our power to recognize in any one of them distinctive marks of truth to account for their vogue. In ethics all possible views have been maintained, and if several appear to be in agreement, it is because moralists have, in most instances, been careful not to cross swords with the general sentiment and common instinct of mankind. Pure reason, if they had hearkened only to her, would have led them by divers roads to the most monstrous conclusions. This is seen in certain religious Sects and certain Heresies, whose founders, their brains turned by solitude, scorned the unreasoned consensus of everyday opinion. It would seem they reasoned very soundly, those Cainite doctrinaires, who deeming creation evil, taught the faithful to break deliberately the physical and moral laws of the universe, following the example of criminals, and taking as their chosen models Cain and Judas Iscariot. Their reasoning was right enough, yet their morality was abominable. Yes, this blessed and saving truth is found underlying all Religions,—that men have a more trustworthy guide than reason, and that we should rather obey the dictates of the heart.

In æsthetics, that is in the clouds, there is more opportunity and better ground for argumentation than in any other subject. It is a region where it behoves us to be especially mistrustful, where pitfalls lurk on every side,—indifference no less than partiality, coldness no less than passion, knowledge no less than ignorance, art, wit, subtlety, and simplicity that is more perilous than cunning. On æsthetic questions, oh! beware of alluring sophistries, the more alluring the more dangerous,—and there are many that might deceive the very elect. Distrust even the Mathematics; albeit so sublime and highly perfected, we have here a machine of such delicacy it can only work *in vacuo*, and one grain of sand in the wheels is enough to put everything out of gear. One shudders to think to what disaster such a grain of sand may bring a Mathematical brain. Remember Pascal.

Æsthetics rest on no solid foundation. It is all a castle in the air. It is supposed to rest on Ethics; but there is no such thing as Ethics. There is no such thing as Sociology; nor yet Biology. The complete round of the Sciences has never existed save in the head of M. Auguste Comte, whose work is a prophecy. When Biology is eventually constituted, that is to say some millions of years hence, it will perhaps be possible to frame a science of Sociology. This will be a

matter of many centuries ; then, and then only, it will be allowable to build up on solid foundations a system of æsthetics. But by that time our planet will be very old and coming near the goal of its fortunes. The sun, whose spots even now make us justifiably anxious, will then present to our globe only a face of a dull, smoky red, half smothered in opaque masses of scoriæ, while the last denizens of earth, cowering for warmth at the bottoms of mines, will be thinking less of discussions on the essence of the sublime and beautiful than of keeping alight in the subterranean gloom their last bits of coal, before finally perishing in the ice of ages.

Tradition and the general consensus of opinion are invoked as affording a basis for Criticism. But they are non-existent. True, an almost universal approval is accorded to certain works. But these results form a mere presumption, and by no means imply anything in the nature of deliberate choice or spontaneous preference. The works everybody admires are the ones nobody examines. Each generation receives them as a precious burden, and passes them on to the next without so much as looking at them. Do you really think there is much freedom of judgment in the approbation we accord the Classics, Greek and Latin, or even the French Classics? Even the predilection

we display, as a matter of taste, for such and such a contemporary production, and our repugnance for another, are these really free and unbiassed judgments? Are they not determined by a host of circumstances foreign to the contents of the work under question, the chief being the spirit of imitation, which is so powerful both in men and animals? This faculty of imitation is necessary to enable us to live without going too utterly astray; we import it into all our actions, and let it dominate our æsthetic sense. But for it, opinions on questions of art would be far more diverse even than they are. It is through it that a work which, for any reason whatsoever, has originally met with some measure of approval, afterwards wins more and more voices. The first only were free; all the rest simply follow suit. They have no sort of spontaneity, or meaning, or value, or character of their own. Yet by their mere number they constitute fame. Everything depends on an insignificant beginning. So we see how works which are contemned at their birth have small chance of winning popularity later on, while on the contrary works that are celebrated from the start long preserve their reputation, and are highly thought of even after they have grown unintelligible. What proves clearly that this consensus is purely the effect of prejudice, is that it

breaks down when the latter is exploded. Numerous instances could be given ; I will mention only one. Fifteen years ago or so, in the examination for the privilege of only one year's voluntary service with the colours, the Military Board gave the candidates as a piece of dictation an unsigned page which was quoted in different journals and made fine fun of in their columns, rousing the ridicule of very cultivated readers. "Wherever did these military fellows," it was asked, "find such a farrago of uncouth and ridiculous phrases?" Yet, as a matter of fact, they had chosen them from a very noble book. It was Michelet, and Michelet at his best, Michelet in his finest period. The board of officers had taken the text of their dictation from that brilliant description of France with which the great Writer concludes the first volume of his *History*, and which is one of the most admired passages in the book. "*In latitude, the zones of France are readily distinguished by their several products. In the North, the rich low-lying plains of Belgium and Flanders with their fields of flax and colza, and the hop-plant, their bitter vine of the North,*" and so on. I have heard literary experts making merry at the style, which they supposed some old half-pay captain to be responsible for. The wag who laughed the loudest was an enthusiastic admirer of Michelet. The

page is an admirable piece of writing ; yet to win unanimous admiration, it must even now be signed with the author's name. The same may be said of any and every page written by the hand of man. Per contra, whatever is recommended by a great name stands a chance of being blindly praised. Victor Cousin discovered sublimities in Pascal which have since been recognized as errors due to a copyist. He went into ecstasies, for instance, over certain "*raccourcis d'abîme*," which only owe their existence to a mistaken reading of the text.¹ One can hardly picture M. Victor Cousin admiring the same expression in the pages of a contemporary writer. The rhapsodies of a Vrain Lucas were favourably received by the Academy of Sciences under the august name of Pascal and Descartes. Ossian seemed the equal of Homer when he was deemed an ancient bard. He is neglected now we know he originated with Macpherson.

When men admire the same things, and give each his own reason for so admiring, then concord changes into discord. In one and the same book they will applaud opposite qualities that cannot

¹ "Je lui veux peindre (à l'homme) non-seulement l'univers visible, mais l'immensité qu'on peut concevoir de la nature, dans l'enceinte de ce raccourci d'atome (un ciron). PASCAL, *Pensées*, I, i., éd. Havet. Pascal wrote "*ce raccourci d'atome*," a rhetorical way of indicating the *ciron* or cheese-mite. The copyist made it "*raccourci d'abîme*."—A. A.

possibly coexist together. It would form an extremely interesting book if one could have a detailed history of the variations of critical opinion on one of the masterpieces that have most occupied men's thoughts,—*Hamlet*, the *Divina Commedia*, or the *Iliad*. The *Iliad* fascinates its readers of to-day by a certain barbarous and primitive character we are quite sincere in believing we discern in it. In the Seventeenth Century Homer was commended for having duly observed the rules of the Epic. "Rest assured," wrote Boileau, "that, if Homer has used the word *dog*, the word is dignified in Greek." Such ideas strike us as ludicrous. Our own will perhaps appear equally laughable in two hundred years' time, for after all it cannot be set down as one of the everlasting verities that Homer is barbarous and that barbarism is to be admired. There is not in the whole range of literary criticism any single opinion that cannot easily be matched with its contrary. Who can settle finally the disputes of the virtuosos?

Must we therefore abandon æsthetics and criticism altogether? I do not say so; but we must recognize that we have to do with an art, and throw into it the passionate enthusiasm and agreeable charm, without which there can be no Art.

IN THE ELYSIAN FIELDS

N

TO MONSIEUR L. BOURDEAU

IN THE ELYSIAN FIELDS



WAS suddenly caught away into regions of dumb darkness, amid which appeared vague and mysterious shapes that filled me with horror. Little by little my eyes grew accustomed to the gloom, and I made out, beside a river whose turbid waters rolled sluggishly ^{st-y X} along, the shadowy form of a man of a terrifying aspect. On his head was an Asiatic cap, and he carried an oar over his shoulder. I recognized the wily Odysseus. His cheeks were hollow and his chin covered with a long, unkempt white beard. I heard him moan in a weak voice :

“I am hungry. My eyes are dim and my soul is like a heavy smoke floating in the darkness. Who will give me a draught to drink of the black blood, that I may remember once more my vermilion-painted ships, my blameless wife, and my mother ?”

When I heard these words of his, I knew I had been translated to the Infernal Regions. I tried to direct my steps as well as I could by following the

descriptions of the poets, and I set off for a meadow where shone a faint, soft light. After a half-hour's walking, I came upon a group of Shades gathered in a field of asphodel and conversing together. The company included souls of all times and all countries, and I could see amongst them great philosophers side by side with poor savages. Hidden in the shade of a myrtle, I listened to their discourse. First I heard Pyrrho ask, with a gentle, deprecating air, his hands folded on his spade like a true gardener :

“What is the soul?”

The Shades who stood about him answered eagerly, all trying to speak at once.

The divine Plato said, with a look of subtlety :

“The soul is threefold. We have a very gross soul in the belly, an affectionate soul in the breast, and a reasonable soul in the head. The soul is immortal. Women have only two souls. They lack the reasonable.”

A father of the Council of Macon answered him :

“Plato, you speak like an idolater. The Council of Macon, by a majority of voices, accorded, in the year 585, an immortal soul to woman. Besides, woman is a man, inasmuch as Jesus Christ, born of a virgin, is called in the Gospels the Son of Man.”

Aristotle shrugged his shoulders and replied to his master, Plato, in a tone of respectful firmness :

“By my reckoning, Plato, I count five souls in man and in animals : 1, the nutritive ; 2, the sensitive ; 3, the motive ; 4, the appetitive ; 5, the ratiocinative. The soul is the formative element of the body. It causes it to perish when itself perishes.”

Divers other views were propounded, each contradicting the other.

ORIGEN.

The soul is material and figurative.

ST. AUGUSTINE.

The soul is incorporeal and immortal.

HEGEL.

The soul is a contingent phenomenon.

SCHOPENHAUER.

The soul is a temporary manifestation of the will.

A POLYNESIAN.

The soul is a puff of wind, and when I saw myself on the point of expiring, I pinched my nose to keep my soul inside my body. But I did not squeeze hard enough. And I am dead.

AN INDIAN WOMAN OF FLORIDA.

I died in childbed. They put my little baby's hand over my lips that he might hold in his mother's breath. But it was too late, my soul slipt between the poor innocent's fingers.

DESCARTES.

I proved conclusively that the soul was spiritual. As for knowing what it will be, I refer to Sir Kenelm Digby, who has written on the subject.¹

LAMETTRIE.

Where is this Digby? Let him be fetched!

MINOS.

Gentlemen, I will have him carefully searched for in all the purlieus of Hell.

ALBERTUS MAGNUS.

There are thirty arguments against the immortality of the soul and thirty-six for,—*ergo*, a majority of six arguments in favour of the affirmative.

LEATHER-STOCKING.

The spirit of a brave chief does not die, nor yet his tomahawk nor his pipe.

THE RABBI MAIMONIDES.

It is written: "The wicked man shall be destroyed, and there will be left nothing of him."

¹ *Nature of Man's Soul* (1644).

ST. AUGUSTINE.

You are mistaken, Rabbi Maimonides. It is written: "The accursed shall go to the fire eternal."

ORIGEN.

Yes, Maimonides is mistaken. The wicked man will not be destroyed, but he will be diminished; he will become quite small and imperceptible. This we must understand of the damned. And the souls of the Saints will be absorbed in God.

DUNS SCOTUS.

Death makes beings to re-enter into God like a sound that vanishes in the air.

BOSSUET.

Origen and Duns Scotus are wrong here; their words are saturated with the poisons of error. What is said in the holy books of the torments of Hell is to be understood in the precise and literal meaning. Ever living and ever dying, immortal for the suffering of their torments, too strong to die, too weak to endure, the damned shall groan eternally on beds of flame, overwhelmed in furious and irremediable pangs.

ST. AUGUSTINE.

Yes, these verities must be taken in the literal meaning. It is the true flesh of the damned that

will suffer *in sæcula sæculorum*. Babes dead as soon as born or even in their mother's womb will not be exempt from these dire punishments. Such the fiat of Divine justice. If you find it hard to credit that bodies plunged in the flames are never consumed, that is the result of sheer ignorance, because you do not know that there are sorts of flesh which are preserved in fire ; for instance, the flesh of the pheasant. I made experience of this at Hippo, where my cook prepared one of these birds and served one half for my dinner. After a fortnight I asked for the other half, which was still good to eat. Whereby it appeared that the fire had preserved it, as it will preserve the bodies of the damned.

SUMANGALA.

All the doctrines I have just listened to are black with the black darkness of the West. The truth is this : souls migrate into divers bodies before winning to the all-blessed *nirvāna*, which puts an end to all the evils of existence. Gautama went through five hundred and fifty incarnations before he became Buddha ; he was king, slave, ape, elephant, crow, frog, plane tree, etc.

THE ECCLESIAST.

Men die like the beasts of the field and their end is the same. As men die, the beasts die also.

Both breathe the same breath, and men have nothing which the beasts have not.

TACITUS.

This language is conceivable in the mouth of a Jew, fashioned for slavery. For myself, I will speak as a Roman. The soul of famous citizens is not perishable. This we may well believe. But we offend the majesty of the gods by supposing them to grant immortality to the souls of slaves and freedmen.

CICERO.

Alas! my son, all they tell us of the Infernal Regions is a tissue of falsehoods. I ask myself the question: Am I immortal myself, otherwise than by the memory of my Consulship, which will endure for ever?

SOCRATES.

For my part, I believe in the immortality of the soul. It is a fine hazard to stake, a hope each man may enchant himself withal.

VICTOR COUSIN.

Dear Socrates, the immortality of the soul, which I have demonstrated eloquently, is primarily an ethical necessity. For virtue is a fine subject for rhetorics, and if the soul is not immortal virtue will not be recompensed. And God would not be God if he did not have a care for my French theses.

SENECA.

Are those the maxims of a sage? Consider, oh! philosopher of the Gauls, that the recompense of good actions is to have done them, and that no prize meet to reward virtue is to be found extraneous to virtue itself.

PLATO.

Yet there are divine rewards and punishments. At death, the soul of the wicked man goes to inhabit the body of some inferior animal,—horse, hippopotamus, or woman. The soul of the wise man mingles with the choir of the gods.

PAPINIAN.

Plato will have it that in the future life the justice of the gods must needs correct the errors of human justice. On the contrary, it is good that individuals who were condemned on earth to chastisement they did not merit, but which was laid upon them by magistrates liable indeed to err, yet duly appointed and of full competence to deliver sentence, continue to bear their pains and penalties in the Shades; human justice is concerned in this, and it would tend to weaken it to give out that its judgment can be set aside by the Divine wisdom.

AN ESKIMO.

God is very good to the rich and very bad to the poor. This is because he loves the rich and he does not love the poor. And inasmuch as he loves the rich, he will welcome them in Paradise, and as he does not love the poor, he will put them in hell.

A CHINESE BUDDHIST.

Know that every man has two souls, one good, which will be reunited with God, the other bad, which will be tormented.

THE OLD MAN OF TARENTUM.

Oh! sages, answer an old man, a lover of gardens: Animals, have they a soul?

DESCARTES AND MALEBRANCHE.

No. They are machines.

ARISTOTLE.

They are animals and have a soul like ourselves. This soul is in relation with their organs.

EPICURUS.

O! Aristotle, for their happiness, their soul is like ours, perishable and subject to death. Dear Shades, wait patiently in these gardens the time when you will lose altogether, along with the cruel

wish to live, life itself and its miseries. Rest yourselves by anticipation in the peace which nothing troubles.

PYRRHO.

What is life ?

CLAUDE BERNARD.

Life is death.

“What is death ?” asked Pyrrho further.

But no one answered him, and the group of Shades slipt away noiselessly, like a cloud flying before the wind.

I thought I was left alone in the meadow of asphodels till I caught sight of Menippus, whom I knew by his air of smiling cynicism.

“How is it,” I said, “O Menippus, that these dead folk speak of death as if they knew nothing of it, and why are they as ignorant of human destinies as if they were still on earth ?

“It is, no doubt,” Menippus told me, “because they still remain human and mortal in some degree. When they shall have entered into immortality, they will not speak nor think any more. They will be like the gods.

ARISTOS AND POLYPHILOS ON THE
LANGUAGE OF METAPHYSICS

TO MONSIEUR HORACE DE LANDAU

ARISTOS AND POLYPHILOS ON THE
LANGUAGE OF METAPHYSICS

ARISTOS.



GOOD day, Polyphilos. What is your book? You seem plunged over head and ears in its pages.

POLYPHILOS.

It is a Manual of Philosophy, dear Aristos, one of those little works that bring the wisdom of the ages within reach of your hand. It reviews all systems, one by one, from the old Eleatics down to the latest Eclectics, and it ends up with M. Lachelier. First I read the table of contents; then, opening the book in the middle, or thereabouts, I lighted on this sentence: *The spirit possesses God in proportion as it participates in the absolute.*

ARISTOS.

Everything indicates that this thought forms part of a serious argument. There would be no sense in considering it as it stands by itself.

POLYPHILOS.

For that reason I paid no attention to what it might mean. I made no attempt to discover how much truth it contained. I devoted myself solely to the verbal form, which is in no wise singular, I doubt not, or out of the common, and which offers to an expert like yourself, I should say, nothing specially precious or rare. All one can say is that it is a metaphysical proposition. And that is what I was thinking about when you came.

ARISTOS.

May I share the reflexions I have unfortunately interrupted ?

POLYPHILOS.

I was merely thinking,—thinking how the Metaphysicians, when they make a language for themselves, are like knife-grinders, who, instead of knives and scissors, should put medals and coins to the grindstone, to efface the lettering, date and type. When they have worked away till nothing is visible in their crown-pieces, neither King Edward, the Emperor William, nor the Republic, they say: “These pieces have nothing either English, German or French about them ; we have freed them from all limits of time and space ; they are not worth five shillings any more ; they are of an inestimable value, and their circulation is extended infinitely.” They

are right in speaking thus. By this needy knife-grinder's activity words are changed from a physical to a metaphysical acceptation. It is obvious that they lose in the process ; what they gain by it is not so immediately apparent.

ARISTOS.

But how, Polyphilos, shall we discover at first sight what will assure gain or loss, as the case may be, in the future ?

POLYPHILOS.

I quite see Aristos, it would not be seemly to employ in this case the balance with which the Lombard of the Pont-au-Change used to weigh his angels and ducats. Let us first of all note that our spiritual knife-grinder has very freely ground down the two words *possess* and *participate* which occur in the sentence from the little *Manual*, where they glitter with all their original dross removed.

ARISTOS.

Very true, Polyphilos, they have left nothing contingent about them.

POLYPHILOS.

And in the same way they have polished smooth the word *absolute*, which concludes the sentence. When you came in just now, I was thinking two things about this very word, the word *absolute*.

The first is,—that the Metaphysicians have all along shown a marked preference for negative terms, such as *non*-existence, *in*-tangible, *un*-conscious. They are never so happy as when they are discoursing about the *in*-finite and the *in*-definite, or dealing with the *un*-knowable. In three pages of Hegel taken at random, in his *Phenomenology*, out of six-and-twenty words, the subjects of important sentences, I found nineteen negative terms as against seven affirmatives,—I mean seven terms the meaning of which was not annulled in advance by some prefix reversing the essential signification. I cannot say if the same ratio holds good in the rest of the book ; that I do not know ; but the example will serve to illustrate a remark the accuracy of which can be readily verified. Such is the general practice, so far as I have observed, of the Metaphysicians,—more correctly the *Metataphysicians* (*μετὰ τὰ φύσικα*) ; for it is another remarkable fact to add to the rest, that your science itself has a negative name, one taken from the order in which the treatises of Aristotle were arranged, and that strictly speaking, you give yourselves the title : Those who come after the *physicians*. I understand of course that you regard these, the physical books, as piled atop of each other, so that to come after is really to take place above. All the same you admit this much, that you are outside of natural phenomena.

ARISTOS.

Keep to one idea at a time, I do beseech you, dear Polyphilos. If you go jumping perpetually from one to another, I shall find it very hard to follow you.

POLYPHILOS.

Well, I will confine myself for the present to the predilection shown by these thought-distillers for such terms as express the negative of an affirmation. And the said predilection, I freely allow, implies of itself nothing abnormal or fantastic. It is no symptom with them of intemperateness, degeneracy, or insanity; it merely satisfies the natural cravings of minds of an abstract tendency. These *abs* and *ins* and *nons* are more effective than any grindstone in planing down. At a stroke they make the most rugged words smooth and characterless. Sometimes, it is true, they merely twist them round for you and turn them upside down. Or else, again, they endow them with a mysterious and sacred potency as we see in *absolute* (*absolutus*), which is something much more imposing than *solute* (*solutus*). *Absolutus* is the patrician amplification of *solutus*, and a fine testimonial to the majesty of the Latin language.

That is the first remark I wished to make. The second is, that the philosophers, such as you, Aristos, who talk metaphysics, take care to select words for

this smoothing down process of theirs that had already, ere they touched them, lost somewhat of the original brilliance of their type and superscription. For it must be allowed that we too, we everyday folk, are not guiltless of the trick of filing down words, and little by little defacing their pristine clearness. And in so doing we are Metaphysicians,—without knowing it.

ARISTOS.

That last admission of yours, Polyphilos, we had best make a note of, that you may not be tempted later on to argue that the processes of metaphysical reasoning are not natural to mankind,—legitimate and in some sort necessary operations. However, proceed.

POLYPHILOS.

I observe, Aristos, that many expressions, as they pass from mouth to mouth in the course of generations, take on a polish, or as they say in the studios, “surface.” Whatever you do, do not imagine, Aristos, that I am blaming the Metaphysicians because they go out of their way to choose for polishing such words as come to them a bit rubbed already. In this way they save themselves a good half of the labour. Sometimes they are luckier still, and put their hands on words which, by long

and universal use, have lost from time immemorial all trace whatever of an effigy. My sentence from the little *Manual* actually contains two of the sort.

ARISTOS.

You mean, I feel convinced, the words *God* and *soul*.

POLYPHILOS.

You have guessed them, Aristos. These two words, worn and rubbed for centuries, have lost all trace of the design they originally bore. Before *Metaphysics* began upon them, they were completely "metaphysicized." Judge for yourself if the *abstractor* by profession is likely to let this description of words escape, words that seem and indeed are specially adapted for his use, seeing the unknown hosts of mankind have worked them smooth for ages,—unconsciously, indeed, yet with a genuine philosophic instinct.

Last of all, to meet the case where they deem themselves to be thinking what had never been thought before, and conceiving what had never yet been conceived, the philosophers coin new words. These of course issue from the mint as smooth as so many counters. But after all they have had to be struck from the old common metal. So here we have yet another factor to be considered.

ARISTOS.

You mean to imply by your last remark, Polyphilos, if I understand you aright, that the Metaphysicians speak a language made up of terms, some of which are borrowed from the vulgar tongue, for choice whatever words are most abstract, most general or most negative in it, the rest created artificially out of elements borrowed from the same source. Well, what then ?

POLYPHILOS.

Grant me one thing, Aristos, to begin with, viz. that all the words of human speech were in the first instance struck with a material type and that they all represented in their original freshness some sensible image. There is no term which was not primitively the sign of an object belonging to the common stock of shapes and colours, sounds and scents, and all the illusive phenomena whereby our senses are mercilessly cajoled.

It was by speaking of the straight road and the tortuous path that our ancestors expressed the first moral ideas. The vocabulary of mankind was framed from sensuous images, and this sensuousness is so bound up with its constitution that it is still to be found even in those words to which common consent has assigned subsequently a vague, spiritual connotation, and even in the technical terms specially

concocted by Metaphysicians to express the abstract at its highest possible power of abstraction. Even these cannot escape the fatal materialism inherent in the vocabulary ; they still cling by some root-let or fibre to the world-old imagery of human speech.

ARISTOS.

There is no denying it.

POLYPHILOS.

All these words, whether defaced by wear and tear, or polished smooth, or even coined expressly in view of constructing some intellectual concept, yet allow us to frame some idea to ourselves of what they originally represented. So chemists have reagents whereby they can make the effaced writing of a papyrus or a parchment visible again. It is by these means palimpsests are deciphered.

If an analogous process were applied to the writings of the Metaphysicians, if the primitive and concrete meaning that lurks invisible yet present under the abstract and new interpretation were brought to light, we should come upon some very curious and perhaps instructive ideas.

Suppose we try, Aristos, to give back form and colour, to restore the original life and force, to the

words composing the sentence I quoted from my little *Manual* :—

The spirit possesses God in proportion as it participates in the absolute.

In this endeavour the science of Comparative Grammar will afford us the same help that the chemical reagent gives to the scholars who decipher palimpsests. It will enable us to see the meaning borne by these ten or a dozen words, not of course at the first origin of language, which is lost in the shades of a far-remote past, but at all events at a period long anterior to all historic record.

Spirit, God, measure, possess, participate, can all be referred back to their Aryan signification ; *absolute* can be broken up into its Latin elements. Now, restoring to these words their early and undefaced visage, this (barring errors) is what we get :—

The breath is seated by the shining one in the bushel of the part it takes in what is altogether loosed.

ARISTOS.

Do you suppose, Polyphilos, that any conclusions of importance are to be drawn from this rigmarole ?

POLYPHILOS.

There is one at any rate, to wit, that the Metaphysicians construct their systems with the frag-

ments, now all but unrecognizable, of the signs whereby savages once expressed their joys and wants and fears.

ARISTOS.

In this they only submit to the necessary conditions of language.

POLYPHILOS.

Without raising the question whether this common fatality is a subject for humiliation on their part or something to boast of, I cannot help reflecting on the extraordinary adventures the terms they employ have gone through in changing from the particular to the general, the concrete to the abstract. For instance, the word *soul* or *spirit*, which was originally the warm breath of the body, has so completely altered its essential meaning that we can say: "This animal has no soul"; a proposition which strictly and literally signifies: "The creature that breathes has no breath." Again, the same title, *God*, has been given at successive periods to an appearance of the sky, a fetish, an idol, and the first cause of things. Well, there you have some really remarkable and startling vicissitudes for two poor vocables.

By this sort of precise examination of their past fortunes, we should be reconstructing the natural history of metaphysical ideas. It would be neces-

sary to follow out the successive modifications which words like *soul* and *spirit* have undergone, and discover how the present meanings have gradually been developed. This would throw a lurid light on the kind of reality these words express.

ARISTOS.

Why, Polyphilos, you talk as if the ideas we attach to a word, being dependent upon that word, were born and suffered change and died together with it; and because a noun like *God*, *soul*, or *spirit* has stood successively as the symbol of several mutually discrepant ideas, you suppose yourself able, by studying the history of the word, to comprehend the life and death of the idea. In fact you make metaphysical speculation the slave of its own phraseology and liable to all the hereditary defects of the terms it employs. The attempt is so preposterous that you dared not avow it except in purposely ambiguous phrases and with evident anxiety.

POLYPHILOS.

My only anxiety is to know what limit there will be to the difficulties I suggest. Every word is the image of an image, the symbol of an illusion. Nothing else whatever. And if I convince myself that it is with the defaced and disfigured remains

of ancient images and gross illusions that philosophers represent the abstract, *ipso facto* the abstract ceases to be represented to my mind; I see nothing but the ashes of the concrete, and instead of a pure, immaterial idea, merely the finely comminuted dust of the fetishes, amulets, and idols that have been destroyed.

ARISTOS.

But did not you say just now that the language of metaphysics was all completely polished down and as it were ground smooth on the grindstone? And what, pray, did you mean by that, if not that the terms then used are, so to speak, stripped bare, in other words, abstract? And this grindstone you talked about, what is it, if not the definition given to these terms. You forget the fact that in every metaphysical thesis the terms are precisely defined, and that being abstract by definition, they retain nothing of any such concrete associations as they took over from an earlier acceptance.

POLYPHILOS.

Yes, you define your words,—how? Why, by other words. Are they any the less therefore human words, that is to say world-old cries of desire or terror, uttered by unhappy beings in face of the shadows and lights that hid the veritable world

from them? Like our poor degraded ancestors of the woods and caves, we are imprisoned within our senses, which bound the universe for us. We believe our eyes reveal it to us, and all the while it is a reflexion of ourselves that these actually give us back. Furthermore, to express the emotions of our ignorance, what have we but the voice of the savage,—his stammering syllables a little better articulated and his howls a trifle mitigated? That, Aristos, is a description of all human speech!

ARISTOS.

If you condemn it in the philosopher, to be consistent, you must do the same with the rest of mankind. Those who deal with the exact sciences likewise employ a vocabulary which first took shape in the broken stammerings of primitive man, and which does not for all that lack precision. Again, the Mathematicians, who, like ourselves, discuss abstractions, speak a language which might no less than ours be traced back to the concrete, inasmuch as it is a form of human speech. You would have fine work, Polyphilos, if you chose to materialize an axiom of geometry or an algebraic formula. Do what you will, you will not destroy the ideal element. On the contrary, you would demonstrate, in the process of removing it, that it was there originally.

POLYPHILOS

No doubt. But neither the physicist nor the geometrician are in the same case as the metaphysician. In the physical sciences and in the mathematical, the precision of the vocabulary depends solely and entirely on the relations between the word and the object or phenomenon which it designates. There we have an infallible standard. And as name and thing are both equally sensible, we can apply the one with certainty to the other. Here the etymological meaning, the intrinsic force of the term, is of no importance. The signification of the word is determined within such exact limits by the sensible object it represents that any other exactitude is superfluous. Who would ever dream of trying to affix a more exact precision to the idea given us by the terms *acid* and *base*, as these are understood by chemists? It would not be common sense therefore to examine into the history of the individual words that go to form the terminology of the sciences. A chemical term, once installed in the text-books, is not called upon to tell us of the adventures that befell it in the days of its frolic youth, when it ran wild in the woods and mountains. It has given up these frivolities. Itself and the object it designates can

both be embraced in the same glance and instantly and always confronted.

Again, you mention geometry. Yes, no doubt the geometrician speculates as to abstractions. But mathematical abstractions differ altogether from metaphysical, the former being derived from the sensible and measurable properties of bodies, constituting a system of physical philosophy. Consequently the truths of mathematics, albeit intangible in themselves, can in every case be compared with Nature, which, without ever entirely disengaging them, manifests that they are all involved in her. Their expression is not a matter of the language used; it is conditioned by the nature of things; it is implicit in the categories of time and space under which Nature manifests herself to mankind. Thus the language of mathematics, to be excellent, needs only to be governed by stable conventions. If each concrete term in it designates an abstraction, that abstraction has in nature its concrete representation. You are at liberty to say it is a rough and ready delineation, a sort of coarse, clumsy caricature; but that does not prevent its being a sensible image, a tangible type of the said abstraction. The word is directly applicable to it, because it is on the same plane with it, and is therefore readily transferred to the purely intellectual concept corresponding to the sensible or material notion.

It is *not* the same with metaphysics, where abstraction is no longer the visible result of experience, as it is in physics, no longer the outcome of speculation on the attributes of sensible nature, as it is in mathematics, but simply and solely the product of an operation of the mind, which extracts from a thing certain qualities,—qualities intelligible and conceivable for itself alone. Of these all we know is that the mind has framed a concept of them, which concept it makes known only by way of the language in which it describes them; in other words they have no guarantee of existence save and except the bare phrase. If these same abstractions do veritably exist in and by themselves, they reside in a region accessible to pure intelligence alone, they inhabit a world which you call the absolute as contra-distinguished from an opposite of which I will merely say that in your sense of the word it is not absolute. And if these two worlds are implicit one in the other, well! that is their affair, not mine. It is enough for me to possess the assurance that one is sensible and the other is not; that the sensible is not intelligible, and the intelligible is not sensible. Consequently word and thing can never coincide with one another, not being in the same place; it is impossible they should ever take account of each other, not being parts of the same world. Metaphysically, either the word is the

whole thing, or it has nothing to do with the thing.

For it to be otherwise, there would have to be words absolutely abstract and free of all taint of sensuous association; and there are none such. The words we call abstract are so only by being made so of deliberate intent. They play the part of the abstract, just as an actor represents the Ghost in *Hamlet*.

ARISTOS.

You raise difficulties where there were none before. *Pari passu* as the mind has abstracted, or, if you prefer it, decomposed, and as you said just now, distilled nature to extract the essence, it has in like fashion abstracted, decomposed, distilled words, in order to represent thereby the product of its transcendental operations. Whence it comes that the sign is exactly coincident with the object.

POLYPHILOS.

But, Aristos, I have fully proved to you, and from divers points of view, that the abstract in words is only a lesser concrete. The concrete, fined down and extenuated, is still the concrete. We must not commit the blunder some women fall into, who because they are thin, pose as pure, immaterial spirits. You are like children who take

a twig of elder and keep only the pith to make little figures of. Their mannikins are small and light, but they are made of elder for all that. Similarly, your so-called abstract terms have merely become something less concrete. If you take them as being purely abstract and withdrawn entirely outside their true and proper nature, you do so by mere arbitrary convention. But, if the ideas represented by these words are not themselves mere conventions, if they are realized anywhere else than in yourselves, if they exist in the absolute, or in any other imaginary place you choose to name, if in one word they "are," then they are incapable of verbal enunciation, they remain ineffable. To name them is to deny their existence; to express them is to destroy them. For, the concrete word being the symbol of the abstract idea, the latter is no sooner phrased than it becomes concrete, and then all the quintessence is gone!

ARISTOS.

But if I tell you that, for the idea equally with the word, the abstract is only a lesser concrete, your argument falls through.

POLYPHILOS.

You will never say such a thing. It would mean the ruin of metaphysics root and branch, and an

intolerable injury to the soul, to God, and eventually to His professors. I am quite aware Hegel said the concrete was the abstract, and the abstract the concrete. But then that thinker has turned your science upside down. You will allow, Aristos, were it only to keep to the rules of the game, that the abstract is the opposite of the concrete. Now, the concrete word cannot be the sign of the abstract idea. At most it might be the symbol, or, to put it better, the allegory. The sign designates the object and recalls it to memory. It has no proper value of its own. The symbol, on the other hand, stands for the object. It does not point it out, it represents it. It does not recall it, it copies it. It is a picture. It has a reality of its own and a distinctive signification. Wherefore I was on the right road when I investigated the meanings inherent in the words *spirit*, *God*, *absolute*, which are symbols and not signs.

“The spirit possesses God in proportion as it participates in the absolute.”

What is this if not a collection of little symbols, much worn and defaced, I admit, symbols which have lost their original brilliance and picturesqueness, but which still, by the nature of things, remain symbols? The image is reduced to the schema; but the schema is still the image. And I have been able, without sacrificing fidelity, to

substitute one for the other. In this way I have arrived at the following :—

“The breath is seated by the shining one in the bushel of the part it takes in what is altogether loosed (or subtle),” whence we easily get as a next step : *“He whose breath is a sign of life, man that is, will find a place (no doubt, after the breath has been exhaled) in the divine fire, source and home of life, and this place will be meted out to him according to the virtue that has been given him (by the demons, I imagine) of sending abroad this warm breath, this little invisible soul, across the free expanse (the blue of the sky, most likely).”*

And now observe, the phrase has acquired quite the ring of some fragment of a Vedic hymn, and smacks of ancient Oriental mythology. I cannot answer for having restored this primitive myth in full accordance with the strict laws governing language. But no matter for that. Enough if we are seen to have found symbols and a myth in a sentence that was essentially symbolical and mythical, inasmuch as it was metaphysical.

I think I have at least made you realize one thing, Aristos,—that any expression of an abstract idea can only be an allegory. By an odd fate, the very metaphysicians who think to escape the world of appearances, are constrained to live perpetually in allegory. A sorry sort of poets, they

dim the colours of the ancient fables, and are themselves but gatherers of fables. Their output is mythology, an anæmic mythology without body or blood.

ARISTOS.

Good-bye, dear Polyphilos. I leave you unconvinced. If only you had reasoned by the rules, I could have rebutted your arguments quite easily.

THE PRIORY

TO TEODOR DE WYZEWA

THE PRIORY



FOUND my friend Jean at the old Priory, in the ruins of which he has made himself a home for the last ten years. He received me with the quiet cheerfulness of a hermit delivered from our human hopes and fears, and led me down to the unkempt orchard where every morning he smokes his clay pipe among his moss-grown plum trees. There we sat down to wait for *déjeuner* on a bench in front of a rickety table, under a crumbling wall where the soapwort swings the rosy clusters of its flowers, faded and fresh at the same time. The light of a rainy sky trembled in the leaves of the poplars that whispered by the roadside. Clouds of a pearly grey drifted above our heads, with a suggestion of gentle but incurable melancholy.

Remembering his manners, Jean asked me news of the state of my health and affairs ; then he began in a slow voice and with puckered brows :

“ Though I never read as a rule, my ignorance is not so closely guarded but that I came acquainted

in my hermitage, which you jeered at in former days, on the second page of a newspaper with a prophet wise enough and well-meaning enough to teach that science and intellectual effort are the source and fountain-head, the well and reservoir of all the ills men suffer. This seer, if I remember right, maintained that, to make life innocent and even amiable, all that was needed was to renounce reflexion and the acquisition of knowledge, and that the only happiness in the world is to be found in a sympathetic, unreasoning charity. Wise precepts, salutary maxims, whose only fault lay in their enunciator having expressed them at all and been so weak as to set them out in fine phrases, without seeing that to combat art with art and intellect with intellect is to condemn oneself only to win the cause for intellect and art. You will do me the justice, old friend, to admit that I have not fallen into this pitiful contradiction, and that I have entirely given up thinking and writing ever since the day I realized that thought is an evil and writing a curse. This wise conviction I reached, as you know, in 1882, after the publication of a little book of philosophy that had cost me a thousand pains and which the philosophers contemned because it was written in a graceful style. In it I went to prove that the universe is unintelligible, and I was angry when I was told that as

a matter of fact I had not understood it. Thereupon I was for defending my book ; but on re-reading it, I failed to recover its precise meaning. I saw that I was as obscure as the greatest metaphysicians, and that the world was treating me most unjustly in not awarding me some portion of the admiration they excite. This finally and completely weaned me from transcendental speculations. I turned to the sciences of observation and studied physiology. Its principles are fairly well established, as they have been for thirty years now. They consist in fixing a frog neatly with pins on a little slab of cork and opening it up to observe the nerves and heart, which by the by is double. But I realized very soon that, by these methods, it would need far more time than life has to give to discover the deep-laid secret of living things. I felt the vanity of pure science, which, embracing only an infinitely minute fraction of the phenomena, is confronted with too limited a number of relations to build up any solid system. I thought for a moment of throwing myself into industrial pursuits. My natural kindness of heart prevented me. There is no form of enterprise of which we can say beforehand whether it will do more good than harm. Christopher Columbus, who lived and died like a saint and wore the habit of the good St. Francis, would certainly never have sought out the

way to the Indies if he had foreseen that his discovery would lead to the massacre of so many nations of red-skins, vicious and cruel men no doubt, but still capable of feeling pain, and that he would introduce into the Old World, along with the gold of the New, diseases and crimes hitherto unknown. I shuddered when people, very honest people too, invited me to interest myself in big guns and fire-arms and high explosives, which had won them money and distinctions. My doubts became a certainty, that civilization, as it is called, was nothing more than scientific barbarism, and I made up my mind to turn savage. I found no difficulty in putting my design into practice in this remote little district, lying thirty leagues away from Paris and declining in population every day. You saw in the village street houses standing empty and going to ruin. The peasants' sons, one and all, make for the towns, abandoning a countryside where properties are so minutely subdivided that they can no longer make a living wage.

“The day seems coming when a clever speculator will buy up all these lands and re-establish large landholding, and we shall very likely see the small cultivator disappear from the country, as even now the small tradesman tends to disappear from the big towns. This must be as it will. I care nothing one way or the other. I have paid down

six thousand francs and bought the remains of an old Priory, with a fine stone staircase, a round tower and this orchard, which I leave to go waste. There I spend my time in watching the clouds in the sky, or in the grass the white spindles of the wild carrot. That is surely better than dissecting frogs or creating a new model of torpedo-boat.

“When the night is fine, if I am awake, I gaze at the stars, which I am fond of looking at now that I have forgotten their names. I see no visitors, I think of nothing. I have been at no pains whether to attract you to my retreat or keep you away.

“I am happy to offer you an omelette, wine, and tobacco. But I tell you frankly it is still more agreeable to me to give my dog, my rabbits and pigeons their daily bread, which renews their vigour. *They* will not turn it to bad uses in writing novels that disturb men’s minds or textbooks of physiology that poison existence.”

At this moment a fine-looking girl, with red cheeks and light blue eyes, brought us eggs and a bottle of light red wine. I asked my friend Jean if he hated arts and letters as cordially as he did the sciences.

“Oh, no!” he assured me; “there is a childish element in the arts which disarms strong dislike. They are infants’ games. Painters and sculptors

are daubers of pretty pictures and makers of dolls. That is all ; and what great harm is there in that ? We ought even to feel grateful to the poets for only using words after they have stripped them of all serious meaning, if only the poor fellows who follow this amusement did not take their work, as they call it, seriously, and if it did not make them odiously selfish, irritable, jealous and envious, a sort of crack-brained lunatics. They actually expect to reap renown from this foolish trumpery. This is proof positive of their insanity. For of all the hallucinations that can spring from a sick brain, surely the desire of fame is the most grotesque and mischievous. I can only pity them. Here the labourers sing at the plough the old songs their fathers sang ; the shepherds, sitting on the hill-sides, carve with their knives little figures out of boxwood roots, and the housewives knead loaves for fête days in the shape of doves. These are innocent arts, which no poisonous pride envenoms. They are easy and proportioned to human feebleness. On the contrary, the arts of the towns demand effort, and every effort results in pain.

“ But what above all afflicts and hideously disfigures and deforms our fellow-creatures is Science, which brings them into relations with objects to which they are out of all proportion and distorts the true conditions of their intercourse with nature.

It provokes them to understand, when it is manifest that an animal is made to feel and not to understand ; it develops the brain, which is a useless organ, at the expense of the useful organs which we possess in common with the beasts ; it turns us against enjoyment, for which we experience an instinctive craving ; it tortures us with terrifying illusions, showing us horrors that only exist by its instrumentality ; it establishes our pettiness by measuring the heavenly bodies, the shortness of life by calculating the antiquity of the world, our helplessness by leading us to suspect what we can neither see nor touch, our ignorance by bringing us up continually against the unknowable, and our wretchedness by multiplying our subjects of curiosity without supplying answers.

“I am not speaking of its purely speculative researches. When it goes on to practical applications, its inventions are only new and ingenious instruments of torture, machines in which unhappy human beings are done to death. Visit any manufacturing town or go down into a mine, and say if the sights you see do not exceed all that the most ferocious theologians have imagined of Hell. Yet, on reflexion, it may be doubted if the products of industry are not less hurtful to the poor who manufacture them than they are to the rich who use them, and whether, of all the ills of life,

luxury is not the worst. I have known people of all social conditions; I have met none so wretched as a lady of position in Paris, a young and pretty woman, who spends fifty thousand francs every year on her dresses. It is a state of things that leads to incurable neurosis."

The good-looking country-girl with the clear eyes poured us out our coffee with an air of contented stolidity.

My friend Jean pointed to her with the stem of his pipe, which he had just filled, and—

"Look at that girl," he said; "she lives on bread and bacon, and no longer ago than yesterday she was carrying trusses of straw on a pitchfork; you can see bits of it in her hair now. She is happy and innocent in all she does. For it is science and civilization have created sin as well as disease. I am almost as happy as she is, being almost as stupid. Thinking about nothing, I never torment my wits. Doing nothing, I am not afraid of doing ill. I do not even till my garden, for fear of performing an act the consequences of which I could not calculate. In this way, I enjoy perfect peace of mind."

"In your place," I told him, "I should not feel the same security. You cannot have so completely crushed out all knowledge, thought and action in yourself as to taste a genuine tranquillity. Mind this: do what we will, to live is to act. The con-

sequences of a scientific discovery or invention alarm you, because they are incalculable. But the simplest thought, the most instinctive act, likewise involves incalculable consequences. You pay a great compliment to intellect, science and industry in thinking they only are concerned in weaving the web of men's destinies. Many a mesh is framed by unconscious forces. Can we foretell the effect of the tiniest pebble dislodged from a mountain side? It may modify the lot of humanity more notably than the publication of the *Novum Organum*, or the discovery of electricity.

“It was an act neither original nor deeply pondered, nor surely of a scientific sort, to which Alexander or Napoleon owed their appearance in the world. Yet millions of human destinies were involved. Do we even know the value and true meaning of what we do? There is a tale in the *Arabian Nights* to which I cannot somehow help attaching a philosophical interpretation. I mean the story of the Arab merchant who, on his way back from a pilgrimage to Mecca, seats himself on the margin of a spring to eat dates, the stones of which he tosses up in the air. One of these date-stones kills an invisible being, the son of a Genie. The poor man never dreamt he could do so much with a date-stone, and when he was informed of the crime he had committed, he was dumbfounded with horror. He

had never pondered sufficiently on the possible consequences of every act we do. Can we ever tell, when we lift our arm, if we may not strike, as the merchant did, a genie of the air? In your place, I should not feel at ease at all. How do you know that your quiet sojourn in this old Priory, overgrown with ivy and saxifrage, is not an act of more profound importance to humanity than all the discoveries of all the savants, and productive of effects of direst import in days to come?"

"It is not probable."

"It is not impossible. You lead a strange life. You speak strange words that may be collected and published. Quite enough, under given circumstances, to make of you, in spite of, even against your will, the founder of a new Religion. Millions of men might embrace it, whom it would render unhappy and ill-conditioned, and who would in your name massacre thousands upon thousands of their fellow-men."

"A man must needs die then to be innocent and win tranquillity?"

"Mind what you say, again; to die is to accomplish an act of incalculably far-reaching potentialities."

END.

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