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ESSAYS BY SAINTE-BEUVE.

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TRANSLATED, WITH AN INTRODUCTION, BY ELIZABETH LEE.

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INTRODUCTION.

THE personality of men like Dante, Milton, Shelley, Charles Lamb, Heine, is in many ways even greater than their work; our interest in the man equals our delight in the productions of his art. Others again, either because we know very little of their personal history, or because what we do know is not attractive, we prefer to study only in their work. Sainte-Beuve's personality is not very distinct; his inconsistencies help to obscure his individuality, and are not in themselves of a kind to interest us deeply. Directly or even before the grave had closed over him men began to quarrel and dispute about his reputation both as an individual and a man of letters; every French newspaper and journal published many columns of biography and criticism; journalists took the opportunity of revenging themselves for real or supposed injuries, or sang hymns of praise in gratitude for benefits. Each one of them had his own peculiar method of judging the man and his work. We have no intention here of entering into the controversy, and shall only set down the facts of his life because they help us to appreciate at its right value his powerful and original mind. We seek him in the work he has produced, work which stamps him as the greatest literary critic of the age, maybe of all time. In amount and variety it is enormous; sixty volumes scarcely suffice to contain it, and he was by turns poet, novelist, historian, critic, and philosopher, knowing almost all there was to know of literature, politics, history, religion, art, and science.

Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve was born at Boulogne-sur-Mer, December 23, 1804. His father was a native of Picardy, and his mother, Augustine Coilliot, was of English descent. She was forty years old at the time of her marriage, and a few months afterwards her husband died. Sainte-Beuve was thus a posthumous child, inheriting from his half-English mother his red hair and robust frame, and perhaps his love and admiration of English literature. But contrary to what has generally been proved the rule in regard to the mothers of great men, Madame Sainte-Beuve seems to have had no intellectual tastes, and to have been unable to recognise her son's talent until he was elected a member of the French Academy. From his father then must Sainte-Beuve have inherited his love of books and his intellectual power. The comments and notes made by the elder Sainte-Beuve in the margins of his books prove him to have been a man of considerable learning and literary taste. Sainte-Beuve greatly reverenced this father whom he never knew. "I was born in a time of mourning; my cradle rested on a coffin. . . . My father left me his soul, mind, and taste written on every margin," he tells us in the *Consolations.* Brought up partly by his mother, and partly by an old aunt, his father's sister, his childhood was peaceful and studious. At his first school he made a lasting friendship with Eustache Barbe, afterwards Abbé Barbe, and his letters to him, comparatively few as they are in number, extend over almost the whole of his life. They are sympathetic and true, and form the most delightful part of his large correspondence; in them is seen the best side of the man.

At the age of fourteen he went to Paris to continue his studies, and won prizes at college for history and Latin verse. On leaving college he studied medicine for three years (1824-27). His resources were small, and he had to

practise the greatest economy. He has painted himself and his youthful aspirations and thoughts in the "Life of Joseph Delorme," prefixed to his first volume of poems. Joseph Delorme, the supposed author of the poems, is really the young Sainte-Beuve, and we learn the struggle in his mind between duty and inclination, the one pressing him to find work by which he might earn a living, the other urging him to dream and to write. The book was published in 1829, and its hero belongs to the class of the Werters and the Renés. The age of eighteenth century sentimentalism had not quite passed away, and the book attracted much attention. To-day we have done with all that, and pride ourselves on our realism; it is doubtful if our youths and maidens have dreams and aspirations, and even if they had them, their non-fulfilment would scarcely lead to despair and self-slaughter; but it is quite certain that, if, following the example of Goethe, Chateaubriand, Lamartine, Sainte-Beuve, they took to publishing them, no one would have the patience to read them. In 1824 M. Dubois, Sainte-Beuve's professor of rhetoric, founded the newspaper called *The Globe;* he invited Sainte-Beuve to assist him, and from 1824 to 1827 he wrote in it short articles signed "S. B.," which may now be found in the first volume of the *Premiers Lundis.* He attracted Victor Hugo's attention by two articles on the "Odes and Ballads" (1827), was won over to the romantic school, and soon became known as its champion and critic. Though in later life he modified his judgment, he never quite lost the enthusiasm, the independence of thought, and the recognition of all that was beautiful and true in literature—let the style be what it might—which he owed in a great measure to his connection with the famous *Cénacle.* Through it he became acquainted with the leading literary lights of the period, with Jouffroy, De

Rémusat, the two Ampères, Merimée, Guizot, Cousin, Villemain, and others.

His poetical period, the first period of literary work, immediately followed. *Joseph Delorme*, of which we have already spoken, was published in 1829, *Consolations* in 1830, and a third volume of verse, *August Thoughts*, the result of a journey in Switzerland, in 1837. His poetry wants the divine spark, but it was of a kind new to France, a poetry dealing directly with the common things of life; as far as it goes it is real and sincere, and lines and verses of it live in the memory. It was admired by Béranger, Lamartine, Jouffroy, and George Sand. He loved the sonnet and handled it to perfection, characterising "an idea in a sonnet" as "a drop of essence in a crystal tear."

The Revolution of July 1830 broke up the little society of *The Globe;* many entered into politics, but Sainte-Beuve remained a man of letters. His attitude in regard to politics has been much commented on; his inconsistencies and compromises have been vastly blamed, but we should remember that there are men in whose minds the patriotic feeling is not uppermost, men who care more for the things of the imagination, for that peace and material well-being which is an absolute condition of their intellectual work. Those things are more to them than the upholding of a political principle. In the essay on Montaigne there is a fairly complete statement of Sainte-Beuve's ideas on the subject, and he concludes with Montaigne's counsel to men who, born like himself for a quiet, studious life, are fallen on times of disturbance and revolution, men who, without in any way provoking them, or believing themselves capable of averting them, suffer from the political confusions: to such Montaigne—and Sainte-Beuve is in full sympathy with him

—recommends a wise foresight in regard to political events, but, at the same time, the avoidance of too much preoccupation about them and the taking good advantage of all the quiet times and bright intervals. To sum up, it seems to mean that men of delicately cultured temperaments should not trouble themselves greatly about politics. It is not, perhaps, the highest morality, or the action or rather inaction most useful to mankind, but many of us would rather be the inheritors of Sainte-Beuve's great work as a critic than of anything he might have accomplished as a politician. During the next three years he wrote in the *National* under Armand Carrel, and his articles form part of the second volume of the *Premiers Lundis*. Ampère introduced Sainte-Beuve to Madame Récamier, and he speedily became a frequenter of the aristocratic and polished society of her *salon* in the Abbaye-aux-Bois. About that time, also, he came for a while under the influence of La Mennais, whom he had met at Victor Hugo's in 1829. Sainte-Beuve's impressions of La Mennais may be read in the essay on Maurice de Guérin. In 1834 he published his novel *Volupté*; as in *Joseph Delorme*, the hero, Amaury, is doubtless partly intended for himself. The book as a whole is a little dull, though it contains fine passages, and is overshadowed by a certain melancholy that is not without attraction; it lacks, however, the sweetness and charm of *René* and *Graziella*, and is without the skill, artistic sense, and absolute truth of some of the modern masters of realistic fiction. It has been described as a kind of link between Rousseau and the school of Flaubert and Zola, but that is probably giving it more importance than it deserves. It had a success, and Sainte-Beuve was complimented upon it by Chateaubriand, Michelet, Villemain, Eugénie de Guérin, and George Sand.

The three following years formed a time of religious and moral crisis in his life, during which he passed from religion to scepticism. In the winter of 1837-38 he delivered a course of lectures at Lausanne on the history of the Port-Royal. Afterwards he published them in instalments, and the book in five volumes remains a brilliant historical monument, and the last word to be said on the subject. M. Ferdinand Brunetière, Sainte-Beuve's latest critic, eulogises his *Port-Royal* in the highest terms. From this time he abandoned the sentimental and romantic side of things, and devoted himself to what best suited his intellect, to criticism of literature. He began his famous series of portraits in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. In 1840 he was made Keeper of the Mazarin Library, and in 1844 was elected member of the French Academy in succession to Casimir Delavigne. His welcome was spoken by Victor Hugo. Writing to his friend Barbe, just at this time, he spoke of such institutions with much contempt: "Between ourselves, all academies are mere puerilities; the least little quarter of an hour of solitary reverie, of serious *tête-à-tête* conversation in our youth was better employed; but in growing old we become accustomed to these nothings: it is good only to know that they are nothings." Such distinctions, he holds, should be regarded merely as the hall-mark demanded by outsiders so that they may be sure of the genuineness of the article. The volume entitled *Chateaubriand and his Literary Group* was the outcome of a course of lectures delivered at Liège in 1848. His greatest critical achievement, the sixteen volumes now known as the *Causeries du Lundi*, which contain his best work in pure criticism, was begun in the *Constitutional* on October 1, 1849. For the remaining twenty years of his life, with very rare intermissions, there appeared every Monday a literary article

equal in length to some twenty or thirty pages of an ordinary octavo volume, varied in subject, and comprising, we might almost say, the ancient and modern literature of the whole world. He set about the work, for work of the severest kind it was, in no perfunctory spirit. His published letters to M. Paul Chéron, of the National Library, prove the enormous number of books he read and consulted for each article, and the most cursory glance at any one of the essays shows to all who have any acquaintance with literature the amount of knowledge he possessed. Occasionally he felt hampered by the drudgery of the weekly task, and he tells us himself how he could not in all cases choose his subjects, and was at times condemned to write about all and any. But he tried to do his work honestly and conscientiously, and absolutely refused to write on any subject about which he knew nothing. Moreover, he invariably preserved his independence of judgment, and, in the case of an author recently dead, never allowed the family of the writer he was criticising to see his notice before it was published; such a manner of proceeding, he wisely remarked, would have prevented any adverse criticism, at least criticism that would be regarded as adverse by the family, though the public would not look at it in that light. His labour was great; he says: "I never get a day off. About mid-day on Monday I lift up my head and breathe freely for about an hour. Then the door shuts again, and I'm in prison for a week."

Sainte-Beuve never married. His mother lived with him until her death in 1850. When writing to his friend Barbe after that event, he seems to regret the absence of wife and children, and speaks of his loneliness, and how, for all his griefs, he found a refuge in work.

He was appointed in 1855 to the chair of Latin poetry at

the Collège de France, and began a course of lectures on Virgil. The students received him so badly that at the second meeting the lectures were suspended. It appears that immediately after the *coup d'état* of 1852 Sainte-Beuve gave his support to the empire, and such action caused many persons, and among them most of the students, to look on him as a political renegade. His friendship with the Princess Mathilde—his letters to her fill a volume—and with Prince Napoleon is well known, but it was a literary friendship, scarcely a political one; as long as there was peace enough to carry on his beloved work, he probably did not much care who was ruling the country. The incident serves to show how much greater is the influence and importance of politics in France than in the other countries of Europe. Sainte-Beuve became a member of the Senate in 1865, and ranged himself on the side of materialism and free-thought. He spoke but seldom, and his speeches were never popular. It was said of him that he was a senator but *si peu!*

On October 13th, 1869, after much suffering, Sainte-Beuve died and was buried in the cemetery of Mont-Parnasse. A couple of weeks before his death he wrote that he wished his interment to be without pomp or ceremony, and that no speech other than a few simple words of thanks to those who had come to the funeral, should be delivered. Notwithstanding his many enemies, —it is the lot of a critic to make enemies,—he was followed to the grave by an enormous crowd. Among the distinguished persons present were the two Dumas, Flaubert, George Sand, and M. Taine. A large concourse of students came to honour him as the champion of free-thought.

When the quantity of a man's writing is great, and

the quality fine, selection from his work is always a matter of difficulty, and the result will never be likely to satisfy. The few essays of Sainte-Beuve printed in this volume offer the merest taste of his great critical work, and have been chosen chiefly because they seem most likely to interest the English literature-loving public. They contain passages of beautiful and vigorous writing. For the student whose business it is to study the evolution of literary style, it might have been better to pay more attention to chronology, and to have given a series of essays that would have shown Sainte-Beuve's literary manner and the various changes through which it went. It is, however, almost impossible to give an adequate idea of Sainte-Beuve's style in English; to accomplish such a feat to perfection would require a genius equal to that of Sainte-Beuve himself. Those, therefore, who are unable to study him in the original, must be content to take more interest in what he said, than in how he said it. Indeed, taking into account the wonderful clearness of the French language, his style is at times almost obscure, and often very mannered. It has been wittily said that the style of his letters is far superior to that of his essays, because he had not time to spoil it. It seems to us that a comparison of the two essays, that on Sir Walter Scott (1832), and on Taine's *English Literature* (1864), will be enough to show to thoughtful minds the difference between his early and late styles. His use of epithets was often excessive, but whatever we may think of his style, his taste in literature must always be recognised as beyond dispute.

If too much space has been given to essays on English writers, let the apt saying that the criticism of a foreigner is as near as we can get to the verdict of posterity plead our excuse. It is sometimes good for us to see ourselves as

others see us, and will see us. Sainte-Beuve was well acquainted with the English language, and had an enormous admiration for our literature: he considered our poetry superior to the French, fuller and sounder. He thinks French poetry too slight and mixed to have any lengthened hold on serious minds. A curious little poem called "My Books" shows his wide reading among English authors. That a Frenchman should appreciate Pope and Lord Chesterfield may be easily understood, but that Sainte-Beuve should form an appreciative estimate of Cowper proves the wonderful catholicity of his literary taste. It is curious, however, that while defining a true classical author as one who has enriched the human mind and increased the sum of its treasure, and while carefully assigning a definite place in his Temple of Taste to Milton, Pope, and Addison, he contents himself with merely mentioning that Shakespeare is there. Is it because no matter how emancipated a Frenchman's taste may be, he can never quite accustom himself to Shakespeare's utter indifference to all classical restraint properly so-called?

Sainte-Beuve's conception of the whole duty of critics was extremely high, and those who have lately been discussing the matter in a somewhat aimless and desultory fashion, would do well to study his method. To him belongs the honour, if honour it be, of introducing what he himself calls the natural history of minds. He found out everything about the author he was studying down to the minutest details: nothing mental, moral, or physiological escaped him. He then produced a life-like portrait, and when we have once read a criticism of Sainte-Beuve on any writer, he lives in our minds as Sainte-Beuve painted him. The impress of a great and powerful critic's mind may be compared to that of a great

painter of portraits on canvas. The man goes down to posterity as the artist limned him, or as the writer described him, so that we have not only the man himself to the life, but in addition we have him as seen by a mind equally great. It has been said that Sainte-Beuve's criticisms lead to no conclusions: there is perhaps some truth in the statement, but many of us can afford to do without conclusions for the sake of what can be best expressed by the word *appreciations*. It is perhaps significant that we have borrowed that sense of the word appreciation from the French. Sainte-Beuve took truth for his motto, was devoted to his profession of critic, and tried to make himself an able workman. Loving his art, he cultivated it for its own sake, and it is to his credit that in these days of fortunes made in literature, he died a poor man.

A man's character is always more or less revealed in his letters. Among Sainte-Beuve's correspondents were all the greatest contemporary names in French literature. His letters form of themselves a whole school of literary criticism: they are never trifling, and his remarks on men and books have all the value and interest of first impressions: he had not a week in which to reconsider them, and polish the style of expression. His politeness and at the same time his decision in answering the usual requests made to men holding a high position in the literary world are admirable, and worthy of imitation. Young, unknown authors send him their productions: he warns them that no one will read philosophical works nowadays, and poetry does not pay either publisher or author. Would-be literary young ladies ask for introductions to editors, and Sainte-Beuve tells them that introductions are useless, since an editor who is worth anything only decides on reading work submitted to him. More or less obscure writers ask him to

put paragraphs about them and their works in the newspaper. Sainte-Beuve replies that nowadays newspapers are great industrial undertakings in which the lines are counted. The correspondence is full of points of the deepest interest to all engaged in the pursuit of literature.

In Sainte-Beuve's writings ideality is found side by side with reality, poetry with science. He himself tells us that he always remembered that, whereas a critic is nothing more than a man who knows how to read and teaches others to do the same, criticism is a perpetual invention and creation. Close and careful study of him proves the truth of what Matthew Arnold, the only English critic who may worthily be placed by Sainte-Beuve's side, said of him:—"Certain spirits are of an excellence almost ideal in certain lives; the human race might willingly adopt them as its spokesmen, recognising that on these lines their style and utterance may stand as those not of bounded individuals, but of the human race. So Homer speaks for the human race, and with an excellence which is ideal in epic narration; Plato in the treatment at once beautiful and profound of philosophical questions; Shakespeare in the presentation of human character; Voltaire in light verse and ironical discussion. A list of perfect ones indeed each in his own line! and we may almost venture to add to their number in his line of literary critic, Sainte-Beuve."

ELIZABETH LEE.

ESSAYS BY SAINTE-BEUVE.

ESSAYS OF SAINTE-BEUVE.

WHAT IS A CLASSIC?

A DELICATE question, to which somewhat diverse solutions might be given according to times and seasons. An intelligent man suggests it to me, and I intend to try, if not to solve it, at least to examine and discuss it face to face with my readers, were it only to persuade them to answer it for themselves, and, if I can, to make their opinion and mine on the point clear. And why, in criticism, should we not, from time to time, venture to treat some of those subjects which are not personal, in which we no longer speak of some one but of some thing? Our neighbours, the English, have well succeeded in making of it a special division of literature under the modest title of "Essays." It is true that in writing of such subjects, always slightly abstract and moral, it is advisable to speak of them in a season of quiet, to make sure of our own attention and of that of others, to seize one of those moments of calm moderation and leisure seldom granted our amiable France; even when she is desirous of being wise and is not making revolutions, her brilliant genius can scarcely tolerate them.

A classic, according to the usual definition, is an old author canonised by admiration, and an authority in his particular style. The word *classic* was first used in this sense by the Romans. With them not all the citizens of the different classes were properly called *classici*, but only those of the chief class, those who possessed an income of a certain fixed sum. Those who possessed a smaller income were described by the term *infra classem*, below the pre-eminent class. The word *classicus* was used in a figurative sense by Aulus Gellius, and applied to writers: a writer of worth and distinction, *classicus assiduusque scriptor*, a writer who is of account, has real property, and is

not lost in the proletariate crowd. Such an expression implies an age sufficiently advanced to have already made some sort of valuation and classification of literature.

At first the only true classics for the moderns were the ancients. The Greeks, by peculiar good fortune and natural enlightenment of mind, had no classics but themselves. They were at first the only classical authors for the Romans, who strove and contrived to imitate them. After the great periods of Roman literature, after Cicero and Virgil, the Romans in their turn had their classics, who became almost exclusively the classical authors of the centuries which followed. The middle ages, which were less ignorant of Latin antiquity than is believed, but which lacked proportion and taste, confused the ranks and orders. Ovid was placed above Homer, and Boetius seemed a classic equal to Plato. The revival of learning in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries helped to bring this long chaos to order, and then only was admiration rightly proportioned. Thenceforth the true classical authors of Greek and Latin antiquity stood out in a luminous background, and were harmoniously grouped on their two heights.

Meanwhile modern literatures were born, and some of the more precocious, like the Italian, already possessed the style of antiquity. Dante appeared, and, from the very first, posterity greeted him as a classic. Italian poetry has since shrunk into far narrower bounds; but, whenever it desired to do so, it always found again and preserved the impulse and echo of its lofty origin. It is no indifferent matter for a poetry to derive its point of departure and classical source in high places; for example, to spring from Dante rather than to issue laboriously from Malherbe.

Modern Italy had her classical authors, and Spain had every right to believe that she also had hers at a time when France was yet seeking hers. A few talented writers endowed with originality and exceptional animation, a few brilliant efforts, isolated, without following, interrupted and recommenced, did not suffice to endow a nation with a solid and imposing basis of literary wealth. The idea of a classic implies something that has continuance and consistence, and which produces unity and tradition, fashions and transmits itself, and endures. It was only after the glorious years of Louis XIV. that the nation felt with tremor and pride that such good fortune had happened to her. Every voice informed Louis XIV. of it with flattery, exaggeration, and emphasis, yet with a certain sentiment of truth. Then arose

a singular and striking contradiction: those men of whom Perrault was the chief, the men who were most smitten with the marvels of the age of Louis the Great, who even went the length of sacrificing the ancients to the moderns, aimed at exalting and canonising even those whom they regarded as inveterate opponents and adversaries. Boileau avenged and angrily upheld the ancients against Perrault, who extolled the moderns—that is to say, Corneille, Molière, Pascal, and the eminent men of his age, Boileau, one of the first, included. Kindly La Fontaine, taking part in the dispute in behalf of the learned Huet, did not perceive that, in spite of his defects, he was in his turn on the point of being held as a classic himself.

Example is the best definition. From the time France possessed her age of Louis XIV. and could contemplate it at a little distance, she knew, better than by any arguments, what to be classical meant. The eighteenth century, even in its medley of things, strengthened this idea through some fine works, due to its four great men. Read Voltaire's *Age of Louis XIV.*, Montesquieu's *Greatness and Fall of the Romans*, Buffon's *Epochs of Nature*, the beautiful pages of reverie and natural description of Rousseau's *Savoyard Vicar*, and say if the eighteenth century, in these memorable works, did not understand how to reconcile tradition with freedom of development and independence. But at the beginning of the present century and under the Empire, in sight of the first attempts of a decidedly new and somewhat adventurous literature, the idea of a classic in a few resisting minds, more sorrowful than severe, was strangely narrowed and contracted. The first Dictionary of the Academy (1694) merely defined a classical author as "a much-approved ancient writer, who is an authority as regards the subject he treats." The Dictionary of the Academy of 1835 narrows that definition still more, and gives precision and even limit to its rather vague form. It describes classical authors as those "who have become *models* in any language whatever," and in all the articles which follow, the expressions, *models*, *fixed rules* for composition and style, *strict rules* of art to which men must conform, continually recur. That definition of *classic* was evidently made by the respectable Academicians, our predecessors, in face and sight of what was then called *romantic* —that is to say, in sight of the enemy. It seems to me time to renounce those timid and restrictive definitions and to free our mind of them.

A true classic, as I should like to hear it defined, is an author

who has enriched the human mind, increased its treasure, and caused it to advance a step; who has discovered some moral and not equivocal truth, or revealed some eternal passion in that heart where all seemed known and discovered; who has expressed his thought, observation, or invention, in no matter what form, only provided it be broad and great, refined and sensible, sane and beautiful in itself; who has spoken to all in his own peculiar style, a style which is found to be also that of the whole world, a style new without neologism, new and old, easily contemporay with all time.

Such a classic may for a moment have been revolutionary; it may at least have seemed so, but it is not; it only lashed and subverted whatever prevented the restoration of the balance of order and beauty.

If it is desired, names may be applied to this definition which I wish to make purposely majestic and fluctuating, or in a word, all-embracing. I should first put there Corneille of the *Polyeucte*, *Cinna*, and *Horaces*. I should put Molière there, the fullest and most complete poetic genius we have ever had in France. Goethe, the king of critics, said:—

"Molière is so great that he astonishes us afresh every time we read him. He is a man apart; his plays border on the tragic, and no one has the courage to try and imitate him. His *Avare*, where vice destroys all affection between father and son, is one of the most sublime works, and dramatic in the highest degree. In a drama every action ought to be important in itself, and to lead to an action greater still. In this respect *Tartuffe* is a model. What a piece of exposition the first scene is! From the beginning everything has an important meaning, and causes something much more important to be foreseen. The exposition in a certain play of Lessing that might be mentioned is very fine, but the world only sees that of *Tartuffe* once. It is the finest of the kind we possess. Every year I read a play of Molière, just as from time to time I contemplate some engraving after the great Italian masters."

I do not conceal from myself that the definition of the classic I have just given somewhat exceeds the notion usually ascribed to the term. It should, above all, include conditions of uniformity, wisdom, moderation, and reason, which dominate and contain all the others. Having to praise M. Royer-Collard, M. de Rémusat said—"If he derives *purity of taste*, *propriety of terms*, *variety of expression*, attentive care in *suiting the diction to the thought*, from our classics, he owes to himself alone the distinctive character he gives it all." It is here

evident that the part allotted to classical qualities seems mostly to depend on harmony and *nuances* of expression, on graceful and temperate style: such is also the most general opinion. In this sense the pre-eminent classics would be writers of a middling order, exact, sensible, elegant, always clear, yet of noble feeling and airily veiled strength. Marie-Joseph Chénier has described the poetics of those temperate and accomplished writers in lines where he shows himself their happy disciple:—

"It is good sense, reason which does all,—virtue, genius, soul, talent, and taste.—What is virtue? reason put in practice;—talent? reason expressed with brilliance;—soul? reason delicately put forth;—and genius is sublime reason."

While writing those lines he was evidently thinking of Pope, Boileau, and Horace, the master of them all. The peculiar characteristic of the theory which subordinated imagination and feeling itself to reason, of which Scaliger perhaps gave the first sign among the moderns, is, properly speaking, the *Latin* theory, and for a long time it was also by preference the *French* theory. If it is used appositely, if the term *reason* is not abused, that theory possesses some truth; but it is evident that it is abused, and that if, for instance, reason can be confounded with poetic genius and make one with it in a moral epistle, it cannot be the same thing as the genius, so varied and so diversely creative in its expression of the passions, of the drama or the epic. Where will you find reason in the fourth book of the *Æneid* and the transports of Dido? Be that as it may, the spirit which prompted the theory, caused writers who ruled their inspiration, rather than those who abandoned themselves to it, to be placed in the first rank of classics; to put Virgil there more surely than Homer, Racine in preference to Corneille. The masterpiece to which the theory likes to point, which in fact brings together all conditions of prudence, strength, tempered boldness, moral elevation, and grandeur, is *Athalie*. Turenne in his two last campaigns and Racine in *Athalie* are the great examples of what wise and prudent men are capable of when they reach the maturity of their genius and attain their supremest boldness.

Buffon, in his Discourse on Style, insisting on the unity of design, arrangement, and execution, which are the stamps of true classical works, said:—"Every subject is one, *and however vast it is, it can be comprised in a single treatise.* Interruptions, pauses, sub-divisions should only be used when many subjects are treated, when, having to speak of great, intricate, and dissimilar things, the march of genius is

interrupted by the multiplicity of obstacles, and contracted by the necessity of circumstances: otherwise, far from making a work more solid, a great number of divisions destroys the unity of its parts; the book appears clearer to the view, but the author's design remains obscure." And he continues his criticism, having in view Montesquieu's *Spirit of Laws*, an excellent book at bottom, but sub-divided: the famous author, worn out before the end, was unable to infuse inspiration into all his ideas, and to arrange all his matter. However, I can scarcely believe that Buffon was not also thinking, by way of contrast, of Bossuet's *Discourse on Universal History*, a subject vast indeed, and yet of such an unity that the great orator was able to comprise it in a single treatise. When we open the first edition, that of 1681, before the division into chapters, which was introduced later, passed from the margin into the text, everything is developed in a single series, almost in one breath. It might be said that the orator has here acted like the nature of which Buffon speaks, that "he has worked on an eternal plan from which he has nowhere departed," so deeply does he seem to have entered into the familiar counsels and designs of providence.

Are *Athalie* and the *Discourse on Universal History* the greatest masterpieces that the strict classical theory can present to its friends as well as to its enemies? In spite of the admirable simplicity and dignity in the achievement of such unique productions, we should like, nevertheless, in the interests of art, to expand that theory a little, and to show that it is possible to enlarge it without relaxing the tension. Goethe, whom I like to quote on such a subject, said:—

"I call the classical *healthy*, and the romantic *sickly*. In my opinion the Nibelungen song is as much a classic as Homer. Both are healthy and vigorous. The works of the day are romantic, not because they are new, but because they are weak, ailing, or sickly. Ancient works are classical not because they are old, but because they are powerful, fresh, and healthy. If we regarded romantic and classical from those two points of view we should soon all agree."

Indeed, before determining and fixing the opinions on that matter, I should like every unbiassed mind to take a voyage round the world and devote itself to a survey of different literatures in their primitive vigour and infinite variety. What would be seen? Chief of all a Homer, the father of the classical world, less a single distinct individual than the vast living expression of a whole epoch and a semi-barbarous

civilisation. In order to make him a true classic, it was necessary to attribute to him later a design, a plan, literary invention, qualities of atticism and urbanity of which he had certainly never dreamed in the luxuriant development of his natural inspirations. And who appear by his side? August, venerable ancients, the Æschyluses and the Sophocles, mutilated, it is true, and only there to present us with a *débris* of themselves, the survivors of many others as worthy, doubtless, as they to survive, but who have succumbed to the injuries of time. This thought alone would teach a man of impartial mind not to look upon the whole of even classical literatures with a too narrow and restricted view; he would learn that the exact and well-proportioned order which has since so largely prevailed in our admiration of the past was only the outcome of artificial circumstances.

And in reaching the modern world, how would it be? The greatest names to be seen at the beginning of literatures are those which disturb and run counter to certain fixed ideas of what is beautiful and appropriate in poetry. For example, is Shakespeare a classic? Yes, now, for England and the world; but in the time of Pope he was not considered so. Pope and his friends were the only pre-eminent classics; directly after their death they seemed so for ever. At the present time they are still classics, as they deserve to be, but they are only of the second order, and are for ever subordinated and relegated to their rightful place by him who has again come to his own on the height of the horizon.

It is not, however, for me to speak ill of Pope or his great disciples, above all, when they possess pathos and naturalness like Goldsmith: after the greatest they are perhaps the most agreeable writers and the poets best fitted to add charm to life. Once when Lord Bolingbroke was writing to Swift, Pope added a postscript, in which he said—"I think some advantage would result to our age, if we three spent three years together." Men who, without boasting, have the right to say such things must never be spoken of lightly: the fortunate ages, when men of talent could propose such things, then no chimera, are rather to be envied. The ages called by the name of Louis XIV. or of Queen Anne are, in the dispassionate sense of the word, the only true classical ages, those which offer protection and a favourable climate to real talent. We know only too well how in our untrammelled times, through the instability and storminess of the age, talents are lost and dissipated. Nevertheless, let us acknowledge our age's part and superiority in greatness.

True and sovereign genius triumphs over the very difficulties that cause others to fail: Dante, Shakespeare, and Milton were able to attain their height and produce their imperishable works in spite of obstacles, hardships, and tempests. Byron's opinion of Pope has been much discussed, and the explanation of it sought in the kind of contradiction by which the singer of *Don Juan* and *Childe Harold* extolled the purely classical school and pronounced it the only good one, while himself acting so differently. Goethe spoke the truth on that point when he remarked that Byron, great by the flow and source of poetry, feared that Shakespeare was more powerful than himself in the creation and realisation of his characters. "He would have liked to deny it; the elevation so free from egoism irritated him; he felt when near it that he could not display himself at ease. He never denied Pope, because he did not fear him; he knew that Pope was only a *low wall* by his side."

If, as Byron desired, Pope's school had kept the supremacy and a sort of honorary empire in the past, Byron would have been the first and only poet in his particular style; the height of Pope's wall shuts out Shakespeare's great figure from sight, whereas when Shakespeare reigns and rules in all his greatness, Byron is only second.

In France there was no great classic before the age of Louis XIV.; the Dantes and Shakespeares, the early authorities to whom, in times of emancipation, men sooner or later return, were wanting. There were mere sketches of great poets, like Mathurin Regnier, like Rabelais, without any ideal, without the depth of emotion and the seriousness which canonises. Montaigne was a kind of premature classic, of the family of Horace; but for want of worthy surroundings, like a spoiled child, he gave himself up to the unbridled fancies of his style and humour. Hence it happened that France, less than any other nation, found in her old authors a right to demand vehemently at a certain time literary liberty and freedom, and that it was more difficult for her, in enfranchising herself, to remain classical. However, with Molière and La Fontaine among her classics of the great period, nothing could justly be refused to those who possessed courage and ability.

The important point now seems to me to be to uphold, while extending, the idea and belief. There is no receipt for making classics; this point should be clearly recognised. To believe that an author will become a classic by imitating certain qualities of purity, moderation, accuracy, and elegance, independently of

the style and inspiration, is to believe that after Racine the father there is a place for Racine the son; dull and estimable *rôle*, the worst in poetry. Further, it is hazardous to take too quickly and without opposition the place of a classic in the sight of one's contemporaries; in that case there is a good chance of not retaining the position with posterity. Fontanes in his day was regarded by his friends as a pure classic; see how at twenty-five years' distance his star has set. How many of these precocious classics are there who do not endure, and who are so only for a while! We turn round one morning and are surprised not to find them standing behind us. Madame de Sévigné would wittily say they possessed but an *evanescent colour*. With regard to classics, the least expected prove the best and greatest: seek them rather in the vigorous genius born immortal and flourishing for ever. Apparently the least classical of the four great poets of the age of Louis XIV. was Molière; he was then applauded far more than he was esteemed; men took delight in him without understanding his worth. After him, La Fontaine seemed the least classical: observe after two centuries what is the result for both. Far above Boileau, even above Racine, are they not now unanimously considered to possess in the highest degree the characteristics of an all-embracing morality?

Meanwhile there is no question of sacrificing or depreciating anything. I believe the temple of taste is to be rebuilt; but its reconstruction is merely a matter of enlargement, so that it may become the home of all noble human beings, of all who have permanently increased the sum of the mind's delights and possessions. As for me, who cannot, obviously, in any degree pretend to be the architect or designer of such a temple, I shall confine myself to expressing a few earnest wishes, to submit, as it were, my designs for the edifice. Above all I should desire not to exclude any one among the worthy, each should be in his place there, from Shakespeare, the freest of creative geniuses, and the greatest of classics without knowing it, to Andrieux, the last of classics in little. "There is more than one chamber in the mansions of my Father;" that should be as true of the kingdom of the beautiful here below, as of the kingdom of Heaven. Homer, as always and everywhere, should be first, likest a god; but behind him, like the procession of the three wise kings of the East, would be seen the three great poets, the three Homers, so long ignored by us, who wrote epics for the use of the old peoples of Asia, the poets Valmiki, Vyasa of the Hindoos, and Firdousi of the Persians: in the domain of taste it is well to know that such men exist, and not to divide the

human race. Our homage paid to what is recognised as soon as perceived, we must not stray further; the eye should delight in a thousand pleasing or majestic spectacles, should rejoice in a thousand varied and surprising combinations, whose apparent confusion would never be without concord and harmony. The oldest of the wise men and poets, those who put human morality into maxims, and those who in simple fashion sung it, would converse together in *rare and gentle* speech, and would not be surprised at understanding each other's meaning at the very first word. Solon, Hesiod, Theognis, Job, Solomon, and why not Confucius, would welcome the cleverest moderns, La Rochefoucauld and La Bruyère, who, when listening to them, would say "they knew all that we know, and in repeating life's experiences, we have discovered nothing." On the hill, most easily discernible, and of most accessible ascent, Virgil, surrounded by Menander, Tibullus, Terence, Fénélon, would occupy himself in discoursing with them with great charm and divine enchantment: his gentle countenance would shine with an inner light, and be tinged with modesty; as on the day when entering the theatre at Rome, just as they finished reciting his verses, he saw the people rise with an unanimous movement and pay to him the same homage as to Augustus. Not far from him, regretting the separation from so dear a friend, Horace, in his turn, would preside (as far as so accomplished and wise a poet could preside) over the group of poets of social life who could talk although they sang, — Pope, Boileau, the one become less irritable, the other less fault-finding. Montaigne, a true poet, would be among them, and would give the finishing touch that should deprive that delightful corner of the air of a literary school. There would La Fontaine forget himself, and becoming less volatile would wander no more. Voltaire would be attracted by it, but while finding pleasure in it would not have patience to remain. A little lower down, on the same hill as Virgil, Xenophon, with simple bearing, looking in no way like a general, but rather resembling a priest of the Muses, would be seen gathering round him the Attics of every tongue and of every nation, the Addisons, Pellissons, Vauvenargues—all who feel the value of an easy persuasiveness, an exquisite simplicity, and a gentle negligence mingled with ornament. In the centre of the place, in the portico of the principal temple (for there would be several in the enclosure), three great men would like to meet often, and when they were together, no fourth, however great, would dream of joining their discourse or their silence. In them

would be seen beauty, proportion in greatness, and that perfect harmony which appears but once in the full youth of the world. Their three names have become the ideal of art—Plato, Sophocles, and Demosthenes. Those demi-gods honoured, we see a numerous and familiar company of choice spirits who follow, the Cervantes and Molières, practical painters of life, indulgent friends who are still the first of benefactors, who laughingly embrace all mankind, turn man's experience to gaiety, and know the powerful workings of a sensible, hearty, and legitimate joy. I do not wish to make this description, which if complete would fill a volume, any longer. In the middle ages, believe me, Dante would occupy the sacred heights: at the feet of the singer of Paradise all Italy would be spread out like a garden; Boccaccio and Ariosto would there disport themselves, and Tasso would find again the orange groves of Sorrento. Usually a corner would be reserved for each of the various nations, but the authors would take delight in leaving it, and in their travels would recognise, where we should least expect it, brothers or masters. Lucretius, for example, would enjoy discussing the origin of the world and the reducing of chaos to order with Milton. But both arguing from their own point of view, they would only agree as regards divine pictures of poetry and nature.

Such are our classics; each individual imagination may finish the sketch and choose the group preferred. For it is necessary to make a choice, and the first condition of taste, after obtaining knowledge of all, lies not in continual travel, but in rest and cessation from wandering. Nothing blunts and destroys taste so much as endless journeyings; the poetic spirit is not the *Wandering Jew.* However, when I speak of resting and making choice, my meaning is not that we are to imitate those who charm us most among our masters in the past. Let us be content to know them, to penetrate them, to admire them; but let us, the late-comers, endeavour to be ourselves. Let us have the sincerity and naturalness of our own thoughts, of our own feelings; so much is always possible. To that let us add what is more difficult, elevation, an aim, if possible, towards an exalted goal; and while speaking our own language, and submitting to the conditions of the times in which we live, whence we derive our strength and our defects, let us ask from time to time, our brows lifted towards the heights and our eyes fixed on the group of honoured mortals: *what would they say of us?*

But why speak always of authors and writings? Maybe an age is coming when there will be no more writing. Happy

those who read and read again, those who in their reading can follow their unrestrained inclination! There comes a time in life when, all our journeys over, our experiences ended, there is no enjoyment more delightful than to study and thoroughly examine the things we know, to take pleasure in what we feel, and in seeing and seeing again the people we love: the pure joys of our maturity. Then it is that the word classic takes its true meaning, and is defined for every man of taste by an irresistible choice. Then taste is formed, it is shaped and definite; then good sense, if we are to possess it at all, is perfected in us. We have neither more time for experiments, nor a desire to go forth in search of pastures new. We cling to our friends, to those proved by a long intercourse. Old wine, old books, old friends. We say to ourselves with Voltaire in these delightful lines:—"Let us enjoy, let us write, let us live, my dear Horace! . . . I have lived longer than you: my verse will not last so long. But on the brink of the tomb I shall make it my chief care—to follow the lessons of your philosophy—to despise death in enjoying life—to read your writings full of charm and good sense—as we drink an old wine which revives our senses."

In fact, be it Horace or another who is the author preferred, who reflects our thoughts in all the wealth of their maturity, of some one of those excellent and antique minds shall we request an interview at every moment; of some one of them shall we ask a friendship which never deceives, which could not fail us; to some one of them shall we appeal for that sensation of serenity and amenity (we have often need of it) which reconciles us with mankind and with ourselves.

MADAME RÉCAMIER.

I.

In May last, a figure, unique among women who have reigned by virtue of beauty and grace, passed away; a *salon*, which had long gathered together under its pleasant influence the most illustrious and diverse persons, which even the most obscure had at one time or another the chance of visiting, was closed. The most famous of the group of memorable names were struck by death almost at the same time as she who was its chief attraction and bond. A few, since scattered and inconsolable, survived with difficulty; and those who only came in contact for a moment with that select society have the right and almost the duty to speak of it as of something which henceforth possesses interest for all, and has become historical.

Madame Récamier's *salon* was many other things besides, but taking it in its later years, it was a literary centre and home. The particular kind of social product so greatly affected in France, a thing that exercised (Madame Récamier's *salon* is proof of it) so powerful an influence, does not date back further than the seventeenth century. The foundation of polite society, of society met together to talk about beautiful things, and particularly about intellectual things, must be placed in the Hôtel de Rambouillet. But the solemnity of the Rambouillet circle scarcely affords the idea which I wish to conjure up here, and I prefer to seek in more unobtrusive and modest corners of society the true *precedent* of the kind of *salon* of which the last has just ended under our very eyes. About the middle of the seventeenth century, a lady, celebrated for her wit and her long and brilliant success, the Marquise de Sablé, retired to the top of the Faubourg Saint Jacques, to the neighbourhood of the monastery of Port Royal. In that semi-retreat, with a window looking on the convent, and a door still partly open to the world, M. de la Rochefoucauld's old friend, ever active-minded, interested in everything, continued till the year 1678, when she died, to gather round her the most distinguished and diverse men and women

who had remained faithful; they came from a distance, from the town or from the court, to visit her; semi-recluses, people of the world like herself, whose wit became finer and keener in retirement; professional recluses from whom at times, by force of her charming importunity, she tore their vow of silence. When the recluses were named Arnauld or Nicole, they were not unamiable, and now and then Pascal was of the number. Madame de Sablé's little *salon*, so retired and so frequented, which, under the shade of the cloister, without showing too much sign of it, combined something of two worlds, seems to me to be the earliest type of what we saw for ourselves in the *salon* of the Abbaye-aux-Bois.[1]

There M. de Chateaubriand ruled, and when he was present everything was referred to him; but he was not always there, and even then there were places, degrees, niches for each. Everything was discussed, but as it were confidentially, and in scarcely such loud tones as elsewhere. Everybody, or at least many people, came to that *salon*, and yet there was nothing commonplace about it: entering, you breathed an air of reserve and mystery. The kindness, but a kindness actually felt and nicely adapted, some indescribable special remarks addressed to each, put him at his ease at once and softened the effect of initiation into what almost seemed a sanctuary. High breeding and familiarity, or certainly naturalness, a great latitude in choice of subjects,—a most important point for the play of conversation,—a readiness to enter into what was said, arising not merely from amiability and good manners, but testifying to a still deeper interest, were to be found there. The eye was met by a smile which said, "I understand," and lighted up everything with tenderness. Even at the first visit you did not leave without having your mind and heart touched in some particular way, causing you to feel flattered, and, above all, grateful. In the eighteenth century there were many distinguished *salons*—that of Madame Geoffrin, Madame d'Houdetot, Madame Suard. Madame Récamier knew them all; any one wishing to write

[1] I have since had the satisfaction of finding this view in M. Cousin's book on *Madame de Sablé* (1854), chap. i., p. 63. Speaking of Madame de Sablé, he says: "She had reason, wide experience, exquisite tact, an amiable disposition. When I represent her to myself as I imagine her to be from her writings, letters, life, and friendships—partly living in solitude, partly in the world, without fortune, yet of great repute, a woman once pretty, almost retired into a convent, and become a literary power—I think I see Madame Récamier of our own time at the Abbaye-aux-Bois."

of them with taste was obliged first to talk with her of them ; but none of them resembled hers.

And she herself resembled no one. M. de Chateaubriand was the pride of her *salon*, but she was its soul, and it is necessary to try and describe her for those who did not know her; to remind her friends of her is unnecessary, and to paint her for them impossible. I shall take care not to attempt a biography of her here : a woman's biography ought never to be written; it is an ugly word for the use of men, and savours of study and research. Even when they have nothing particular to conceal, women in the text of a continued narrative can only lose their charm. Can a woman's life be related? She feels, passes, appears. I should also greatly like to put no dates, for dates in regard to such a subject are scarcely pretty. Since it is necessary, let us content ourselves with knowing that Jeanne-Françoise-Julie-Adélaïde Bernard was born at Lyons in the country of Louise Labé, on December 3, 1777. Of all the baptismal names I have just enumerated, the one by which she was generally known was that of Julie changed into Juliette, although she never had a Romeo. She was married at Paris in her sixteenth year (April 24, 1793) to Jacques-Rose Récamier, a rich banker, or who soon became so. At the beginning of the Consulate she made a brilliant *début*, was fêted, was applauded, the youngest queen of elegance, leading the fashion, inventing with art simple things only suited to supreme beauty. We, who were not there, can only speak with all reserve of Madame Récamier's almost mythological epoch, for at this distance she seems to us like a youthful goddess above the clouds ; we could not speak of her in fitting terms, not because there is anything to conceal behind the cloud, but because such delicate and budding beauty possesses rare qualities that cannot be described if they have not been seen. Who would venture to paint the dawn, if he had only seen the sunset? However, as Madame Récamier's character and tender genius, her sincere ambition which showed in her so much strength and persistence combined with refinement, cannot be understood, nor her mind and person comprehended without a clear notion of what inspired her at that time, differing very little from what inspired her at the end, I shall try to give a hasty sketch of the few facts in the legend with which in her case, as in that of all beings endowed with magic, the truth is always veiled. When we wish to criticise Madame de Sévigné or Madame de Maintenon, and to account for their natures, we must have a general idea or *theory* of them. For instance, in order to

understand thoroughly Madame de Maintenon in relation to Louis XIV., or Madame de Sévigné in relation to her daughter, and what kind of sentiment or passion they brought to those relations, several questions about the youth of the two women must be asked, or more truly one question—the chief and almost only one to be put in speaking of a woman: Has she loved? What was the manner of her love?

I shall ask the question, or, rather, it asks itself in spite of me, about Madame Récamier; and with her, as with Madame de Maintenon, as with Madame de Sévigné (Madame de Sévigné not yet a mother), I boldly reply, *No*. No, she never loved, loved with passion and fire; but the immense need of loving which belongs to every tender spirit became with her an infinite need of pleasing or rather of being loved, and an active desire, a fervent wish, to repay those who loved her by kindness. We who saw her in her last years and received in passing some fragments of that divine kindness, know in what degree she was accustomed to exert it, and how in her friendship possessed the ardour love never had.

Two perfectly distinct epochs must be noted in Madame Récamier's life: her life of youth, triumph, and beauty—her long sunny morning, which lasted even to sundown; then the evening of her life after the sun had set,—I can never bring myself to say her old age. In the two epochs so unlike outwardly, she was at bottom the same, although she must have appeared very different. She was the same in two essential characteristics, which alone explain how, despite a youth passed in the midst of the most powerful enchantments and the excitement of society, she always remained pure; how in retirement and among a select few she always preserved the desire of conquest and the gentle skill of winning hearts—let us say the word, her coquetry; but (may orthodox doctors forgive the expression) it was a coquetry of the angels.

There are natures that are born pure, and receive, whether they will or not, the gift of innocence. Like Arethusa, they cross the stormy ocean; they resist the fire like the sons of Holy Writ whom the good angel saved and refreshed with gentle dew even in the furnace. Madame Récamier in youth had need of the angel by her side and within her, for the society she frequented and lived in was mixed and passionate, and she did not cautiously keep away from temptation. To speak the truth, I must lower my tone a little, descend for a moment from the lofty ideals of Laura and Beatrice which we are in the habit of attributing to Madame Récamier, to talk of her more

familiarly, and in prose. And I hope she will lose nothing on that account.

Directly she appeared in all her brilliance at the time of the Consulate, she was surrounded, admired, and passionately loved. Lucien, the Consul's brother, was the first historical personage who loved her (I do not reckon Barrère, who knew her as a child). Lucien loved, was not repulsed, but was never accepted. There was the fine distinction. It was the same with all who approached her then, as with all who followed. Not long since, I saw in the late King of Holland's palace at the Hague a very beautiful statue of Eve. Eve, in the first bloom of her youth, is with the serpent who shows her the apple: she looks at it, half turns towards Adam, and seems as if she would consult him. Eve is at that supreme moment of innocence in which a woman plays with danger, and converses in whispers with herself or another. Well, that moment of indecision, which in Eve's case did not last, and had a bad ending, came over and over again, and was prolonged by a thousand complications in the brilliant and occasionally imprudent youth of which we are speaking; but it was always checked in time, and dominated by a stronger sentiment, by some hidden virtue. By side of the passion she inspired and ignored, the young woman possessed the carelessness, confidence, and eagerness of a child or of a school-girl. She met danger smiling, with a sense of security and a charity something like the most Christian kings of old, who on a certain day in Holy Week, by merely visiting sick people, thought to cure them. She was never at a loss how to act, and never doubted her gentle magic, her virtue. She was almost anxious to wound your heart so that she might afterwards have the pleasure and perform the miracle of curing you. If you complained or grew angry, she said with a kindness that made you despair, "Come, I will cure you." And with some, with the greater number, she succeeded in doing so. All her friends, with very few exceptions, began by loving her. She had many, and kept them nearly all. M. de Montlosier remarked to her one day that she could say, like the Cid, "Five hundred of my friends." In insensibly changing love into friendship, and leaving to it all the bloom and perfume of the former feeling, she was truly a magician. She would have liked to stop everything at April. Her heart remained at the early spring when the orchard is a mass of white flowers, and is, as yet, without leaves.

If my pen was light enough to touch the flowers without crushing them, I could set down here many a recollection of her. To

her new friends, as she sometimes liked to call them, Madame Récamier often spoke with pleasure of past years and the people she had known. "It is," she said, "a means of bringing the past before my friends."

Her friendship with Madame de Staël, with Madame Moreau, with the wounded and vanquished, soon threw her into opposition to the Empire, but there was a brief period when she had not yet taken her side. Fouché, recognising the power of the young woman, thought to make an instrument of it. He wished Madame Récamier to enter the Imperial household as a lady-in-waiting; he did not like the nobility, and wished to have some one of influence and enthusiasm at Court. She refused to lend herself to such a part. Soon, especially through her friends and the idea that people entertained of her, she was in opposition.

She was not yet in opposition when one day she was dining with a sister of Bonaparte. It was desired that she should meet the first Consul, and as a matter of fact he was there. She was to have sat next him at table, but through a misunderstanding which occurred as they were sitting down, she found herself next Cambacérès, and Bonaparte said jestingly: "Ah! Consul Cambacérès, always next the prettiest!"

Madame Récamier's father, M. Bernard, was in the post-office and a royalist; under the Consulate he was compromised, arrested, and put into close confinement. She learnt the news suddenly, when Madame Bacciocchi, Bonaparte's sister, was dining with her, and Madame Bacciocchi promised to do everything to interest the Consul. After dinner Madame Récamier went out; she endeavoured to see Fouché, but he refused to receive her, "for fear," he said, "of allowing his heart to be touched in an affair of State." She hastened to the Théâtre-Français to rejoin Madame Bacciocchi, who was with her sister Pauline; the latter was entirely occupied with Lafon's helmet. "But look," she said, "how badly the helmet is put on; it is all on one side." Madame Récamier was in torture; Madame Bacciocchi wished to stay till the end of the tragedy, maybe on account of her sister Pauline. Bernadotte was in the box; he noticed Madame Récamier's agitated countenance; he offered her his arm to take her away, and promised that he would himself see the Consul at once. Bernadotte's warm feeling for her dates from that time; he did not know her before. He obtained her father's pardon. What is stated in the *Memorials of Saint Helena* is incorrect. Madame Récamier did not see Bonaparte on that occasion; it was Bernadotte who looked after everything.

Bernadotte loved her, and was one of her cavaliers, and, on their return after the emigration, so were the Montmorencys. Mathieu de Montmorency, who afterwards grew pious, Adrien (afterwards Duc de Laval), and later on Adrien's son, who was thus his father's rival, all loved her passionately. Henri de Laval often met his father, the Duc de Laval, at her house; he neither stirred nor offered to go, conduct that made the Duke angry. But as he possessed wit, he wrote very prettily to Madame Récamier, "My son is in love with you; you know if I am; it is indeed the fate of the Montmorencys:

'They do not all die, but all are wounded.'"

Madame Récamier was the first to relate those things, and she laughed merrily at them. She preserved almost to the end the childish laughter and the childish act of putting her handkerchief to her mouth in order to keep herself from bursting out laughing. But in the days of her youth the childishness of feeling, and the charming art combined with it, led more than once—and is it surprising?—to serious complications. All the men attracted and smitten by her were not so easy to lead and to escape from as the peaceful dynasty of the Montmorencys. At certain times there must have been many violent acts and many serious revolts around her that her gentle hand was scarcely able to overcome. Playing with human passion while she wished only to charm, exciting it more than she knew, she resembled the youngest of the Graces, who amused herself by yoking lions to her chariot and then tormenting them. Careless as innocence is, I said, she courted danger—danger for others, if not for herself; and why should I not say it? in the hazardous game which so easily drifts into cruelty she, despite her excellences, brought trouble to many hearts; without intending it she wounded not only many indignant and embittered men, but, without knowing it, sacrificed and hurt many poor women who were her rivals. In the end her charity was not without consciousness of that serious side; it is a lesson that the great importance attached to her noble memory does not forbid us to recall. With her instincts of purity and goodness, she recognised it so surely, that, admired and worshipped as she was, she regretted neither her youth, nor the bright periods of her life, nor her passions, even the most beautiful of them. She could not imagine perfect happiness outside duty; she placed her ideal of romance where she found it in so small a degree, that is to say, in marriage; and more than once in her best days, in the midst of a *fête* where she was the acknowledged queen, it came

into her head, she said, to escape the homage and to go away for a moment and weep.

That is how I imagine her in the world and in the excitement of society, before her retirement. A series of chapters might be written on the subject, but I have no intention of even sketching them. One chapter would tell of her relations and her intimacy with Madame de Staël, who both of them exerted brilliant influence; though so different and often opposed to one another, they were scarcely ever rivals, for one was the complement of the other. It was in 1807, at the château of Coppet, at Madame de Staël's, that Madame Récamier met Prince Augustus of Prussia, who was one of those conquered at Jéna. In her turn she soon overcame and conquered him, a royal prisoner, brusque in manner, and at times embarrassing. His awkwardness betrayed him. One day while out riding with Madame Récamier, wishing to speak to her, he turned to Benjamin Constant, who was of the party: "Monsieur de Constant," he said, "suppose you were to take a little gallop." And Constant laughed at German *finesse*.

Another chapter would treat of Madame Récamier's easy conquest at Lyons of the gentle Ballanche, who surrendered on the first day, and never even told his love. Another chapter would present the less simple, at first less easy, but in the end firmly-established relations with M. de Chateaubriand. Madame Récamier saw him for the first time in 1801 at Madame de Staël's; she saw him for the second time in 1816 or 1817, about the time of Madame de Staël's death, and again at her house. But those were mere chance meetings. The real intimacy did not begin till later, at the Abbaye-aux-Bois, when M. de Chateaubriand had left the ministry.

There would also be a chapter to write on the close friendship with Benjamin Constant, which dates only from 1814 to 1815. The letters he wrote to Madame Récamier would be of much service; but from the point of view of truth they would be very unsatisfactory without those he wrote for himself alone at the end of the connection—letters which many people have read; and indeed, the whole would have to be made clear by the explanations of a moral philosopher, not usually found in the pleadings of an advocate. But that reminds me of a very troublesome law-suit on the matter, and I hasten to hold my peace.

Before the chapter concerning Benjamin Constant, there would be one on the voyage to Italy in 1813, the residence at Rome, the connection with Canova, his statue, which, to be ideal, had only to copy the model; then the residence at Naples, near Queen Caroline and Murat. He, if I do not

mistake, was somewhat interested in her. But a truce to these rapid sketches.

When Madame Récamier felt the time approaching at which beauty lessens and fades, she did what very few women know how to do: she did not struggle, but resigned herself with good taste to the inroads of time. She perceived that after such a success due to beauty, the only means of still appearing beautiful was to cease to lay further claim to it. To a woman who, seeing her again after many years, complimented her on her appearance, she said: "Ah! my dear friend, let there be no longer any illusion; the day I saw that the little Savoyards in the street did not turn round, I knew all was over." She spoke the truth. She was sensitive to every glance, to all praise, to the exclamation of a child or of a woman of the people, as to the declaration of a prince. While moving slowly along in her elegant barouche amid a crowd, she thanked each passer-by for their admiration with a bow and a smile.

On two occasions Madame Récamier suffered great reverses of fortune: the first time at the beginning of the Empire; the second during the early years of the Restoration. It was then (1819) that Madame Récamier retired to a suite of apartments in the Abbaye-aux-Bois. She never held a higher place in society than when she lived in that humble abode on the outskirts of Paris. It was there that her delicate genius, freed from too troublesome complications, made its fine quality more and more felt. It may be said that she perfected the art of friendship and caused it to make a fresh advance. She introduced, as it were, another fine art into life, which adorned, ennobled, and made symmetrical everything round her. At the time party spirit ran high. She disarmed anger and softened asperity; she took harshness from you and inoculated you with tolerance. She never rested until she brought about a meeting at her house of her friends of opposite parties and reconciled them by kindly mediation. It is by such influences that society becomes society in the best sense of the word, and acquires all its affability and charm. It is thus that a woman, without leaving her sphere, aids civilisation in the highest degree, and that Eurydice after her fashion fills the part of Orpheus. He tamed savage life; she perfects and crowns civilised life.

One day in 1802, during the short peace of Amiens, not in the brilliant hotel of the Rue du Mont-Blanc, where Madame Récamier was then living, but in the drawing-room of the château of Clichy, where she was spending the summer,

men of the most opposite views were assembled—Adrien and Mathieu de Montmorency, General Moreau, distinguished Englishmen, Mr. Fox, Mr. Erskine, and many others. They were watching each other face to face; no one would commence talking. M. de Narbonne, who was there, attempted to start a conversation, but notwithstanding his wit he did not succeed. Madame Récamier entered: she spoke first to Mr. Fox, made a remark to each, introduced them to one another with an appropriate word of praise, and immediately conversation became general—the one touch of nature was found.

What she did one day she did every day. In her little drawing-room at the Abbaye-aux-Bois she thought of everything; she cast her net of sympathy over all. There was not a talent, a virtue, a distinction, she was not anxious to know, to encourage, to treat kindly, to bring into notice, to place in relation and harmony with herself, to mark it at heart with a little sign of her own. Doubtless there was ambition in this; but what lovable ambition, especially when we remember that while addressing the most celebrated she did not neglect the most obscure and that she sought out the most miserable! The characteristic of Madame Récamier's many-sided mind was to be at once universal and particular, to exclude nothing—what do I say? to attract everything, and yet to make a choice.

The choice could even be unique. During the last twenty years M. de Chateaubriand was the centre of her world, the great interest of her life, to which I will not say she sacrificed all the rest—she only sacrificed herself—but to which she subordinated everything. That he had his antipathies, aversions, and even afflictions, is sufficiently proved by the *Memoirs beyond the Tomb*. She tempered and corrected all that. How clever she was in making him speak when he was silent, in lending him amiable words, words of kindness to others, which he doubtless said to her in private, and did not always repeat before witnesses! What a coquette she was for the sake of his fame! How she succeeded sometimes in making him really gay, amiable, contented, eloquent, everything that was so easy when she wished it! By her gentle influence over him, she justified Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's saying, "Woman possesses a gaiety wherewith to dissipate man's melancholy." And with what a melancholy she had here to do! a melancholy René possessed from his birth, which increased with the years! Madame de Maintenon never exercised her wits to prevent Louis XIV. being bored as Madame Récamier did hers in behalf of M.

de Chateaubriand. "I always noticed," said Boileau, returning from Versailles, "that when the conversation did not turn on his praise, the king was bored, and ready to yawn or go away." Every great poet when growing old is on that point a little like Louis XIV. Every day Madame Récamier found a thousand charming fashions whereby to revive and invigorate his praises. From all sides she led to him friends, new admirers. She fastened us all to the feet of her statue with a golden chain.

A person of intellect as refined as it was just, and who knew her well, said of Madame Récamier: "She had in her disposition what Shakespeare called 'the milk of human kindness,' a tender and compassionate sweetness." She saw her friends' failings, but she tended them as she would have tended their physical infirmities. She was a sister of mercy to them in their troubles, weaknesses, and a little in their faults. In this habitual method of procedure, I dare not deny, all the more perhaps because I think I experienced it myself, that in the long run a few disadvantages were mingled with the charm; in the cool and peaceful atmosphere, in giving minds gentleness and culture, she slightly enervated them and inclined them to complacency. It was a *salon* where not only politeness but charity was somewhat injurious to truth. There decidedly were things she did not wish to see, and which had no existence for her. She did not believe in evil. I am anxious to make it clear that in her persistent innocence she preserved something of childhood. Is that a cause for complaint? After all, does life afford us another instance of such real goodness in the midst of so ornate and embellished an illusion? La Rochefoucauld, a bitter moralist, said: "We should enjoy little pleasure were we never to deceive ourselves."

I have heard people ask if Madame Récamier had wit. But it seems to me we know that already. She possessed in the highest degree not the wit which wants to shine itself, but the wit which perceives and knows how to bring out that of others. She wrote little, having early formed the habit of writing as little as possible; but the little was good, and of a perfect style. In speaking she also expressed herself clearly and in appropriate language. In her reminiscences, she invariably made choice of some characteristic trait, a kindly or merry saying, a poignant situation, and neglected the rest; she knew how to recollect with taste.

She was an enchanting listener, letting nothing that was good in what you said pass without showing that she perceived it. She questioned with interest, and was all attention in replying.

Upon quitting her, people were interested in finding wit in her very smile and silence.

As to the youth and beauty of her heart, if it was permitted to all to appreciate them, it is for those who most intimately enjoyed them some day to speak of them. After the death of M. Ballanche and of M. de Chateaubriand, although there still remained M. Ampère, the Duc de Noailles, and many other affectionate friends, she languished, and died May 11, 1849, in her seventy-second year. The unique woman, whose memory will live as long as French society, was charmingly painted in the bloom of her youth by Gérard. Canova made a bust of her in the hey-day of her beauty. Achille Deveria, on the day of her death, made a faithful sketch, expressing suffering and repose.

II.

I ought to have spoken of this book[1] a long time ago—firstly, because it is devoted to the memory of a woman who is still charming and unique in the recollection of all who knew her, and whom she honoured with her kindness; secondly, because it is the book best calculated to recall her faithfully to the friends who regretted and still regret her, and is most fitted to give a sound idea, an approximate idea at least, of her to the curious generations which have so far only known her name. The volumes, however, contain few things written by Madame Récamier herself; she did not much care for writing, and on her death-bed ordered what of her reminiscences she had written to be destroyed. There only remains a small number of pages by her, a few narratives and notes. But if she preferred to be silent, all her friends spoke and came in turn to say what they thought of her, how she inspired them, to testify their sentiments in a variety of tones, with perfect concord and deep-seated harmony; there is, in fact, a symphony of harmonious sound around her. After that it is impossible not to be persuaded that Madame Récamier was a personage almost as much distinguished by intelligence as by heart. Her beauty might at first eclipse her mind; in looking at her, no one thought of it. That beauty fading with the years—a slow retreat—and insensibly vanishing, by degrees her mind appeared, as on certain days before evening, "the star with

[1] *Souvenirs and Correspondence*, taken from the Papers of Madame Récamier.

its shining face appears in a clear sky on the side opposite the sun." All the distinguished homage by which she was surrounded is proof and sign of approbation. We find necessarily around her, addressing her in a series of confidential letters, M. de Montmorency, M. Ballanche, M. de Laval, Benjamin Constant, M. de Chateaubriand, and many others. So perfect is the editor's art, and so much care has he taken to conceal himself, that I was nearly forgetting to tell my readers that the whole is welded together by a rapid biographical narrative, by indispensable traditions and skilful and fine threads; all explanations necessary for the reader are pleasantly and briefly given so that they come just at the right time; thus all the little facts, the anecdotes that belong to Madame Récamier's circle, those she liked to tell herself, are rendered for us in the clear manner and with all the variety of light and shade which was the especial tone of her *salon.* Thus an intelligent and always appropriate criticism corrects and relieves here and there a too great gentleness in the portraits. In fact, these *Memoirs of Madame Récamier* (as the English, who excel in those sorts of books, would say) are as faithfully and skilfully put together as can be desired, and it is no indiscretion to name the author and editor, Madame Récamier's niece and adopted daughter, Madame Lenormant. We must thank her for having extracted so happy and ingenious a portion from all that was in her possession. It is said, and we think we recognise, that the "Introduction" is by M. Lenormant.

There are undoubtedly gaps in these volumes: among the number of Madame Récamier's more constant and intimate correspondents, Madame de Staël is wanting; she shines by her absence. The necessities of conventionality may have kept back, merely for a time we hope, the publication of that notable branch of the correspondence; it was never Madame Récamier's intention to conceal or suppress it. All that I formerly read of it, and I owe that reading to her kindly confidence, while penetrating more deeply into the hearts of the two friends and throwing light on the passions which agitated them, was of a nature to do honour to both. But the gaps in the work, the omissions enjoined on the editor by contemporary propriety, must not be further exaggerated. Madame Récamier's existence, so brilliant, so surrounded and interwoven in all its parts, holds no mysteries, or if there are any, and in the life of every woman there are some, they are simple enough and possess no startling feature; they are not inexplicable. In fact, Madame Récamier had nothing to hide, and in what is now given to us

in the name of the family, we have verily the loved and cherished way of life, the habitual and chosen manner of existence, the exterior and interior of the charming and celebrated woman.

Madame Récamier's distinctive and characteristic feature was to have inspired love, a very ardent love, in all who saw her and cultivated her acquaintance, and, while yielding to none, to have kept them all, or nearly all, on the footing of friends. "You are the only woman in the kingdom," wrote Bussy to his charming cousin, "who can persuade a lover into being contented with friendship." Madame Récamier was more beautiful and of a more irresistible beauty than Madame de Sévigné, perhaps too, rather more of a coquette, and in the zenith of her charm more provoking of admiration; she had a much more difficult task than Madame de Sévigné in afterwards reducing to the duty and calmness of ordinary friendship the hearts of those she inflamed. She needed a heart, a wise and constant effort, a whole series of tactics compounded of skill and kindness, tempered with coldness and compassion; and in that, I think, no one has surpassed her. Some are angry with her, and find it out of all proportion that she should have put so accomplished and refined an art to the service of so virginal a fate. But from Ariadne and Dido to Mademoiselle de l'Espinasse and later, there have been quite enough victims of a delirious and ill-fated passion: let us leave under her crown an unique figure, the wisest of virgins in the art of taming and subduing hearts. Madame Récamier possessed the secret of success in it, and the whole of the book is speaking proof of it, without reckoning all that may be guessed at in the intervals; for it was not always against natures as calm as those of M. Ballanche and M. de Montmorency that she had to contend (in speaking of them it cannot be said to defend herself); but many whom we see finally subdued and under the yoke, had at first stoutly resisted.

Of all the letters published in the different parts of these volumes, which present a continuous whole, the most interesting in my opinion, are those of M. de Montmorency, M. Ballanche, and M. de Laval: M. de Chateaubriand gains nothing from it, and doubtless here, on that very point, Madame Récamier's delicate sensibility would have suffered and been disturbed by publication at the present time. M. de Montmorency, young and already converted at the beginning of the friendship, appears at first a little monotonous. He loves Madame Récamier purely, platonically; he trembles for her when he

sees her embarked without protection in so much worldliness, so many tempests; sees her, like a careless child, smilingly disport herself on the foam of the waves. He wanted to lead her to God, to bind her by some formal promise, some preservative vow: he does not quite dare to propose that she shall wear hair-cloth under her ball-dress (like Madame de Longueville); but, had he dared, I cannot undertake that he would not have done so. He continually admonished her; every one of his letters had its moral inference, the little stroke of the bell which is never wanting. We end by expecting it; we see it from afar, and prepare ourselves for it. An eloquent preacher is not more careful to arrange the end and conclusion of his sermon, a great modern lyrist is not more anxious to close each of his poems suddenly with a loud thunder-clap or the crack of a whip. Madame des Ursins, in her recently published correspondence, is not more concerned in varying the indispensable compliment and noble reverence which terminates each of her letters to the Maréchale de Noailles. General Bernadotte, in the notes he wrote Madame Récamier, was not more desirous of leading up to and turning his last chivalrous greeting with gallantry and grace, than M. de Montmorency showed himself anxious and skilful in inserting in each letter a little touch of homily. Sometimes we smile at the good man and reproach him, as with a bad habit, with what is merely the fixed idea of his most Christian friendship. But when difficult and delicate circumstances, which put the whole man to the test, arise, we perceive that M. de Montmorency's character gains by that interior support. On what a solid basis of equity and nobility he appears! And, for example, in politics, when he is with M. de Chateaubriand, in secret rivalry with him, and is the first ousted from the Ministry, what moral superiority he possesses over his brilliant and passionate rival! In 1823-24 Madame Récamier was the confidante of both; she counted for much in their jealousy and hidden rivalry. Her inclination, I fear, leaned to the least wise—the way of even the best women. But she knew how to keep the balance even. She listened to each, and each spoke to her of the other; "everybody was pleased, and no one was betrayed." In this double confidence, of which she was the depository, in what a different tone they each spoke! And when they were both out of office, what a difference in conduct and bearing! On one side, accents of revengeful rage, and an individuality that nothing could overcome; on the other, calmness, serenity, and elevation. I shall be told that M. de Montmorency had less reason than M.

de Chateaubriand to be irritated and wounded to the quick, that he was not consumed by his talents, and had not the consciousness of being the cleverest of his party and the only man capable of guiding the monarchy. But were such ideas and pretensions well founded with M. de Chateaubriand? However it may be, the impression left by the parallel reading of the letters of the two men is entirely in favour of M. de Montmorency; his handsome and benign countenance rises before our eyes by contrast. New generations, if they still care for such things, may, for the future, form an idea of the last virtuous man of a great race, the last of the *prud'hommes*, as they said in the time of St. Louis, whose renown for virtue was, until now, confined to an exclusive and aristocratic circle.

M. Ballanche also fills a large place and plays a prominent part in the correspondence. Excellent M. Ballanche was a singular person. He possessed qualities vague, obscure, and unintelligible even to himself; he never succeeded in making them clear, or explaining them to the world or to himself. He was full of puerilities and childishnesses; he stammered in ordinary conversation, and at the same time words of gold issued from his mouth, and especially from his pen. All who have written about him have praised him; I believe it indeed. It is in fact a sort of distinction to seem to understand him. A more than half-concealed genius can only be discovered by lending it our own, and can only be understood by completing it. To write about M. Ballanche is to become in some degree his collaborator. Do not believe him too modest under his appearance of simplicity and good nature. He had an exalted idea of his superiority, and never forgave the French Academy for having made him wait. At bottom, in spite of outward admiration and daily intercourse, he did not very much like M. de Chateaubriand, who, on his part, did not take M. Ballanche seriously, and called him the *hierophant*. "Sir," said M. Ballanche to me the day after the publication of one of M. de Chateaubriand's last pamphlets, "don't you think the reign of the phrase is nearly at an end?" He thought that the reign of the *idea*—that is to say, his own—would follow. Towards the end, and although the Abbaye-aux-Bois would always be "the centre of the world" for him, he had his own little circle of worshippers and admirers, his small coterie, a little private chapel-of-ease, of which he was pontiff and oracle. "M. Ballanche," it was said, "is the *most advanced man* of the Abbaye-aux-Bois." He himself had no doubts on the matter, and believed his particular and grandiose destiny was to fulfil the mission of an initiator. Notwith-

standing those excrescences of individual pride, he was the gentlest and most placid of dreamers, a man of sublime innocence. His letters to Madame Récamier contain most exquisite passages, describing her under the ideal symbolical form he never ceased to lend her. For example, complaining gently that she would not return love for love, and supposing that she therefore struggled against her natural destiny and inclination, he said to her—

"What there has been apart in your existence is not what would have pleased you the most, if you had had the choice. It is said that the phœnix, a marvellous but solitary bird, often felt very weary. He fed on perfumes, and lived in the purest region of the air; his splendid existence ended on a funeral pile of odoriferous woods, set on fire by the sun. More than once, doubtless, he envied the fate of the white dove, because she had a companion like unto herself.

"I do not wish to make you out better than you are; you are sensible of the impression you produce; you are intoxicated by the incense burnt at your feet. You are an angel in many things; you are a woman in some."

Insisting on that chief natural quality, strong affection, which he liked to contemplate in her, and which in his opinion society, wishing to see in her only desire of pleasing and coquetry, did not recognise, he said to her again—

"You were at first an *Antigone* of whom people absolutely insisted making an *Armida*. They have succeeded ill; no one can be false to his own nature."

With his somewhat naïve literary ideas, savouring a little of the province, he wanted Madame Récamier to write, to take rank in her turn among women who aspired to the double crown; he tried at one time to embolden her to make proof of her talent, to become a *poet*—that is to say, to translate and interpret a poet, as if that is not the same thing as becoming an author. But he gave his advice in well-chosen words, and with a poetry worthy of its object.

"How do you suppose," he said to her, "that I should have any confidence in myself, if you, whom I consider so eminently gifted, have none in yourself? My sort of talent, I know, presents no surface: others build a palace on the ground, and it is seen from afar; as for me, I dig a well to a fairly great depth, and it can only be seen quite near. Your particular domain is likewise the inmost recesses of sentiment; but, believe me, *you have at your bidding the genius of music, flowers, long reveries, and elegance. Privileged creature, take a*

little confidence; lift up your charming head, and do not fear to try your hand on the golden lyre of the poets.

"The whole of my particular destiny lies perhaps in acting in such a manner that some trace of your noble existence may be preserved on this earth. Help me to accomplish my destiny. I consider it a thing good in itself that you should be loved and appreciated when you cease to exist. It would be a real misfortune if so excellent a creature passed away like a charming shade. Of what use are recollections, if not to perpetuate what is beautiful and good."

Madame Récamier left to others, and to the friend to whom we have been listening, the task of preserving her memory. She did not do as M. Ballanche desired; she distrusted herself, and perhaps felt that a woman who writes shows too exactly what she can do: in that, as in all things, it is better to leave it to be guessed. In the little that she wrote is a clearness, delicacy, an elegant correctness, a natural urbanity much to the taste of the critical reader. Her charming narrative of the journey to Rome with a noble and amiable queen then in exile, the touch of affection and the hidden playfulness which animates the pages, make us regret that there are so few of them. It is always Galathea throwing you a single golden apple, and fleeing while making herself desired.

The friend and correspondent of Madame Récamier who shows to most advantage, and who is entirely new to the public, is the Duc de Laval, M. de Montmorency's cousin. It was he who, for a long time in love with Madame Récamier, as his cousin had been, and as his son was, said that it was the fate of the Montmorencys, and added wittily: "They do not all die, but they are all wounded." Though at first sight he scarcely gave the impression, he was an intelligent man: with a slight stammer, very short-sighted, continually asking questions, as if he did not understand, it took time to appreciate him at his proper value. At first Ambassador at Madrid, he was removed because the king, Louis XVIII., did not consider him sufficiently capable. It was M. Pasquier, at that time Minister for Foreign Affairs, who, reading M. de Laval's correspondence, and finding it both witty and sensible, caused the king to alter his impression. M. de Laval, afterwards Ambassador at Rome, Vienna, and London, everywhere proved himself on a level with, if not above, those high functions. He did not cease at any time to be a faithful, constant, and close friend to Madame Récamier, never exacting, and scarcely complaining of being put on the second or third plane (for there was a

decided hierarchy in the company of friends), but proving, by the delicacy and continuance of his affection, that he was worthy of better treatment, at least of being advanced a step. After a friendship of thirty years, he wrote to her: "There is nothing tender, consoling, and I might even say honourable, but the continuance and perseverance of sentiment. I had rather my heart should be torn from me than the remembrance of having loved you so much and so long." Once, in a moment of ill-temper, M. de Chateaubriand cast the word *mediocrity* at him. M. de Laval's letters show us a man of perfect good-breeding and sociability, whose heart was not *mediocre* in feeling and affection. Loyal and honest natures, born and nourished in spheres of idleness, try at least to give their lives noble settings!

The Duc de Laval possessed gaiety of wit. It was he who said of a tall woman with a big nose: "She must be treated with deference, for if she is offended, she will run her nose through your body." The saying was preserved as witty and original; but I cannot agree with the distinguished writer who said that in the two volumes there is only that one saying worthy of remembrance. And here we must understand each other, and not ask of the editor of Madame Récamier's *Memoirs* more than there actually was. Every *salon*, every circle has, as it were, its tone of conversation: that of Madame Récamier's circle was, above all, moderate. Few enough of loud-toned, quotable sayings were spoken in the drawing-room of the Abbaye-aux-Bois. There was more light and shade than brilliance; the wit was delicate and gentle—pearl grey, if we wish to describe it in colour. It was by no means, as might be believed from its outward renown, a *salon* of fine wits: there was nothing elaborate or forced, all was natural and easy.

One of Madame Récamier's arts and charms was to make the most of the person with whom she was talking; she made it her business, and liked to efface herself; she was only anxious to give opportunities to the wit of others, and men were grateful for her few words and intelligent periods of silence. Her friends' wit ran and played before her, but without affectation or effort. If she interposed, it was discreetly, to introduce a witty remark or relate a well-chosen anecdote, whose aptness usually produced a smile. The greater number of the anecdotes we heard her tell find a place in the volumes before us; I recognise them and think I am listening to her. Thus she merrily described the journey from Rome to Naples, on which, throughout the whole route, she took, without suspecting it, the relays prepared for the Duke of Otranto. Again, she related capitally how, in 1815,

in presence of the Duke of Wellington, she expressed her astonishment that the Bourbons, on coming back, should, without repugnance, rely on that same personage, and that Louis XVIII., yielding to a pretended necessity of circumstances, should take a man celebrated for so many revolutionary acts for minister. When it was explained to the Duke of Wellington what those acts (the massacres at Lyons) were, he, misapprehending the force of the French word, said to her: "Oh! ce sont des *frivolités!*" People smiled, and the conversation, enlivened and in no way disconcerted, as sometimes happens by too lively sallies, went on its way. If, at the present time, I dared allow myself to pronounce a sort of verdict on a circle to be for ever regretted, to which I belonged, and to which the author of the *Memoirs* assures me I might have belonged even more closely, I should say, while admitting there might have been danger and disadvantage in some part of the charming circle, it was not on the side of taste. Taste was maintained in its simplicity and delicacy, and nourished on the best part of things: if a danger was to be feared, it was too great a desire to please, and too much charity; truth suffered through it. Taste was not spoiled, it was rather perfected: tact was quickened and men's dispositions softened. Self-love, hers and that of others, was too much cherished. Wit and charm found profit there: originality and independence ran risks. In the long run, charm may be enervating.

The most misanthropical person could have no more to say; it is the only reservation that can be made in speaking of that graceful and delightful corner of society. For him who entered it, was it even only once, there was no possibility of error. The king of the house, the idol of the little temple during the latter years, was M. de Chateaubriand. It is clearly to be seen, even in the place he holds in these volumes. The impression of the most kindly-disposed readers is that there is a little too much of him. He fills too many pages with his imperious and inevitable personality. It would, however, be ungrateful in those who had the honour of meeting him often in that circle of his choice, not to recall and say to all how many times they saw him there natural, amiable, facile, eloquent, even good-natured; but directly the public interposed, and the passions of the outer world entered by the smallest crevice, or the slightest breath of contradiction made itself felt, everything immediately changed; the features were compressed, the temper ruffled. The correspondence also brings out these variations and his excessive susceptibility. Chateaubriand the politician, whom we formerly

attempted to describe, ends by perfectly delineating himself: never contented, always ready to quarrel, disgusted with a thing from the second day, desiring everything and caring for nothing, without enough pity and contempt for his *poor friends*, his *poor devils of friends* (as he called them), believing all the sacrifice to be on his side, and complaining of the ingratitude of others, as if he alone had done everything.

When, after his return to affairs and the triumph of the Spanish war, Madame Récamier saw him more eager, exalted, and more elated than ever, less docile probably in close friendship, she decided, at the end of 1823, to go to Rome. In her system of constant but pure and dispassionate affection, she considered it prudent at that critical time to withdraw for a certain space and let him exhaust with his bubbles of triumph his last fire—Madame Cornuel would have said, his last youthful wild oats.[1]

He attempted to justify himself in her sight, writing to her on April 3, 1824:—

"Forgive me, and if you suffer, think that I, too, suffer much. It is indeed enough that I should be reproached for my *perfidy* towards Mathieu (M. de Montmorency). You know what there is in it, and what he thinks of it himself; he dined yesterday at my house. But a man in my position is exposed to many calumnies. You have been told that flattery has turned my head; come, and you will see; it has had an entirely different effect. My great fault is not to be elated enough; I should be better if I could be enthusiastic over something. Seeing France in such consideration abroad and prosperity at home, I am not insensible to the thought that the glory and happiness of my country date from my entry into the ministry; but if you take from me that satisfaction of an honest man, there remains only a profound weariness of my position, lassitude that makes itself felt in everything, a greatly increased contempt for men, and a desire to go and die far from noise, in peace and forgotten, in some far-off corner of the world: that is the *effect of flattery* on me."

The refrain is never-ceasing with him; at every turn he always goes back on the desire for retirement, and it forms a strange contrast to his violent desires and ill-dissimulated fits of ambition. At bottom, always too much of a poet for politics,

[1] That departure of Madame Récamier in 1823 might well have had for motive a little touch of jealousy of a very pretty and witty woman, Madame de C——, who was at that time much *fêted* at the Foreign Office.

he is henceforth too much of a statesman and politician for the retirement, the innocent and studious leisure, of the poet: he possesses in himself something irreconcilable. At the time of his dismissal from the ministry, in the violent and decisive crisis which rent his royalist life in two, his letters to Madame Récamier are missing; we are told they were not found among the other papers. The bursts of anger and vengeful hatred they would contain will doubtless cause them to be suppressed for a long period of time.

While ambassador at Rome (1828–29) he wrote letters to Madame Récamier, containing fine passages, which, through the too apparent infirmities of character, still testify to the fulness and greatness of his talent:—

"*Rome, Wednesday, April* 15, 1829.

"I begin this letter on the evening of Ash Wednesday, after my return from the Sistine Chapel, where I assisted at Tenebræ and heard the Miserere sung. I remember that you spoke to me of that beautiful ceremony, and for that reason I was a hundred times more impressed by it. It is truly unrivalled: the brightness dying away by degrees, the gloom gradually enveloping Michael Angelo's marvels, all the cardinals on their knees, the new Pope himself prostrated at the foot of the altar where a few days before I had seen his predecessor; the lovely song of suffering and mercy rising at intervals on the silence of the night; the idea of a God dying on the Cross to expiate men's crimes and weaknesses; Rome and all her memories under the vaulted roof of the Vatican: why were you not there with me! I liked it even to the tapers, which, when the light was put out, let a white smoke escape, image of a life suddenly extinguished. Rome is a beautiful place in which to forget everything, despise everything, and die."

However severe we may be to a man who reveals himself in all his moral inconsistencies and personal sufferings, let us never forget the admiration due to such a painter, to him who, under that title, is and remains the chief of our age; for it is the same man whom we have just seen breathing forth all the poetry of Catholic Rome, who, with the same genius and a sublime variety of imagination, described the virgin forest of America, the Arabian desert, and the historic ruins of Sparta![1]

1 It is this twofold sentiment of unceasing admiration for the writer and complete truth about the man that I have attempted to portray in my work, *Chateaubriand et son Groupe littéraire*. The greater

It is a pity that the defects of his style grew more marked with the years, and I regret that too great a number of pages that are certificates of decay should have been inserted in the last half of the second volume. Thus the description of the château of Maintenon, in spite of the interest attaching to so famous a residence, ought to have been suppressed : in those last writings M. de Chateaubriand's pen was no longer itself. These remarks made, it is nevertheless true that the two volumes offer a number of familiar, charming, and unexpected fragments about a woman who was a model of beauty and goodness, and about a society which she possessed the charm and art of gathering round her to the end, and they permit late comers, if they have the curiosity, to spend a few evenings in unlooked-for and most intimate familiarity with it. Henceforth Madame Récamier holds her assured place, one of the best on the shelves of our book-case devoted to the memoirs of French women; she lives, and, to borrow M. Ballanche's expression, she has not passed away "like a charming shade."

number of critics only care to see in it something that is not there—a desire to depreciate M. de Chateaubriand. French readers are so hurried and careless, that they cannot take in more than one idea at a time.

JOUBERT.

SOME one once expressed surprise that Geoffroy could return to the same subject again and again, and write so many articles on the same play. One of his witty colleagues, M. de Feletz, replied, "Geoffroy has three ways of writing an article—*to say, to say again*, and to *contradict himself*." I have already spoken more than once of M. Joubert, and yet I intend to speak of him again without repeating or contradicting myself. The new edition of his works just published provides the opportunity, and perhaps the means.

The first time I spoke of M. Joubert I had to reply to the question that had every right to be asked: Who is M. Joubert? Now, the question is no longer put. Although he belongs to the class of authors never destined to be popular, the publication of his two volumes of thoughts and letters in 1842 sufficed to procure him from the first the esteem of connoisseurs and critics; the matter now at stake is to somewhat enlarge the circle of his readers.

His life was simple, and I only mention it for the sake of those who in the case of an author like to know exactly of what sort of man we are speaking. M. Joubert, who was born in 1754, and died in 1824, was in his lifetime as little of an author as possible. He was one of the fortunate spirits who spend their days in thinking, talking with their friends, dreaming in solitude, meditating some great work they will never execute, work which will only come to us in fragments. The fragments, by reason of their fine quality, and in spite of the defect of a too subtle thought, are sufficiently remarkable for the author to deserve to live in the memory of posterity. M. Joubert was in his time the most refined and original type of the class of honest men which the older society alone produced, spectators, listeners without ambition, without envy, curious, of large leisure, attentive, disinterested; yet, taking interest in everything, the true amateurs of the beautiful. According to Plato, "to converse and to recognise what is worthy, it is in that especially in which the happiness of the life of a private individual consists." The

class of connoisseurs and amateurs created to light up and to comprehend talent has, since everybody makes of it a career, almost disappeared in France. "It is necessary," said M. Joubert, "to have a corner of the mind always open and free, to leave a place there for the opinions of one's friends, and to entertain them as they pass by. It becomes really intolerable to talk to men in whose brains the divisions are filled up, and into which nothing from without can enter. Let us strive after hospitable hearts and minds." But go at the present time and demand intellectual hospitality, a welcome for your ideas, for your dawning opinions, from hurried, busy minds full of themselves, torrents, noisy with their own thoughts! When in his youth M. Joubert came from the province of Périgord to Paris in 1778, at the age of twenty-four, he found what is now no longer to be seen there; he lived as was the custom then; he *talked.* What he did in the years of his youth is to be summed up in that one word. He talked with famous men of letters; he knew Marmontel, La Harpe, D'Alembert; above all, he knew Diderot, naturally the most accessible and most hospitable of minds. Diderot, in fact, had in Joubert a very singular pupil, a refined pupil, platonist and Christian, in love with ideal and holy beauty; studying and worshipping piety, chastity, modesty; unable to find any form ethereal enough, any expression luminous enough, in which to utter his thoughts on those noble subjects. But it is not association with Diderot that best explains in M. Joubert the birth and inoculation of certain ideas then new and bold—ideas that in raising and correcting he rendered truer. M. Joubert had his Diderot period in which he attempted everything; later, he made a choice. At all times, even early, he had nice discernment; taste he acquired afterwards. "Good judgment in literature," he said, "is a very slow-growing faculty, and it only attains the highest point of its growth very late." Arrived at maturity, M. Joubert still did Diderot the justice to say that his works contained many more *extravagances of style* than *extravagances of ideas.* He especially owed to Diderot awakening and initiation in regard to art and literature. But the ideas of literary reform, and of the regeneration of art, which with Diderot preserved something of the commonplace and prosaic, of the heady and bombastic, when taken up by so refined and gentle a mind, were illumined and purified, and clothed with an ideal character, which insensibly brought them near to Greek beauty; for M. Joubert was a Greek, an Athenian touched with the Socratic grace. "It seems to me," he said, "much more difficult to be a modern

than an ancient." He was particularly an ancient, in that he possessed calm and dispassionate feeling; he did not like effects to be forced or too strongly emphasised. He demanded a lively and gentle approbation, a certain inward perpetual joy, giving ease and flexibility to action and form, clearness, light, and transparency to expression. He made beauty consist chiefly in that—

"The Athenians were refined in mind and ear. They could not endure a word likely to displease, even if it was only spoken. It might be said that when writing they were always in good humour. In style they disapproved of the austerity which discloses difficult, harsh, gloomy, or severe morals."

He said again—

"The haughty Romans were hard of hearing, and had to be coaxed for a long time before they became desirous of listening to beautiful things. Thence the oratorical style to be found even in their most learned historians. The Greeks, on the contrary, were gifted with most perfect organs, easily put into play; they had only to be reached to be moved. The simplest ornament was sufficient for an elegant thought to please them, and in descriptions they were satisfied with actual truth. They rigidly observed the maxim, *Nothing in excess.* Much choice and clearness in thought, well-chosen and beautiful words of the right harmony, and lastly, the moderation necessary to prevent the keeping back of an impression, form the characteristics of their best literature."

On Pigalle and modern sculpture as opposed to ancient, on painting, we might quote thoughts of the same kind, whole pages which clearly show where he follows and where he differs from Diderot. Thus, about 1789, there was in France a man whose mind was already formed, aged thirty-five, eight years older than André Chénier, fourteen years older than Chateaubriand, who would have been quite prepared to understand them, to unite them, to stimulate them and give them width, to assist each in extending and perfecting his horizon. That was indeed the part M. Joubert played by the side of M. de Chateaubriand, whose acquaintance he made in 1800, after his return from London. M. de Chateaubriand, at that great period of his life (the great period for me is the literary period and stretches from *Atala*, through *René* and *The Martyrs*, to *The Last of the Abencerrages*), had a happiness very few poets attain: he met two friends, two critics distinguished from the rest, Fontanes and Joubert, expressly fitted to warn or guide him. We have usually but one guardian angel, he at that time had

two: Fontanes wholly protecting him, restraining him, at need defending him from all, covering him with his shield in the fight; Joubert, stimulating and inspiring him, encouraging him in an undertone, or murmuring gentle counsel with a charming contradiction. The best and most subtle criticism that exists on the early and great literary works of M. de Chateaubriand is to be found in *The Letters and Thoughts of M. Joubert.* This is not the place to examine and set forth the criticism; I shall, however, presently say something of it.

M. Joubert's life is entirely in his thoughts, but the little that there is to say of it would not be said if no mention was made of Madame de Beaumont. She was the daughter of the minister, M. de Montmorin, and escaping under the Terror the fate of the rest of her family, she was looked on kindly for the sake of her sorrow and her delicate appearance; and was one of those pathetic beings who glide into life, leaving behind them a track of light. M. Joubert, who was already married, spent part of the year at Villeneuve-sur-Yonne, met her in Burgundy at the door of a cottage in which she had sought shelter. He at once became attached to her; he loved her. He would have loved her with a more passionate feeling than that of friendship, could that exquisite soul have felt a deeper sentiment. Madame de Beaumont, still young, was of an infinite charm. Her mind was quick, solid, elevated; her figure slender and aerial. She had formerly known and liked André Chénier. Ruhlière had a seal engraved for her representing an oak, with the motto, "A breath moves me, but nothing can make me fall." The motto was apt, but the metaphor seems somewhat lofty. However that may be, the fragile and delicate outer covering, the *sensitive reed* that seemed to yield itself to the gentlest breeze, enclosed a strong and ardent soul, capable of passionate devotion. Suffering sorrow on account of her relatives, victim of an ill-assorted marriage, she cared little for life; mortally wounded, she felt it ebb, and hastened to be done with it. Waiting for death, her remarkable mind was prodigal and interested, happy in spreading a gentle feeling of approval around her. It has been said of Madame de Beaumont that she loved merit as others loved beauty. When M. de Chateaubriand arrived in Paris and was introduced to her, she immediately recognised merit under its most attractive form of poetry, and worshipped it. Next to his sister Lucile, it was the first great devotion that the figure of René called forth; later, it was to inspire more than one, but none of greater value. With what she inspired M. Joubert it would be difficult to define: it was an active, tender, perpetual

solicitude, without agitation or disturbance, full of warmth, full of light. The active mind, unable to move slowly, loved to fly and raise itself near her. He had, as he put it, a *chilly* mind; he liked it to be *fine* and *warm* around him. In her society he found calmness and warmth of affection, and derived strength from the indulgence of it. Since she cared nothing for life, he continually preached care and love to her; he wanted her to take up hope again.

"I am forced," he wrote to her, "to desire health for you, since I saw you. I know its importance, for I have none. . . . *It*, you say, *would be sooner ended.* Sooner, yes, but not soon. We are long a-dying, and if, brutally speaking, it is sometimes pleasanter to be dead, it is frightful to be centuries dying. Thus when we have life, we should love it: it is a duty."

He repeated that truth of morality and affection in every form. He wanted to moderate and lessen the energy that devoured her and exhausted her delicate frame. He wished to insinuate Madame de la Fayette's word of resignation, "It is enough to exist."

"Find, I implore you with clasped hands," he said to her, "repose in love, esteem, veneration. It is, I assure you, the only way at the present time of making few mistakes, of adopting few errors, of suffering few evils." "To live," he said again, "is to think and be conscious of one's soul; all the rest, drinking, eating, etc., although I do not think lightly of them, are merely aids to life, means of carrying it on. Were it possible to do without them, I should easily submit to it, and if my soul was left me I could do very well without a body."

He had a right to speak thus, he of whom it has been said that he was like a soul which met a body by chance, and came as little into contact with it as possible. He advised repose and inaction to his amiable friend; the only proceeding he found of use was to remain lying down for a long time *staring at the ceiling.*

"Your energy," he added, "is angry at such happiness; but let us see if your reason would not be of that opinion. Life is a duty; we must make a pleasure of it as far as we can, as of all other duties, and a half-pleasure when more is not possible. If the care of preserving it is the only one with which Heaven is pleased to charge us, we must bear it cheerfully and with as good a grace as possible; we must stir the sacred fire, warming ourselves at it as best we may till some one comes to tell us, *It is enough.*"

The tender advice was useless. Madame de Beaumont had

so little to bind her to life that it seemed only the want of will prevented her; she had only to wish it in order to live. Purest illusion! She was too truly struck down, and she herself had little to do to hasten her fate. In the summer of 1803 she determined to go to the baths of Mont Dore, and thence to go on to Rome, where she joined M. de Chateaubriand; soon after her arrival she died. It is necessary to read the letter written by M. Joubert during that journey to Rome. He did not believe she would go; he silently hoped she would give up so fatiguing and exhaustive a proceeding. The last letter he wrote her (October 12th, 1803) is full of agitated affection; a revelation, long pent up, but which he at last made himself, is to be discovered in it; he had never yet so clearly stated how much he loved her, how necessary she was to him.

"All my mind," he wrote, "has come back to me; it gives me many delights; but a discouraging reflection damps my joy. I no longer have you, and shall certainly not for a long time have you within my reach to listen to my thoughts. The pleasure I once had in talking is entirely gone. I have made a vow of silence: I remain here for the winter. My inner life will be spent wholly between heaven and myself. My soul will keep on its usual course, but all joy is gone from me.

"Farewell," he cried, in concluding, "farewell, cause of so many troubles, you who have so often been for me the source of so much good. Farewell! preserve yourself, take care of yourself, and some day return to us, if only to give me for one moment the inexpressible delight of seeing you again."

In the two preceding years (1800-1803) a small circle, which has often been spoken of, formed round Madame de Beaumont; it lasted only a short time, but it had life and activity, and deserves a place of its own in literary history. It was a time when the whole of society was being regenerated, and many *salons* offered exiled and homeless persons the much-desired pleasures of conversation and of the intellect. There were the philosophical and literary circles of Madame Suard, of Madame Houdetot, that of the Abbé Morellet (presided over by his niece, Madame Chéron); there, properly speaking, men of letters and philosophers held sway, direct continuators of the last century. There were the *salons* of society, properly so called, of a more varied and diverse composition, the *salon* of Madame de La Briche, that of Madame de Vergennes, in which her daughter, Madame de Remusat, was distinguished, that of Madame de Pastoret, of Madame de Staël when she was in Paris, and others besides, and of which each had its

dominant tone and its minute shades of difference. But in a corner of the Rue Neuve-du-Luxembourg, a *salon*, much less frequented, much less known, brought together a few intimate friends round a distinguished lady. Youth, the new ideas and the future, were to be found in that place. The persons who frequented it were M. de Chateaubriand, even his sister Lucile for one whole winter, M. Joubert, Fontanes, M. Molé, M. Pasquier, Chênedollé, M. Gueneau de Mussy, a M. Jullien, learned in English literature, Madame de Vintimille. Those formed the nucleus; others we could name only came occasionally. The great excitement which followed the 18th brumaire made itself felt more than elsewhere in that corner of society; it loved and adopted with joy all genius, every new development of talent; it delighted in it as in a magician. Imagination had again blossomed, and M. Joubert's saying, "Admiration has reappeared and rejoiced the saddened earth," might have been inscribed on the portal.

Happy meetings, perfect assemblies have here below but short duration. After losing Madame de Beaumont, M. Joubert continued to live and to think, but with less delight. He often spoke of her with Madame de Vintimille, the best friend she could have left; but nothing was ever again like the assembly of 1802, and at the end of the empire politics and affairs had loosened, if not dissolved, the ties between the chief friends. M. Joubert, lonely, living with his books, noting his thoughts on little scraps of paper not fastened together, would have died without leaving anything finished or lasting, had not one of the friends of the family, M. Paul Raynal, religiously gathered up the fragments, introduced a certain order into them, and, as it were, made of them a collection of precious gems. They form the volumes of which a second edition is now published.

Since I mentioned precious stones, let me say at once there are too many of them. Cowley, the poet, said: "We shall end by doubting that the milky way is composed of stars, there are so many of them!" There are too many stars in M. Joubert's firmament. We should like more spaces and more rest. "I am like Montaigne," he said, "unsuited for continuous speech. In everything it seems to me that intermediary ideas fail me or weary me." Had he taken the trouble to express those intermediary ideas, they would not probably have wearied us; on the contrary, reading them would have rested us. We perceive in him an effort often happy, but an effort all the same. "If," he said, "there was a man tortured by the cursed ambition of putting a book into a page, a page into a phrase, and a

phrase into a word, I am he." His method was always to give a thought in an image; the thought and the image were one for him, and he only believed he had grasped the one when he found the other. "It is not my phrase that I polish, but my idea. I wait until the drop of light I need is formed and falls from my pen." The thoughts are only drops of light; the mind's eye is at last dazzled. "I should like," he says again, perfectly describing himself, "I should like to make exquisite sense pass into good sense, and to make good sense exquisite." Good sense by itself wearied him; talent without good sense seemed to him justly contemptible: he wished to unite them, no small undertaking. "Oh! how difficult it is," he cried, "to be talented and sensible at the same time!" La Bruyère before him felt the same difficulty, and confessed it in the very beginning. "Everything has been said, and we are too late by more than seven thousand years of man's existence and thought." M. Joubert recognised the same thing: "All the things that are so easy to say well have been said to perfection; the rest is our business or our task: indeed a hard task!" I point out firstly the disadvantages and defects. Books of maxims and condensed moral observations, as was already that of La Bruyère, and as is especially that of M. Joubert, cannot be read continuously without fatigue. They are distilled spirit, fixed in its essence: much cannot be taken at a time.

The early chapters of the first volume are scarcely the most pleasing; they treat of God, of the creation, of eternity, and of many things besides. To the special difficulty of the subjects is added that which arises from the author's subtleties. Here it is not only Plato, but a stiff dose of St. Augustine, and without any connection of ideas. At some future time it will be decidedly an advantage to form one greatly reduced chapter of all the metaphysical chapters in which shall be put only the beautiful, simple, acceptable thoughts, rejecting all that are equivocal or enigmatical. In that way alone can M. Joubert's volumes be made not only a book for the library as now, but also (and with careful selection it would be easy) one of those beautiful little books he loved—a book that would wholly justify his motto: "Excel and you will live."

It is when he comes to speak of morals and of art, of antiquity and of the present, of poetry and of criticism, of style and of taste, it is on those subjects that he delights and charms us, that he seems to us to have added a new and notable part to the treasure amassed by the best of his predecessors. Taste, for him, is "the soul's literary conscience." Not

more than Montaigne does he like the *bookmaking* or *bookish* style, which smells of the ink, and is only produced pen in hand: "In our written language there must be voice, soul, space, grand style, words which exist of themselves and carry their place with them." The life he demands in the author, without which style exists only on paper, he also desires in the reader. Writers who have influence are only men who express perfectly what others think, and who awaken in the mind ideas and feelings that were ready to spring into being. Literatures have their origin in the depths of men's minds. Again, he who understood the ancients so well, the antiquity of Rome, of Greece, and of that of Louis XIV., does not ask of us the impossible; he bids us understand it, but not to return to it. As regards expression, he prefers sincerity to beauty, reality to pretence.

"*Truth* in style is an indispensable quality, and enough to recommend a writer. If we wished to write now on all sorts of subjects as men wrote in the time of Louis XIV., we should have no truth in style, because we no longer have the same temperaments, the same opinions, the same manners. . . . A woman who wished to write like Madame de Sévigné would be ridiculous, because she is not Madame de Sévigné. The more the style of the writing belongs to the character of the man, to the manners of the time, the more style must deviate from that of writers who are only models because they excelled in showing, in their works, either the manners of their epoch, or their own character. Good taste itself allows us, in that case, to deviate from better taste, for taste, even good taste, changes with manners."

If such is already the case with the style of the era of Louis XIV., how is it with that of antiquity, and can we hope to return to it? M. Joubert contented himself with desiring us to worship and tenderly regret what can never be again.

"In the luxury of our writings and our lives, let us at least have the love of and regret for the simplicity we no longer possess, which maybe can never again be ours. Drinking out of our golden goblets, let us remember the drinking-horns of old. Indeed, so that we may not become entirely corrupted, let us cherish what is of greater worth than ourselves, and in perishing, let us save from the wreck our taste and judgment."

What M. Joubert particularly asked of the moderns was not to dwell on their defects, not to turn to the side to which they inclined, not to throw themselves into it with all their strength. All that was ideal, and all that was sensual, bombastic, colossal,

trifling, was especially displeasing to him. For some years we have been very sensitive to what we call strength, power. Often, when I venture a critical remark on some man of talent of the day, I am met with "What does it matter? he has power." But what sort of power? M. Joubert shall reply for me. "Strength is not energy: some authors have more muscle than talent. Strength! I neither hate nor fear it; but, heaven be thanked, I see its emptiness. It is a quality only to be praised when it is concealed or enveloped. In the vulgar sense, Lucan had more than Plato, Brébœuf more than Racine." He says again, "Where there is no delicacy there is no literature. A work containing strength and a certain fire without brilliance merely reveals its character. The same sort of thing can be composed if nerves, bile, blood, and boldness are possessed." M. Joubert worshipped enthusiasm, but he distinguished it from explosion, even from animation, which is only the second quality in inspiration, and which *moves*, while the other *stirs*. "Boileau, Horace, Aristophanes, had animation; La Fontaine, Menander, and Virgil, the sweetest and most exquisite enthusiasm that ever man possessed." Enthusiasm in that sense may be defined as a sort of *exalted peace*. According to him, fine works do not intoxicate, but enchant. He exacted harmony and a certain pleasantness even in austere subjects; he entreated for charm everywhere, even in depth. "Charm must be carried into what is being examined and made to enter the dark caves that have only just been penetrated, the pure and ancient light of less cultivated ages, but more luminous than ours." The words *luminous* and *light* frequently recur and reveal the winged nature, friend of the sky and the heights. The brilliance he distinguished from luminousness holds no attraction for him. "It is good, it is beautiful for thoughts to shine, but they must not sparkle." What he rather desires in them is a lustre which he defines as a peaceful inward brightness, spread uniformly over and penetrating everything.

Much might be taken from M. Joubert's chapters on criticism and style, on criticism of various authors: there he was almost always new, bold, and true. At first sight he astonishes us; after some thought, he more often satisfies us. He possessed the art of making worn-out precepts appear fresh, regenerating them for the use of an age that only half cares for tradition. On that side he is an essentially modern critic. In spite of all his religions of antiquity and his regrets for the past, the impress of the time in which he lived is to be noted in him. He did not dislike a certain air of research, and saw in it

rather a misfortune than a fault. He went so far as to believe "that it is permissible to stray from simplicity when absolutely necessary for harmony, and when simplicity alone would not be beautiful." If he desired what was natural, it was exquisite not commonplace nature. Did he always attain it? He felt he was not free from some subtlety, and excused himself. "Often you cannot help passing through what is subtle to raise yourself up, and so reach the sublime, as if to reach heaven you must pass through the clouds." He often raised himself to the loftiest ideas, but never by following the high road; he knew of hidden by-ways. In fact, to sum up, his criticisms possess distinction and individual *humour*. He is a kindly humorist, who sometimes reminds us of Sterne, or rather of Charles Lamb. He had a way of saying nothing absolutely, nothing like any other man. That comes out clearly in his letters, and is, in the long run, fatiguing. In consequence of those qualities, M. Joubert is not a classical but a modern author, and it seems to me that it is by that title he has the right to give emphasis to good counsel, and to impress its mark on us.

I have sometimes asked myself what in French literature was the sensible, just, natural art of elegant and accurate prose composition, and it happened to me once in my life to have to lecture on it to some young people. What was I to do, in order neither to fall into a routine nor to risk novelty? I commenced simply with Pascal, by the thoughts on literature where the great writer put some of the observations he made on his own art; I read them aloud, commenting on them as I went along. Then I took the chapter of La Bruyère entitled "Works of the Mind." Next I passed on to Fénélon in his *Dialogues on Eloquence*, and his "Letter to the French Academy." I read them, running through them, choosing particular points, and always commenting on them by means of examples, and making use, at need, of living writers. Vauvenargues, in his *Thoughts and Literary Characters*, came next. I borrowed from Voltaire his articles on "Taste" and "Style" in the *Philosophical Dictionary*, his "Temple of Taste," and some passages from his letters in which he criticises Boileau, Racine, and Corneille. In order to extend the horizon a little, I added some remarks on the genius of Goethe, and on the taste of Coleridge. Marmontel, in his *Elements of Literature*, furnished me later with an article on "Style," an excellent piece. To crown the whole, I took care not to omit Buffon on the same subject. Then, the

classical circle ended, I gave my young people, as a sort of dessert, for recreation, as a little final debauch, and a debauch worthy of Pythagoras, M. Joubert! And my course of rhetoric was finished.

To sum up, if I would assign to M. Joubert his true character, he possessed all the fine qualities to be desired in a mind, but not all the power. He belonged to "those contemplative and difficult spirits that are continually distracted from their work by vast, distant views of *divine beauty* of which they want to put some image or emanation everywhere." In the effort they consume themselves. M. Joubert had the sentiment of perfection and finish in too high a degree. "To complete one's thought," he cried, "that is long, that is rare, it produces a supreme delight; for finished thoughts penetrate minds easily; to please, they need not even be beautiful, it is enough that they are perfect. The position of the soul that possessed them is communicated to other souls, and brings to them its calm." Sometimes the delight of completing a thought was his, but never that of joining them together and making of them a monument.

A philosopher of that time, himself a man of the highest intelligence, was in the habit of distinguishing three orders of minds.

The first, powerful and of fine quality, excelling as they understand the art; working out their conceptions, and attaining greatness, beauty, and truth; choice spirits among mortals!

The second, also of fine quality, feeling their idea superior to their execution, their intelligence greater than their talent, although it is very real. They quickly grow disheartened, disdain easy favours, and prefer to criticise, enjoy, and refrain, rather than fall below their ideal and themselves. If they write, it is only in fragments, for themselves alone, at long intervals and at rare moments; only an inward fulfilment falls to their lot, and it has few confidants.

Lastly, the third are those which, more powerful but of a less fine quality and more easily satisfied, create and expand without becoming greatly disheartened, either with themselves or their works; and it is fortunate they feel thus, for otherwise the world would run the risk of being deprived of many works that amuse and charm it, that console it for those greater ones that never come into being.

Is it necessary to say that M. Joubert, like M. Royer-Collard, belongs to the second order of minds, to those who look to the heights and produce within themselves?

It follows that the conversation of such men is superior to their writings, which offer but a very small part of themselves. I have been allowed to select a few characteristic specimens of M. Joubert's conversation from the papers of Chênedollé, who wrote them down directly he left him. Do we want to know how M. Joubert talked of M. de Chateaubriand and of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, while comparing their fine qualities? The past week has been entirely devoted to M. de Chateaubriand, and a great festival of eloquence was provided.[1] However, if I do not deceive myself and interpret rightly certain symptoms, the time is approaching when his great fame will have to withstand one of the general insurrections which, in the end, long monarchies, universal monarchies, never escape. What ought then to be done to uphold the just rights of his fame, is in good criticism, as in good warfare, to surrender at ease all the parts of the vast domain that are not really fine nor capable of being seriously defended, and to confine our attention to the parts that are truly superior and durable. The parts I consider really fine and unassailable are *René*, a few of the scenes in *Atala*, the tale of Endore, the description of the Roman Campagna, some fine pictures in the *Itinerary;* to those must be added a few political and polemical passages. This is what M. Joubert, thinking of *René*, *Paul and Virginia*, and *Atala*, said one February day in 1807, walking with Chênedollé in front of the colonnade of the Louvre :—

"M. de Saint-Pierre's work is like a marble statue, that of M. de Chateaubriand like a bronze statue cast by Lysippus. The style of the first is more polished, that of the second more coloured. Chateaubriand takes for subject heaven, earth, and hell ; Saint-Pierre chooses a very bright part of the earth. The style of the one has a fresher and younger appearance ; that of the other an older look : it seems to be of all time. Saint-Pierre seems to choose what is purest and richest in the language : Chateaubriand culls from everywhere, even from worthless literature, but he works a real transmutation, and his style resembles the famous metal which was formed in the fire of Corinth by the mixing together of all the other metals. One possesses a varied unity, the other a rich variety.

"Both are to be blamed. Saint-Pierre gave the subject a beauty that did not belong to it ; Chateaubriand gave an

[1] There was a great meeting at the French Academy on December 6th, for the reception of M. de Noailles, who took the place and spoke the praises of M. de Chateaubriand. M. Patin replied to him.

innocence to passion that it does not possess, or only possesses once. In *Atala* passion is covered with a long white veil.

"Saint-Pierre has only one line of beauty, which turns indefinitely and comes back on itself, or loses itself in graceful contours. Chateaubriand employs all the lines, even faulty ones, and makes use of the flaws in the truth of detail and in the pomp of the whole.

"Chateaubriand produced with fire; he melted all his thoughts in the fire of heaven.

"Bernardin wrote by the light of the moon, Chateaubriand by that of the sun."

After thoughts like those, well worthy of remembrance, I shall add nothing except to remark that when a new edition of M. Joubert is published, they ought to be included.

RABELAIS.

A WRITER, as yet little known, who, judging from his ideas, must be young, has just published a pleasant little book on Rabelais, whom he places in a sort of gallery of French legends. The word legend sufficiently indicates that the young author has not attempted to give an accurate, exact, and critical biography of Rabelais, and has welcomed the Rabelais of tradition, such as popular imagination has transformed him. Later on, when I have talked for a space with the master, and tried to refresh my memory of him, I shall say a word of the spirit in which the little pamphlet is written.

If only it could be accomplished, what would we not give to talk with Rabelais, to come for an instant into contact with him in his habit as he lived, to hear him? Every one has his ideal in the past. I believe the nature and bent of each mind would be best shown in the choice of the person first sought if we went back to a bygone age. Some, I know, would have no particular choice, but would wander indifferently from one to the other, or would not even go at all. Let us leave minds like those, wanting in love, passion, and desire; they are lukewarm spirits who lack the sacred fire of literature. I know others who would rush to many at one time, and, in their eagerness and affection, would embrace a crowd of favourite authors without knowing by whom to commence. Those minds are not indifferent like the others, they are not lukewarm; they are volatile, unsettled, and I fear we critics have something in common with them. But the wise and praiseworthy minds are those who have a decided taste in the past, an avowed preference; who would, for example, make straight for Molière without stopping even at Bossuet. They are those, in fact, who have the courage of their passion, and do not seek to disguise their highly-placed affection. At that price, were it possible to spend a whole day in the sixteenth century, and to talk every man with his author, to whom would you go?

Calvin, Rabelais, Amyot, and Montaigne are the four great prose writers of the sixteenth century; Rabelais and Montaigne

might rather be called two poets. I do not here include a number of secondary writers, worthy to be mentioned and saluted at their side. On the day which I suppose we might spend in the sixteenth century with our chosen author, I scarcely think at the present time Calvin would find many friends. Good Amyot, with his kindly old man's smile and his somewhat languid charms, would have some attraction for us. But all would flock to Montaigne,—all except a numerous and decided company who, while regretting the necessity of choosing between the two, would elect to pay their respects to Rabelais.

In the taste of certain persons for Rabelais and their worship of him, there is more even than admiration, there is the alert curiosity which belongs to a spice of the unknown and mysterious. We almost know in advance what Montaigne would be like; we picture him almost as he would appear at first view; but Rabelais, who knows him? Rabelais' life and true character have been much discussed. I believe, and every thoughtful reader will believe with me, that those who expected to find in him exactly the man of his book, a sort of jovial priest-physician, a half-drunken buffoon living like a fighting-cock, would be vastly disappointed. Rabelais' debauches were held entirely in his imagination and humour; they were studious debauches, debauches of a very learned man, full of good sense, who, pen in hand, gave himself up to them without restraint. I am none the less convinced, however, that after a very short time passed in intercourse with him, in associating with the man of science and the student—doubtless very good company for his time—the inimitable jester would as a matter of fact be very quickly discovered. It was impossible that the natural flow of such a vein could be restrained and not allowed to come out. The man's person, however noble in bearing, and however venerable its first aspect, would at times grow animated and rejoice in the thousand sallies of the inner genius, the irresistible good humour which frolics in his romance or rather in his drama. I say that of Rabelais as of Molière. The latter was not always gay and amusing, quite the contrary; he was called "the contemplative man"; when he was alone, he was even sad and melancholy. But it is certain that excited and urged to converse, he would again become the Molière we know. So doubtless would it be with Rabelais. There is a charming piece of Latin verse on Rabelais, physician and anatomist, by Étienne Dolet, the man who was burnt alive for the crime of heresy. In it Dolet makes a criminal, who had the honour of being dissected after his execution in the public amphitheatre

of Lyons, by Rabelais himself, and at any rate furnished the subject of a good lesson in anatomy, speak: "In vain did an adverse fortune desire to cover me with outrage and shame," said the criminal in Dolet's lines; "it was otherwise decreed. If I died in a disgraceful manner, there was a moment in which I gained more than any one would have dared to hope from great Jove's favour. Exposed in a public theatre, I was dissected: a learned physician describing me, explained to all how nature formed the human body with beauty, art, and perfect harmony. A numerous company surrounded me and contemplated all my parts, and, while listening to him, admired the wonders of the human structure." Truly, when Rabelais gave that public lecture on anatomy in the Lyons amphitheatre, he must, like Vesalius, have had the doctor's and master's venerable aspect of which some of his contemporaries have spoken, and must have worthily represented the dignity of science.

Son of a tavern-keeper or apothecary of Chinon, it is known that he began life as a monk and a Franciscan. The seriousness and elevation of his tastes, the natural and generous liberty of his inclinations soon rendered him, in that age of decadence, an unsuitable subject for a monastery of that order. He left, tried the Benedictines, a less contemptible order, but fared no better there; then he put off the regular monastical habit, and donned the costume of a secular priest. As we say, he threw his gown to the dogs, and went to study medicine at Montpellier. The little known with certainty of his actual and not legendary biography has been well put together and set forth in the thirty-second volume of Niceron's *Memoirs*. If the honest biographer represents Rabelais with slightly austere, or at any rate serious characteristics, and with much sobriety, he has the advantage of saying nothing problematical, and of being free from prejudice. There, the bulls Rabelais was clever enough to obtain from the Holy See during one of his voyages to Rome in Cardinal du Bellay's suite, by which he prudently set himself right with his enemies in France, may be seen. In a bull dated January 12, 1536, it is stated that he was permitted to practise the art of medicine everywhere, gratuitously however, and excluding the application of the knife and caustic; those sort of operations were forbidden to priests. But nothing was said of the pantagruelic books he had already written and was going to write; and never did Rabelais think it incumbent on him to forbid them to himself.

Nothing is less easy than to hit on the right way of speaking of those books, for Rabelais takes licences peculiarly his own, of

which the most enthusiastic critic cannot take the responsibility. When we want to read Rabelais aloud, even before men (before women it is impossible), we are always in the position of a man wishing to cross a vast open space full of mud and filth: every moment it is necessary to take a long stride, and to walk without getting rather dirty is difficult. Once a lady reproached Sterne for the nudities of his *Tristram Shandy*. At the moment a three-year-old child was playing on the floor and exhibiting himself in complete innocence. "Look," said Sterne, "my book is that three-year-old child who is rolling on the carpet." But with Rabelais the child has grown up; he is a man, a monk, a giant Gargantua, Pantagruel, or at any rate Panurge, and he still conceals nothing. Here there is no possibility of saying to the ladies: Look! And even when we are speaking in the company of men only, and are perfectly cool-headed, it is necessary to make a choice. I too shall choose. In M. Rabelais' first book, *Gargantua*, not perhaps the first according to date, but which is the most consistent, the most complete in itself, with a beginning, a middle, and an end, some admirable chapters are to be found, neither too serious nor too comic, where Rabelais' great powers of good sense are to be seen. I intend to speak of the chapters dealing with Gargantua's education. After all the extravagance of the beginning, the birth of Gargantua by the left ear, the marvellous description of his *layette*, the first signs he gives of his intelligence, and a certain very nonsensical answer he gives his father, in which he recognises with admiration his son's marvellous wit, a master is given him, a sophist in Latin learning. Then follows a very clever and striking satire on the bad education of that time. Gargantua was supposed to have been born in the latter half of the fifteenth century, and was first subjected to the scholastic and pedantic education, full of laborious and complicated puerilities, an education which seemed to be formed expressly for corrupting good and noble minds. However, his father Grandgousier perceived that his son studied hard, and yet grew more stupid every day. He was greatly astonished to learn from one of his friends, the Viceroy of some neighbouring country, that any young man who had only studied for two years under a good master, by means of a new method only just discovered, would know more than all the little prodigies of olden times, given to the care of masters "whose knowledge was nothing but brutishness." Gargantua is brought into the company of the young Endemon, a child of twelve, who addresses him with charm, politeness, and a noble modesty that in no way injures his facility. Gargantua found nothing to reply to all the

young page so amiably and encouragingly said to him, "but all the countenance he kept was that he fell to crying like a cow, and cast down his face, hiding it with his cap." The father was grievously vexed. In his rage he would have killed Maître Jobelin, the pedant who had furnished such a wretched education, but he contented himself with kicking him out of doors, and entrusting Gargantua to the charge of the tutor who had brought up Endemon so successfully, and whose name was Ponocrates.

Here we touch on one of the parts of Rabelais' book which contains much good sense, and up to a certain point a serious meaning. But I speak with reserve; because, while recognising the serious parts, it is necessary to be careful not to imagine and create them, as so many commentators have done—a proceeding that must give Rabelais plenty to laugh at, if he takes any heed of us in the shades. But in the present instance the meaning is not to be doubted. We saw the young Gargantua given up to the pedagogues of the old school, and the sad results of the wretched, methodical, pedantic, and brutalising education, the last legacy of the expiring middle ages. Ponocrates, on the contrary, is an innovation, a modern man, in accord with the true renaissance. He accepts the pupil, takes him away with him to Paris, and sets himself to form his manners and character.

And what merry tricks as they go along, what adventures by the way, and on entering Paris! What a welcome Gargantua receives from the Parisians, over curious and always loafing! Then in return he has to pay his footing! Read all those things, those miraculous, mischievous students' tricks, which make excellent scenes of comedy; I take refuge in the semi-serious parts.

Ponocrates begins by examining his pupil; he employs in advance Montaigne's method, who advises that "you should first trot out" the young mind before you, to judge its pace. For some time Ponocrates allows the young Gargantua to do as he had been accustomed, and Rabelais describes the routine of idleness, gluttony, and sloth, the result of a wrongly-directed early education. Let me briefly sum up the system. The young Gargantua already conducts himself like one of the most ignorant and gluttonous monks of that time, commencing his day late, sleeping far into the morning, taking a plentiful breakfast, hearing a number of masses which scarcely fatigue him, entirely given up to good living, sleep, and idleness. In reading the description, we thoroughly understand Rabelais' disgust for that ignoble life when he was a Franciscan!

It was high time to reform the vicious education; but

Ponocrates, like a wise man, did not make the change too sudden, "considering that nature does not endure sudden changes without great violence." The twenty-third and twenty-fourth chapters of the first book are truly admirable, and present the soundest and most far-reaching system of education imaginable, a better contrived system than that of the *Émile*, Montaigne-like, practical, formed for use, for developing the whole man, the physical as well as the mental faculties. At every turn we recognise the enlightened physician, physiologist, and philosopher.

Gargantua rises at about four in the morning; during his early toilet some chapter of the Holy Scriptures was read to him, aloud and clearly, in such a way as to direct his mind to the works and judgments of God from the morning. A few hygienic details follow, for the physician in Rabelais forgets nothing. Afterwards the tutor takes his pupil out, and they consider the face of the sky, if it was such as they had observed it the night before. He is made to note the differences of position, the changes of the constellations and stars, for with Rabelais the astronomer who had published almanacks was not less clever than the doctor, and he considered no science, no human or physical knowledge, irrelevant to his purpose.

In regard to physical knowledge of the heavens, education has advanced little since Rabelais. Although Newton came, and Arago led the way in his lectures at the observatory, ordinary instruction has not improved. We, who should be ashamed not to know geography and its chief divisions, need only lift our eyes to the sky to perceive that we scarcely know anything of the sublime cosmography. A few evenings with a professor would suffice to teach us. Ponocrates would have been ashamed for his pupil to be ignorant of so majestic and ordinary a spectacle.

After the lesson in the open air came lessons indoors, "three good hours of reading;" then games, ball, tennis, all that might be useful in "gallantly exercising their bodies, as before they had done their minds." According to Rabelais, such combination and accurate balance was what characterised real and complete education: in every prescription you find in him the physician, the man who understands the relation of the physical to the moral world, and who in everything consults nature.

At table, at what was then called dinner (and what we call luncheon), he only allowed his pupil to eat what was necessary to appease "the demands of the appetite;" he desired dinner, the early meal to be "sober and frugal," reserving him a more extensive

and plentiful supper. During the morning meal, in reference to the dishes, conversation turned on the virtue, propriety, and nature of the objects, the viands, herbs, and roots. Passages on these subjects from the ancients were talked of; at need books were fetched; without knowing it, the pupil becomes as learned as Pliny, "that in that time there was not a physician that knew half so much as he did."

After the repast came cards, to learn under that novel pretext a thousand pretty new tricks and inventions, all grounded upon arithmetic and numbers. Thus the young Gargantua, so to say, takes his mathematical instruction while amusing himself.

Digestion finished, after certain hygienic tasks I pass over in silence, but which Rabelais never left to the imagination, they recommence study for the second time, and seriously "for three hours or more." Afterwards, about two or three hours after midday, they leave the house in company of Squire Gymnast, and practise the art of riding and gymnastics. Under so accomplished a master, Gargantua profited boldly and usefully. He did not amuse himself by breaking his lance, "for it is the greatest foolishness in the world," observes Rabelais, "to say: 'I have broken ten lances at tilts or in fight;' a carpenter can do even as much; but it is a glorious and praiseworthy action with one lance to break and overthrow ten of his enemies." Do you not already perceive how good sense is substituted for a false point of honour, and how Rabelais, who does not believe in vainglory and swaggering, wants to reform the last of the Bayards? They were only too well reformed.

In describing the various exercises of riding, hunting, wrestling, and swimming, Rabelais amused himself. Master Gymnast's feats of strength became, under his pen, feats of strength of language. French prose also performed gymnastics, and the style became astounding in its copiousness, freedom, suppleness, suitability, and animation. Never before had language had such a glorious time of it.

It is, in fact, an admirable picture of an ideal education, and, reduced to proportions rather less than those of the giant Gargantua, almost all of it is serious. There is excess, exaggeration, assuredly, in the whole; but it is an exaggeration easily reduced to the truth and the correct sense of human nature. The new character of the education lies in the combination of play and study, in learning things by making use of them, in putting books and the things of life side by side, theory and practice, body and mind, gymnastics and music, as

with the Greeks, without, however, modelling ourselves on the past, but having regard continually to the present and future.

If the weather was rainy, the employment of the time was different, and the diet also varied. Taking less exercise in the open air on those days, he feeds more soberly. On those days the workshops and factories of different artificers, lapidaries, goldsmiths, alchemists, money-coiners, watchmakers, printers, not omitting the casting of great ordnance, then quite new, are more particularly visited, and everywhere they give them wine; they learn the different industries. It is to be remarked that Rabelais wants his royal pupil to examine and become acquainted with all useful arts, every modern invention, so that he may never find himself hindered or at a loss, like so many poor learned men who know nothing but books. An education *à la Ponocrates* reconciled the ancient and modern system. Perrault, Colbert's worthy clerk, would find nothing further to desire there, and Madame Dacier, the worshipper of Homer, would discover there all she liked best.

In the young Gargantua's course of education and study we have the first plan of what Montaigne, Charron, in places and parts the Port Royal School, the Christian school which did not recognise itself so strong in the same path as Rabelais, strange precursor! set forth with greater seriousness, but not with more good sense. We have in advance at one glance, and with brilliant genius, what Rousseau will expound later in *Émile*, reducing it to a system, and Bernardin de Saint-Pierre in his *Studies of Nature*, rendering it vapid.

Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, melancholy and a dreamer by choice, whose chaste and ideal genius seems to have little in common with Rabelais' mind, comprehended him marvellously on the serious side we have been describing, and in a memorable passage, not altogether chimerical, although giving a too uniform explanation, and too much embellished, said—

"It was all up with the happiness of nations, and even of religion, when two men of letters, Rabelais and Michel Cervantes, arose, one in France, the other in Spain, and shook the power of the monasteries and of chivalry. To overturn the two giants, they made use of no arms, but ridicule, the natural antithesis to human terror. [What more exact and happy explanation could you have?] Like children, the people laughed, and were reassured. The only incentives to happiness they possessed were those their princes liked to give them, had their princes been capable of giving them any. *Telemachus*

appeared, and the book reminded Europe of the harmonies of nature. It produced a great revolution in politics. . . ."

I do not dare to accept altogether the fashion of explaining modern history by ascribing its chief results to two or three names, to two or three books. In the intervals of *Gargantua*, *Don Quixote*, and *Telemachus* more things than seem to be dreamed of in Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's philosophy happened. There is truth, however, in regarding Rabelais, the untrammelled jester, as having, at the end of the terrors of the Middle Ages and the labyrinth of scholasticism, consoled and reassured the human race.

The system of education I admire in Rabelais, Montaigne, Charron, and some of their followers, had a great opportunity, when it was a question of emancipating the young, of freeing them from servile and oppressive methods, and of leading their minds into natural paths.

To realise that programme, even after three centuries, much progress has yet to be made. We should, however, bear in mind the new and, above all, pleasant modes of imparting knowledge to children was by means of a preceptor or tutor for each, and took no account of the inherent difficulties of public education nor of those difficulties which depend on the condition of society. Then, and in proportion as we advance in life, what fatigues, struggles, and pains we have to endure! It is no bad thing to have become early accustomed to them by education, and to have felt the consequences of things while young. An eighteenth century philosopher, wiser than Rousseau (Galiani), recommends two particular aims in education: to teach children to support injustice, and to endure *ennui*.

But Rabelais' purpose was merely to advance certain sensible and appropriate notions in a jest: do not demand more of him. His book contains everything, and each admirer can pride himself on discovering in it what best suits his own mind. But he also finds many comic, unreservedly diverting parts to justify to all Rabelais' renown and glory. The rest is disputable, equivocal, liable to controversy and commentary. To those parts candid readers will confess they find a difficulty in paying attention and in taking pleasure in them. What is indisputably admirable is the form of the language, the fulness and richness of the expressions, the abundant and inexhaustible flow of the eloquence. His French, in spite of his scoffs at the "latinisings" and "græcisings" of the time, is full of, almost crammed with, the ancient languages; but it is so from a kind of interior nourishment; it does not seem strange in him, and in his

mouth everything has the ease of naturalness, familiarity, and genius. With him, as with Aristophanes, although more rarely, pure, charming, lucid, and truly poetic passages may be distinguished. Here, for example, is one of those passages, full of grace and beauty. There is talk of studies and of the Muses who turn aside from love. In a dialogue between Venus and Cupid, Lucian made the goddess ask her son why he so greatly respected the Muses, and the boy replied much as Rabelais summed it up, expanded and embellished it in the following words :—

"I remember reading that Cupid, when asked sometimes by his mother why he did not attack the Muses, replied that he found them so beautiful, so innocent, so virtuous, so modest, and continually employed, one in contemplating the stars, another in reckoning numbers, another in measuring geometrical bodies, another in rhetorical invention, another in poetical composition, another in the disposition of music, that, approaching them, he unbent his bow, closed his case of arrows, and extinguished his torch for shame and fear of harming them. Then he tore the bandage from his eyes, in order to see them more easily and to listen to their charming songs and poetic odes. It gave him the greatest pleasure in the world. So much so he was often conscious of feeling quite enchanted by their beauty and grace, and was lulled to sleep by the sweet sounds of their harmony."

That is Rabelais when he remembered Lucian, or rather Plato.

No author is more admired than Rabelais ; but he is worshipped in two ways, and by two races, as it were, very different in intelligence and conduct. Some admire him less than they enjoy him ; they read him, understand him where they can, and console themselves for what they do not understand with the exquisite pieces they extract like marrow from a bone and take delight in. That is Montaigne's way of admiring Rabelais, who ranks him among books "merely amusing"; it is the way of the whole of the seventeenth century, of Racine and La Fontaine, who naïvely asked a doctor who was speaking to him of St. Augustine, if that great saint had as much wit as Rabelais. Another method of admiring Rabelais is in desiring to be a man of his party, of his set, to draw him to one side, to prove him, as Ginguené did in a pamphlet, one of the harbingers and apostles of the revolution of 1789, and of those which are still to come. The latter way, which prides itself on being more philosophical and logical, seems to me much less Rabelaisian.

The young author of the pamphlet I mentioned at the

beginning, M. Eugène Noël, somewhat favours the latter method, applying it, however, according to the ideas and views of our time—that is to say, in still further exaggerating it. He thus systematically spoils an otherwise valuable study, which implies a great deal of reading, and a fairly intimate knowledge of his subject. M. Michelet, carrying on at a distance of three centuries the war against mediæval times, a period, in his belief, still fraught with danger to us, once began one of his lectures at the Collège de France in these words: "God resembles a mother who wishes her children to be strong and proud, and to oppose her; his favourites also are the strong, indomitable natures which wrestle with him like Jacob, the strongest and most cunning of shepherds. Voltaire and Rabelais are his chosen elect." M. Michelet's Rabelais, who wrestles with God to give him pleasure, is a little like M. Eugène Noël's Rabelais. "He rescued," says the biographer, "the men of his time from the darkness and terrible fasts of the old world. . . . His book almost paternal answers the cry of universal thirst of the sixteenth century: 'Drink for the people!' . . . The great river of the papal church of which the middle ages had drunk for so long was exhausted: Drink! drink! was the universal cry; that was also Gargantua's first word." That is an allegorical thirst for a new explanation of which commentators have not yet thought. Every age has its hobby; and his, which does not jest, has the humanitarian craze, and thinks to do great honour to Rabelais by attributing it to him.

I fancy when we try to explain Rabelais according to our own ideas, he permits it merely to have a laugh over it. He might well be astonished to find that under legendary form he is an apostle, saint, what shall I say? a future Christ of the Evangel. Speaking of the manner in which he performed his duties as priest at Meudon, and persisting in the symbolical mode of explanation, the new biographer writes—

"How I should have liked to hear him! How I should have liked on a fine Easter day to assist him at his mass, to contemplate his majestic and serene face, while, hearing sung around him, 'Quemadmodum desiderat cervus ad fontes aquarum,' he remembered with a divine smile of satisfaction the infinite thirst of his Pantagruel!"

In concluding, let us return to common sense and moderation; Voltaire will help us. When young he cared very little for Rabelais. He relates how one day the regent, the Duc d'Orléans, leaving the opera in conversation with him, began a great eulogy of Rabelais. "I took him for a prince in bad

company," he said, "whose taste was spoiled. At that time I had a supreme contempt for Rabelais." In his *Philosophical Letters* he spoke very slightingly of him, putting him below Swift, which is not just. "He is a drunken philosopher," he concluded, "who only wrote when he was drunk." But five-and-twenty years later, in writing to Madame du Deffand, he made him reparation.

"After Clarissa Harlowe, I read over again some chapters of Rabelais, such as the fight of Friar John des Entommeures and Picrochole's council of war. I know them, indeed, almost by heart, but I read them with the greatest pleasure, because they are the most vivid descriptions in the world. It is not that I regard Rabelais as equal to Horace. . . . Rabelais, when he is in good humour, is the best of good buffoons: two of the craft are not wanted in a nation, but there must be one. I repent that I formerly spoke ill of him."

Yes, Rabelais is a buffoon, but an unique buffoon, an Homeric buffoon! Voltaire's latest opinion will remain that of all men of sense and taste, of those who do not possess a decided inclination and particular predilection for Rabelais. But for the rest, for the true amateur, for the real pantagruelist devotees, Rabelais is something very different. At the bottom of Master François's cask, even in the dregs, there is a flavour not to be explained, that they prefer to everything. If we are permitted to have an opinion on so serious a subject, we believe that what we most enjoy in him in his best places with a certain mystery of debauch, is to be found in the same quality and without concealment in Molière.

I have sometimes asked myself what Molière, learned, a physician, enveloped in Greek and Latin, would have been like. Molière, physician (imagine such a miracle) and priest after having been a monk; Molière, born at a period when every independent thinker had to preserve himself from the stakes of Geneva as from those of the Sorbonne; Molière, without a theatre, and forced to hide his splendid comedy in torrents of absurdities, burlesque rhapsodies, and drunken gossip, to safeguard, at every hour, the jest which touches society to the quick, by laughing without cause, and it seems to me we should get something very like Rabelais. However, he will always possess in himself the singular attraction which attaches us to a difficulty overcome, to a freemasonry both bacchic and learned, of which, in loving him, we feel ourselves a part. In a word, there is in pure pantagruelism an air of initiation which always pleases us.

MADAME DE GENLIS.

Among the names of a past generation, that of Madame de Genlis is most frequently mentioned, most familiar to the ear; yet it seems to me that it leaves no very clear idea in the minds of later generations. Something equivocal and ill defined belonged to her reputation. The diversity of her works, and of her manner of life, the politics in which she was concerned, the satires, the perfidious accusations which pursued her, and which maybe more than once she allowed herself in her turn, did not even in her lifetime tend to give her a distinct physiognomy for those who had not known her intimately. Now that at some distance it is permissible to separate and bring out her characteristics more distinctly, even bluntly, I shall endeavour to reproduce my impressions while examining the principal works of this authoress, for it would be a bold man who maintained he had read them all.

Madame de Genlis was above everything an authoress; nature seemed to have created her one, as if the type was henceforth one of the essential functions of civilisation and life: had the inkstand been uninvented, Madame de Genlis would certainly have invented it. But while, like so many others, and in a greater degree than any other, she was an authoress, she was distinguished by her own peculiar manner of being so. Agreeable and brilliant in her youth, she did not confine herself to a single taste, a single talent; she wooed all, and actually possessed some. All those tastes, varied talents, accomplishments, and handicrafts (for she did not omit handicrafts) made her a walking encyclopædia which bid fair to be the rival and antagonist of the other encyclopædia; but a talent for comprehending, ordering and applying them in a certain fixed method, gave life and soul to that multitude of employments. Madame de Genlis was more than an authoress, she was a preceptress; she was born with the mark on her forehead. The good God said to some, *Sing;* to others, *Preach.* To her He said, "Instruct and teach." The word of the Apostle, *Docere autem mulieri non permitto* —"I do not allow a woman to teach," said St. Paul to Timothy—never received a more positive denial. So early was her talent

powerful and irresistible, that, even had she wished it, Madame de Genlis was not free to obey this injunction. Even in childhood she manifested an instinct and enthusiasm for *pedagogy*, using that word in its higher signification. It had been ordained at her birth that she was to be the most attractive and agreeable of pedagogues.

Proof of this is to be found in her voluminous memoirs, where, doubtless desiring to gloss over and dissimulate some things, she brought to light others. After all, if the features of her character are clearly set forth, what does this or that circumstance of her life matter? Madame de Genlis (Mdlle. Félicité Du Crest de Saint-Aubin), born January 25, 1746, of a noble family of Burgundy, passed her early years partly in Paris, more often in the country. Received Canoness at the noble Chapter of Alix, near Lyons, at the age of six, she was called the Countess of Lancy, from the town of Bourbon-Lancy, of which her father was lord. Brought up in the château of Saint-Aubin, under her mother's wing, with a governess who was a good musician, she commenced by reading *Clélie* and some plays. Directly she knew anything, her first desire was to impart it, and to become a schoolmistress; she took her scholars where she could. At the age of seven, having espied from a terrace adjoining her room some little urchins who came to cut rushes near a pond, she took it into her head to teach them what she knew, the catechism, a few lines of the wretched tragedies of a Mdlle. Barbier, and music. From the top of the terrace, as from a balcony, she gave her lessons with all the seriousness in the world. So will she be till the end of her days, always feeling the need of having some one near her to rule, to *instruct*, —little peasants for want of better, or even a dairy-maid's daughter. To her, a child of ten, she once wished to teach the harp; but the harp was too difficult, and at the end of six months the mistress perceived that the child was getting crooked; seeing this she made her figure straight again by means of stays and a piece of lead procured from Paris. In this case then, in default of the harp, Madame de Genlis practised orthopædy; provided she played the tutor, set something right, or performed some act of instruction, what did it matter to her? To that end, she derived advantage from everything. Later on, in writing, she lost no opportunity of placing a precept, a receipt, whether in morals or medicine.

Such a turn of mind would seem to indicate austere tastes; but it was excellently able to combine itself with romantic tastes: that makes another of the most important features of

Madame de Genlis's character. The child who commenced by reading *Clélie*, and always remembered it, was acting from her earliest years, and henceforth in her imagination, everything, even instruction, took of its own accord the form of comedy and the theatre. Madame de Genlis's mother, who wrote verses both good and bad (*facility* was the chief gift of all that family), had composed a comic opera that was played at Saint-Aubin; the young Countess of Lancy (the future Genlis) played the part of Cupid.

"I shall never forget," she said, "that in the Prologue my Cupid's dress was pink, covered with point-lace sprinkled all over with little artificial flowers of different colours; it reached down to my knees; I had little boots of straw colour and silver, my long hair fell upon my shoulders, and I had blue wings."

She played so well and was so great a success that she wore this Cupid's dress for months. She used to walk abroad in it. Only on Sundays, to go to church, her wings were taken off. Thus was she artificial and false working days as well as Sundays. From that time she became accustomed to *romance* about everything, and never in anything to seek the truth. Later, having played the part of a man in a drama of La Chaussée, she abandoned her Cupid's dress, but merely because a charming male costume had been provided for her—a costume she did not give up until she left Burgundy. We see she only relinquished one disguise to don another, and that with her nature is ever masked and travestied. Those early impressions left lasting traces on an imagination which had not enough originality and vigour to repulse and remedy them; up to a certain point they passed into her system of education, which usually contained a mixture of travesty and the theatre. The complacency with which in her old age she used to describe those romantic puerilities, seeming to smile at them, proved on the contrary that she was never cured of them.

Heaven be thanked, we are not writing her life; that would be too delicate, too dangerous a task. Arrived at Paris to settle there, about the age of twelve or thirteen (1758), after a reverse of fortune, she came forward as a little prodigy and a rare virtuoso: the bagpipes, harpsichord, viol, mandolin, guitar, she played all wonderfully, but the harp was her instrument by preference. The method of playing it was still in its infancy: Madame de Genlis, with her natural facility and skill, reformed and perfected the method of execution. From that time we see her endowed with that methodical activity which did not allow a moment to escape without demanding tribute of it, and turned

everything to account for the purposes of study, acquisition, and a superficial extent of knowledge. Works of the hand and head, recitation by heart of verse and prose, the registering of every anecdote and adventure of society, from which she soon drew a comedy or tale, seven or eight hours of the harp a day, she sufficed for everything, even to please and charm the circles that admired her. Whatever opinion may be definitely preserved of her, it will be agreed that at that age she must have been an attractive child: her defects were not apparent as such until later; youth excused everything, and since with Madame de Genlis we are half in mythology, I shall say: Youth lends our faults wings which prevents them making themselves too perceptible and important.

She married the Count de Genlis, the Sillery who was afterwards guillotined with the Girondins; he seems to have been an intelligent and amiable man. Marriage did not interrupt Madame de Genlis's studies; it only extended and varied them. At the château of Genlis, where she passed a season, she always found time to act, to make music, to write a *Journal* of all that happened or was said at the château, to read Pascal, Corneille, and Madame de Sévigné, to take up her anatomical studies again with a surgeon of the neighbourhood (she was already acquainted with anatomy), and, what is more, to learn to bleed. She practised medicine among the villagers, Tissot's book in one hand and a lancet in the other, to bleed any peasant who presented himself: as after each bleeding she gave them thirty sous, patients were not wanting. Such multifarious cares were far from entirely absorbing her: she rode with a soldier of fortune who chanced to be in the neighbourhood, and became a very skilful horsewoman; she took part in fatiguing boar-hunts and had many narrow escapes. It will be thought I am not serious, but let her speak for herself; people are never better described than by themselves when once they speak and write much.

"This new passion," said she of her taste for horse exercise, "does not cause me to neglect either music or study. M. de Sauvigny [*an intelligent and not too mediocre man of letters of that time*] guided me in my reading. I made extracts. I found in the pantry a big folio book intended for the kitchen accounts; I took possession of it, and wrote down in it a detailed *Journal* of my doings and reflections, intending to give it to my mother when it was completed. I wrote a few lines in it every day, and sometimes whole pages. Neglecting no sort of instruction, I endeavoured to gain some insight into field labour

and gardening; I went to see cider made; I also visited all the workmen of the village at work, the carpenter, the weaver, the basket-maker, etc. I learned to play at billiards and several games of cards, piquet, reversis, etc. M. de Genlis drew capitally, in pen and ink, figures and landscapes. I commenced drawing and flower-painting. I wrote many letters: to my mother every day, to Madame de Montesson three times a week, to Madame de Bellevan occasionally, and to Madame de Balincour fairly often. Besides, I carried on a constant correspondence with a lady I had met at ——," etc., etc.

Oh! I stop; it is clear I did not exaggerate. No one was more decidedly a writer than Madame de Genlis; she stands for the type of the race, but with nothing exclusive; the inkstand is only one of her tools. She knows how to do everything, and how everything is done; she understands cider as well as the harp. She wanted to do everything well, and to be called, like Gil Blas, "an universal genius." She never possessed that *modesty in knowledge* which Fénélon recommended to women; he would have had it as ardent and delicate in them, and in as great a degree, as the other kinds of modesty. But note carefully that all she then learnt she imparted later to others, for if she had a passion for learning, she had a rage for teaching.

Of this encyclopædic mania which always possessed her, and only increased with years, one of her witty friends said: "She is reserving for her old age the task of re-writing the *Encyclopædia*."

Meanwhile a young married woman, and hardly certain of becoming a mother, she quickly wrote a book entitled *Reflections of a Mother of Twenty Years of Age*, although she was only nineteen. The manuscript is lost; but she never lost the habit of turning everything she came across into a book, novel, or lesson. Everything was material for writing or composing a treatise.

Grace, elegance of manner, social affability, worldly discernment of character, and the talent of ingratiating herself into favour, a general air of *sentiment* which palliated and hid her pedantry, were her charms in youth. When she went to the Palais-Royal as one of the ladies-in-waiting to the Duchess of Chartres (mother of Louis-Philippe), she had a great success; excited admiration and envy, and became a sort of centre. She was soon bound to the young and facile princess by real affection, and it was decided between them that she should become the governess of her daughters, and (contrary to custom) their

governess from the cradle. After some years spent at the Palais-Royal, Madame de Genlis, aged thirty-one (1777), retired with a sort of brilliant reputation; she solemnly left off rouge, a great sign at that period, and went to live at the convent of Belle-Chasse, in a little pavilion built for her, and installed herself there with her pupils. But her circumstances were not perfect until some time after the Duc de Chartres, equally fascinated by her, conferred on her the functions and title of *governor* to his sons. That was a great moment in Madame de Genlis's life. "I see," said she, "the possibility of an extraordinary and glorious thing, and I hope it may come to pass." In that exclamation, even in the joy of the governor, the *romancer* is recognised. Madame de Genlis had found her ideal. At last she had arrived at the culmination of her most earnest desires, and she was to be perfectly happy in the fulness of her vocation. She was to educate, according to her lights, not only young girls, but young men and princes, one of whom became a king. Here it is really interesting to observe her, and we must render her the justice she deserves.

We should fail in completeness if we did not mention the epigrams which, from that time, began to be pointed at her. The greater number are unsuitable for reproduction, but there are some it is not forbidden to recall. Imagine that, at that epoch, by a sort of attraction that drew the first of formalists to the first of pedants, La Harpe fell in love with her: it is to believe in the influence of the stars. Madame de Genlis assures us that the little man attempted to be bold, but that she knew how to keep him in his place. Those are things we must always believe of women, even when they make no mention of them; when they do, with much more reason. In his correspondence of that time, he speaks of Madame de Genlis as "perhaps the most intelligent woman in Paris." He has not praises enough to bestow on the little society or education plays which Madame de Genlis wrote at that period and had played by her own daughters: they were little moral comedies, without a male character or a love intrigue. La Harpe, for whom prose was not enough to express his enthusiasm, exclaimed in verse—

"Thine art, beautiful Genlis, surpassing ours,—Makes only one sex to speak, and charms both. . . .—What an enchanting whole! what a delightful spectacle!—My heart is still full of the purest emotion. . . . —Worthy mother, rejoice in those delights.—Thy soul and talents, they are thy just rights!—In thee alone at this time is adored—The author, the work and the actresses!"

This shows how far the titulary critic, the man of taste of that period, was carried away by his passion. As may well be thought, the critic's detractors and enemies, those who were envious of the genius of the *governor*, made merry over it; couplets were unfailing, and the name La Harpe, singularly in keeping with Madame de Genlis's celebrated talent for the harp, lent itself to all sorts of puns.

However, La Harpe paid dearly for this short favour; he fell out with Madame de Genlis, who, under the name of Damoville, put him into a satirical tale where she attacked all the philosophical men of letters of the day, and revenged herself on the Academy, which had not crowned any of her works. It was her ordinary practice to transfer the people with whom she quarrelled to her books.

On one occasion Madame de Genlis took part with her pupils in a representation of the *Femmes Savantes* at the Théâtre Français. Hearing the two lines, "They wish to write, become authors,—And rather in this place than in any other place in the world," it is said that all the people, looking the while at her, began to applaud.

Let us return to serious things, and with the multitude of works, treatises, romances, making not less than a hundred volumes, before us, attempt to elucidate and simplify our point of view. In Madame de Genlis, the writer, *four* epochs may be noted. She lived eighty-four years, long enough to see her pupil, Louis-Philippe, king; she died at the end of October, 1830.

1. Her early works, published under Louis XVI. before 1789, relate directly to education. The *Théâtre d'Education*, properly so called (1779); *Adèle et Théodore* (1782); *Les Veillées du Château* (1784), etc., etc. These works, distinguished by facile charm, by intelligent observation and description of society, by a flowing and clear style, by minute setting forth of detail, are more or less spoiled by romanticism, false sentimentality, and theatrical pomp; in their first form they have served their time. Henceforth they can only be re-introduced into education if they undergo revision and correction.

2. When the revolution of 1789 declared itself, Madame de Genlis was not at first against it; she followed or perhaps even stirred up the ambition of the Duke of Orleans, and openly quarrelled with the Duchess. She published, in the constitutional sense, *Conseils sur l'Education du Dauphin*, and did not fear to print a part of the confidential journals which related to the education of the Orleans children, under the title

of *Leçons d'une Gouvernante* (1791), seasoning it with patriotic reflections according to the order of the day. I shall return later to these *Leçons*, in which the childhood and youth of King Louis-Philippe and his sister is recorded to the life.

3. After her departure from France and her travels abroad, Madame de Genlis returned at the time of the Consulate, and published from 1802 to 1813 several works which display her sentimental and romantic rather than her pedagogic vein, some of which had a real success. The *Souvenirs de Félicie*, an early and charming sketch, which she spun out later in her inexhaustible *Memoirs;* a novel which is regarded as her masterpiece, *Mademoiselle de Clermont;* and some historical romances, the *Duchesse de la Vallière*, *Madame de Maintenon*, *Mademoiselle de La Fayette*. This was her best period.

4. Even under the Restoration Madame de Genlis did not discontinue writing; but her writings of that time, the too facile productions of a pen that could never keep itself in bounds, and abandoned itself more than ever to frequent repetitions, reproduce, while exaggerating them, the defects of her mind and style. Her usual elegance of form no longer conceals the insipidity of the groundwork, and a few intelligent observations scarcely float on the sea of words. Add to this that she became more and more a "mother of the Church," and set up for an inveterate enemy of Voltaire.

To be just to Madame de Genlis it is necessary to draw a line and only examine her chief works. I shall therefore say something of the education of Louis-Philippe and the novel *Mademoiselle de Clermont*—that is to say, what Madame de Genlis has done best in history and romance.

The manner in which, from the first day, she conceived and directed the education of the Orleans children is very remarkable, and proves a more practical sense of reality in the teacher than her books alone seem to indicate. Without delay she put them into living languages, ordinary subjects of knowledge, things of the body and mind, taking all concurrently. For instance, in summer at Saint-Leu, each of her pupils had a little garden which they cultivated themselves, and the gardener who taught them spoke only German. But if they gardened in *German*, they dined in *English*, supped in *Italian*, and French filled up the intervals well enough. A botanist accompanied the young princes on their walks to teach them about plants. A Pole, a skilful artist, painted for them sacred and ancient history, together with that of China and Japan; the historical pictures made a *magic lantern* amusing as well as instructive.

Unable to deprive herself of her taste for the theatre, she made them act and represent in the garden, where artificial decorations were mingled with nature, the principal scenes of Abbé Prévost's *Histoires des Voyages*, abridged by La Harpe, and all sorts of historical and mythological subjects. She also invented for them a series of gymnastic exercises then unknown—exercises with *pulleys*, *baskets carried on the back*, *plank beds*, and *leaden soles;* later she could with good reason congratulate herself that she had taught her principal pupil "to wait on himself, to sleep habitually on a plank bed covered with a simple esparto mat; to brave sun, rain, and cold; to accustom himself to fatigue, daily taking violent exercise and a walk of four or five leagues in leaden-soled boots." In short, in this part of her career she proved herself ingenious, inventive, full of animation and fitness; she had discovered the plenitude of her work and genius.

She ruled several pupils at once—M. de Valois (Louis-Philippe), his brothers, M. de Montpensier and M. de Beaujolais, and their sister (Madame Adelaïde); she added to them a nephew and niece of her own, without counting the adopted daughter, the celebrated and interesting *Pamela*, whose romantic name was Madame de Genlis's choice. It is curious to see her opinion of the intelligence of the future king, then aged eight, who remained under her tuition till seventeen: "He had natural good sense which struck me from the first; he loved reason as all other children love frivolous tales." Add to that a sense of order and an astonishing memory. The notes of the Journal of education show further that M. de Montpensier had more natural distinction, more refinement, and that he found his elder brother took things a little too easily; he himself explained this to him more than once with the familiarity of a comrade and a brother. To obtain a true portrait of Louis-Philippe we should study him during the period of his early education, and also in the extract from the Journal relating to him published (1790-91), which forms its natural continuation. He is there described exactly as he proved himself on the throne. M. de Valois, as he was then called, showed in nothing the best part of the old Valois, the supreme distinction in taste, not always in harmony with good sense and practical knowledge of life. He learned everything, retained everything, reasoned well about everything; but he is not of those who have a natural feeling for music, poetry, the higher arts, and the higher literature. Since through the care of his indefatigable governor he had sufficiently seen, handled, and practised them in early life, he had,

however, no small acquaintance with them. "I could do as much," he might have said of almost every production of that kind offered for his consideration. In fact, she had from childhood made him learn and manipulate so many diverse things, that there was scarcely any branch of knowledge or art in which he did not believe himself skilful and capable enough to teach every one on occasion: perhaps for a king he allowed this to be too much in evidence.

I have no right to express a personal opinion on a prince whom the fickleness of the French is, after having overthrown him for the moment, in the act of extolling and glorifying; but I know that one day, during five short minutes, three academicians were introduced into his presence, and he found means to tell them the date of the Cruscan Academy, which none of the three knew; and he was not sorry to be able to tell it. Madame de Genlis's former pupil may there be recognised.

Here I touched on one of the slight disadvantages of a too full and too crowded system of education. Another disadvantage was the not leaving to the young minds who were its subjects an instant of leisure for dreaming, for free development, for bringing to the light an original idea, a natural flower desiring to be born.

There is yet another disadvantage in this education, so entirely modern and so wanting in balance: the feeling for antiquity, the moral and literary genius which does it honour, the high ideal it supposes, is entirely wanting, and does not seem to be even suspected. Oh! it was not so with education *à la Ponocrates*, with education *à la Rabelais* (with all due deference to those whom it may displease!), of which I spoke the other day, which embraced the two ends of art and human admiration!

But the advantages were positive and real, and adversity did not fail to prove them. Madame de Genlis may be blamed for her conduct in the revolution, for the intrigues in which she was implicated, which she has vainly attempted to palliate in her faithless apologies; but her ardent affection, in some degree her maternal love for her pupils, for Mademoiselle d'Orléans in particular (Madame Adelaïde), whom she took with her into Switzerland in 1793, and from whom she only parted at the last extremity, cannot be disputed. At that time the young Duke of Orleans began to wean himself from absolute submission to his *governor's* ideas. His sensible mind, given up to itself, was emancipated by the light of experience; he gave his opinion of the clever and crafty woman who was so

much mixed up in the misfortunes of his house. Some curious letters of Madame de Flahaut, written from Bremgarten, in Switzerland (January and February 1795), testify to the truth of the prince's sentiments at that time, and to the sudden vivacity of his first reaction against Madame de Genlis.[1] The irritation calmed down later. However, the impress of such an education survived everything; and to really know Louis-Philippe, the man in the component qualities of his mind and nature, it is, I repeat, necessary to go back to the beginning, and see him under the long governorship of Madame de Genlis. She truly nourished and formed him; she early judged him correctly, and in that early opinion all the qualities and limits the life of the prince afterwards showed are to be found and foretold. He was indeed the man and king his temperament of that time and an education so unusual for a prince revealed.

In looking through Madame de Genlis's works, it seems to me that Louis-Philippe is her true historical side, the only one on which she will continue to deserve serious attention. I shall say a few words about her literary works, although at the present time it is not easy to know on which to fix. To be brief, let us decide in favour of her masterpiece.

Mademoiselle de Clermont, a short tale published in 1802, ranks as her best work: for a long time I liked to think it so, but I have just read it over again, and cannot help recognising that what is agreeable and *partly good* in it, is now entirely out of date. Regretfully I invite those who doubt the justice of my impression to examine its truth for themselves. The first pages are happily conceived; but the lively action of the beginning is not sustained and soon turns to commonplace, an obvious though graceful lack of truth, an elegant falseness. The author prides herself above all on being true; here truth is only one more sentimental phrase. Mademoiselle de Clermont, a grand-daughter of the great Condé, honours and loves a simple gentleman, the Duc de Melun, and ends by secretly marrying him: as a princess, she must make the advances, and the situation is fairly well drawn. However, everything reminds us that we are in an imaginary world: the men and women are moved for nothing; their knees bend, they sigh, they hesitate without the least cause; lavish emotion is only in words. The terms *sentiment*, *sensibility*, *tenderness*, which occur on every page, in reality spring neither from situations nor hearts. The *petition* which Mademoiselle de Clermont forgets on account of a ball from which M. de Melun draws

[1] See the *Memoirs of Governor Morris*, vol. i.

so great a lesson, an important affair which forms as it were the nucleus of the action, is introduced in the style of Bouilly or of Berguin. The last scene promised well: Mademoiselle de Clermont declared she wished at all risks to make her way to M. de Melun, wounded and dying; but it is spoiled because the princess allows herself to be dissuaded from her purposes, and she does not again see the man she loves. In this little romance, as in all by the author, the narrative follows with the greatest ease, but it is nowhere relieved by vivacity of expression. Expressions possessing novelty and freshness are very rare with Madame de Genlis, and, except in her society portraits, where she was assisted by the fidelity of her memory, are hardly to be found. It has been very justly said of her style as it was said of an actress who played with more judiciousness than animation: "She is always good, never better."

It would be useless to dwell on an opinion which has gradually become that of all the world. Madame de Genlis, an old woman, as she appeared in society after her return to France, exhibited agreeableness and amiability but in a small coterie. Her energy of mind had not become weak. Her day, invariably mapped out and filled up at every moment as in her youth, commenced with a few scales on the harp, and was then with persistent activity divided among a thousand employments. She still liked to have about her pupils and *protégés*, persons of whom she became extremely fond: her prejudice ruled her judgment in everything and prompted her manner of thought and speech. Her only horizon was one of society and coterie. Very prepossessing, very attractive when she liked, knowing the strength and weakness of all, skilful in throwing her nets over you, she became cold and indifferent directly you did not respond in the same tone to her expansive demonstrations. Of an infinite charm when she liked people, she could be almost cruel when she did not care for them. It is said that her ordinary conversation was most pleasing without striking characteristics or brilliant flashes, but abounding in amusing anecdotes and of a lively fluency. What she lacked was elevation of soul and talent—that is, truth and nature: otherwise she possessed the social elegance, tact, and charm.

Taking her for all in all, it is seen that with much intelligence and talent she was in no way a superior woman. Her most real claim to originality consists in her talent for and her intense delight in pedagogy, carried almost to a mania, which procured her many epigrams, but at least made her unlike the rest.

Chénier, in his delightful satire, *Les Nouveaux Saints*, rallied her on that schoolmistress temperament, and overwhelmed her with her most striking and sharply-defined characteristics: "I come from Altona to teach you to read;" and all that follows. It is, however, by this side alone that Madame de Genlis has a chance of being remembered. The lack of harmony between her conduct and the principles set forth in her writings only serves, perhaps, to bring out more clearly what was natural, primitive, and, if I may say so, sincere in her talent for teaching. It was as if there were several persons in Madame de Genlis; but directly she took up her pen, the tone of the inner person who ruled the rest, the tone of the chief character, gained the upper hand, and she could not help writing what, when we are teaching, must always be repeated about religion, principles, and morals. It resulted that prudery in her writings was less hypocritical than might be believed. I explain it thus. The love of teaching ought not with her to be regarded as a caprice; it was the basis and tendency of her nature. It is a pity that, intelligent woman as she was, and a woman of principle as she desired to be, she was unable to unite that avowed inclination with judgment in regard to the conventionalities, with a sense of the ridiculous and simplicity of thought. You see, in fact, that in speaking of her I imitate her, and in concluding draw my moral.

BALZAC.

A CAREFUL study of the famous novelist who has just been taken from us, and whose sudden loss has excited universal interest, would require a whole work, and the time for that, I think, has not yet come. Those sorts of moral autopsies cannot be made over a freshly dug grave, especially when he who has been laid in it was full of strength and fertility, and seemed still full of future works and days. All that is possible and fitting in respect of a great contemporary renown at the moment death lays it low, is to point out by means of a few clear-cut lines the merits, the varied skill, the delicate and powerful attraction, by which it charmed its epoch and acquired influence over it. I shall attempt to do this in respect to Balzac, with a feeling free from all personal recollection,[1] and in a spirit where criticism only reserves to itself some few rights.

Balzac was a painter of the manners of this age, and he was the most original, the most individual and penetrating of them all. From the first he regarded the nineteenth century as his subject and material, he eagerly threw himself into it, and never left it. Society is like a woman—she desires a painter, a painter all to herself: he was this; no tradition was in his painting of it; he applied the methods and artifices of the brush to the use of the ambitious and coquettish society, anxious only to date from itself, and to resemble no other; for that reason it has had much more affection for him. Born in 1799, he had fifteen years to the fall of the Empire; he knew and felt the imperial age with the clear-sightedness and quick penetration belonging to childhood; reflection will perfect it later on, but nothing will equal its youthful lucidity. Some one of the same period as himself said: "From my childhood I saw into things

[1] Cp. in M. de Balzac's *Revue Parisienne* of August 25th, 1840, the article which concerns me. If I have forgotten it, it is certain I do not doubt that others remember it. Such opinions only reflect in the future on those who held them.

with a sensibility that pierced my heart like a sharp blade at every moment." He might have said the same himself. The impressions of childhood, put later into criticisms and pictures, make themselves felt by a strange depth of emotion, and are precisely what gives delicacy and life. A young man under the Restoration, he passed through it; he saw it wholly from what is perhaps the best position for an observing artist to see things, from below, in the crowd, in suffering and struggle, with the immense covetousness of genius and nature, which causes forbidden things to be divined, imagined, and penetrated a thousand times before they are obtained and known; he felt the Restoration like a lover. He began to acquire reputation at the same time as the new *régime*, set on foot in July 1830, was established. That *régime* he saw from the same plane and even from a little above it; he criticised it frankly, he painted it enchantingly in its most striking types and commonplace forms. Thus the three very diverse epochs of physiognomy which form the century, now in its middle, were all known and *lived* through by Balzac, and up to a certain point his work is the reflection of them. Who, for instance, has described better than he the old men and the beautiful women of the Empire? Who has more delightfully hit off the duchesses and countesses of the end of the Restoration, the women of thirty, who, already on the spot, were awaiting their painter with a vague anxiety, so that when he and they met there was a sort of magnetic thrill of recognition? Who, in fact, has better understood and described in all its fulness the lower middle class triumphant under the dynasty of July, the class ever immortal and already gone, alas! of the Birotteaus and Crevels?

There was a vast field, and it must be said M. Balzac soon made it his own in all its extent; he traversed and penetrated it in every sense, and found it too narrow for his valour and ardour. Not content with observing and guessing, he very often invented and dreamed. However it may be with his dreams, it was at first by his delicate and keen observation that he won the heart of the aristocratic society to which he aspired. The first picked troops he introduced into the fortress were *The Woman of Thirty*, *The Deserted Woman*, *The Grenadier*, and he was soon master of the citadel. The woman of thirty is not altogether an unexpected creation. Since civilised society has existed, women of that age have held a large, perhaps the chief place in it. In the eighteenth century, which had time to subtilise everything, a ball was given at court on Shrove Tuesday, 1763, a ball which was called "The Mothers' Ball"; the young

girls, to speak the truth, were lookers-on, and only women of thirty danced. A pretty song was composed on the subject, of which the refrain was, "Girls of fifteen, let your mothers dance!" It is seen how the eighteenth century was doing something towards the real rehabilitation of this matter which lasted only one evening. But the nineteenth century was to improve on it, and the theory of the woman of thirty, with all her advantages, superiority, and definite perfection, only dates from the present time. Balzac is the inventor of it, and it is one of his most real discoveries in the order of familiar novels. The key of his enormous success was wholly in that early little masterpiece.[1] Afterwards women forgave him many things and always believed his word, because he had guessed so correctly the first time.

However rapid and great was Balzac's success in France, it was perhaps even greater and less contested in Europe. The details that could be given in respect of it would seem fabulous, and yet would be only true. Yes, Balzac described the manners of his time, and his success is one of the most curious pictures of it. It was already more than two centuries since, in 1642, Honoré d'Urfé (the author of the famous novel of *Astrée*), who lived in Piedmont, received a most serious letter addressed to him by twenty-nine princes and princesses and nineteen noblemen and noble ladies of Germany. Those persons informed him that they had assumed the names of the heroes and heroines of "Astrée," and had formed themselves into an "Academy of true lovers;" they earnestly entreated him to continue the work. What happened to D'Urfé occurred in exactly the same manner to Balzac. There was a time when, at Venice for instance, the society gathered there thought of assuming the names of his chief characters and of playing their parts. During the whole of one season only Rastignacs, Duchesses of Langeais and Manfrigneuse, were seen; and we are assured that more than one among the actors and actresses in that comedy of society were anxious actually to go through with their parts. Such is usually the case with the reciprocal influences between the painter and his models: the novelist begins, depicts it to the life; exaggerates it a little; society makes it a point of honour and carries it out; and it is thus that what at first appeared an exaggeration ends by being only the truth.

What I said of Venice occurred in different degrees in other

[1] Only read it, I beg of you, in the early editions. The author spoiled it for me in enlarging it afterwards.

places. In Hungary, Poland, Russia, Balzac's novels became the law. At this distance, the slightly fantastic portions mingled with reality which, seen close, prevented a perfect success with difficult minds, have disappeared, and form an extra attraction. For instance, the costly and strange furniture where he heaped up the masterpieces of twenty countries and twenty epochs became afterwards a reality; what seemed to us the dream of an artistic millionaire was copied exactly. People furnished *à la Balzac*. How could the artist remain insensible and deaf to the thousand echoes of celebrity, and not hear in it the accents of fame?

He believed in it, and the sentiment of a certainly lofty ambition made him draw from his strong and fertile organisation all the resources and productions it contained. Balzac had the body of an athlete and the soul of an artist in love with fame; less would not have sufficed for his great task. It is only in our time that we have seen vigorous and herculean organisations lay themselves in some sense under the necessity of deriving from themselves all they could produce, and carry on the difficult wager for twenty years. When we read Racine, Voltaire, Montesquieu, it does not particularly occur to us to inquire if they were robust or not in frame, and of strong physical organisation. Buffon was an athlete, but his style does not show it. The authors of the more or less classical ages only wrote with their thought, with their higher and intellectual part, with the essence of their being. Now, as a consequence of the enormous work the writer imposes on himself, and which society imposes on him at short date, as a consequence of the necessity in which he finds himself of striking rapidly and forcibly, he has not time to be platonic and delicate. The writer's person and whole organisation is enlisted and stands confessed in his works; he does not write them only with his pure thought, but with his blood and muscle. A writer's physiology and hygiene have become one of the indispensable chapters in making an analysis of his genius.

Balzac prided himself on being a physiologist, and he certainly was one, although with less rigour and exactness than he imagined; but physical nature, his and that of others, plays a great part, and continually reveals itself in his descriptions of morals. I do not reproach him; it is a feature which affects and characterises all the descriptive literature of the present time. One day M. Villemain, then very young, read to Sieyès his *Eulogy of Montaigne*, the delightful eulogy, the first he wrote, full of charm and sweetness. When in his reading he reached

the passage where he said—"but I feared, in reading Rousseau, to let my eyes rest too long on those guilty weaknesses from which we ought always to keep our distance," . . . Sieyès interrupted him, saying, "But no, it is better to approach them in order to study them at closer quarters." The physiologist, curious in everything, comes in the way of the man of letters who desires taste above all. Shall I confess it? I am like Sieyès.

That is also saying I am a little like Balzac. But I hold back, however. I dwell on two points. I like his style in the finer parts—the efflorescence (I cannot find another word) by which he gives the feeling of life to everything, and makes the page itself thrill. But I cannot accept, under the cover of physiology, the continual abuse of that quality, the style so often unsteady and dissolvent, enervated, rosy and streaked with all colours, the style of a delicious corruption; Asiatic, as our masters said; in places more interrupted and more softened than the body of an ancient mime. From the midst of the scenes he describes does not Petronius somewhere regret what he calls *oratio pudica*, the modest style which does not abandon itself to the fluidity of every movement?

Another point on which I dwell in Balzac as physiologist and anatomist, is that he at least imagined as much as he observed. A fine anatomist morally, he certainly discovered new veins; he found, and as it were injected, lympheducts, till then unperceived, and he also invented them. There is a point in his analysis when the real and actual plexus ends and the illusory plexus begins, and he does not distinguish between the two. The greater part of his readers, especially of his lady readers, confused them as he did. This is not the place to insist on those points of separation. But it is known that Balzac had an avowed weakness for the Swedenborgs, Van Helmonts, Mesmers, Saint Germains, and Cagliostros of all sorts—that is to say, he was subject to illusion. In short, to carry out my physical and anatomical metaphor, I shall say, when he holds the carotid artery of his subject, he injects it at bottom with firmness and vigour; but when he is at fault he injects all the same, and always produces, creating, without quite perceiving it, an imaginary net-work.

Balzac pretended to knowledge, but what he really possessed was a sort of physiological *intuition*. M. Chasles said excellently: "It has been repeated to excess that Balzac was an observer, an analyst; he was for good and all a *seer*." What he did not see at a first glance he generally lacked; reflection did not give

it him. But what things he could see and take in at a single glance! He came, he talked with you; he, so wrapped up in his work, and apparently so full of himself, knew how to ask questions to advantage, how to listen; but even when he had not listened, when he seemed to have been full only of himself and his own idea, he ended by carrying away, absorbing all he wanted to know, and he astonished you later by describing it.

I said that he was as it were wrapped up in his work; in truth, from his youth, he never came out of it, he lived in it. The society he had partly observed, partly created in every sense, the characters of every class and kind that he had endowed with life were confused by him with real society and people who were scarcely more than a weak copy of his own. He saw them, talked to them, quoted them like people both you and he were familiar with; he had so powerfully and clearly formed them of flesh and blood that, once realised, both they and he were never more parted: all the characters surrounded him, and in moments of enthusiasm began to circle round him and to hurry him into the immense rounds of the human comedy; it makes us a little giddy even to look at in passing, and made its author so before us.

Balzac's particular power requires definition; it was that of a rich, copious, opulent nature, full of ideas, types, and inventions; a nature that repeats unceasingly and is never tired. It was that power he possessed, and not the other, which is doubtless the true strength; power that governs and rules a work, and acts so that the artist is above it as he is above his creation. It might be said of him that he was the prey of his work, and his talent often carries him along like a chariot drawn by four horses. I do not ask that a man should be exactly like Goethe, and should always lift his marble brow above the fiery cloud, but Balzac (and he has said so) desired the artist to precipitate himself headlong into his work, *like Curtius into the gulf.* A genius of that sort affords much animation and passion, but also danger and a great deal of smoke.

To set forth his real literary theory we need only borrow his own words; if, for instance, I take *The Poor Relation*, his last and one of his most powerful novels, published in this paper,[1] I find, in the instance of the Polish artist, Wenceslas Steinbock, the favourite ideas and all the secrets—if he could be said to have secrets—of the author. According to him, "a great artist nowadays is a prince without a title; he is fame and

[1] *Poor Relations* first appeared as a feuilleton in the *Constitutional.*

fortune." But the fame is not gained either by amusing oneself or by dreaming; it is the reward of persevering labour and unceasing ardour. "You have ideas in your brain? A fine thing! I also have ideas. . . . But where's the use of what may be in our minds if we derive no advantage from it?" That is what he thought, and he never spared himself in the relentless labour of execution. "To imagine," he said, "is to enjoy, *to smoke enchanted cigarettes;* but without execution everything vanishes as a dream, as smoke." "Constant labour," he said again, "is a law of art, as of life; for art is idealised creation. Great artists, poets, want neither for orders nor customers; they labour to-day, to-morrow, always. From it results the habit of work, the ever-present knowledge of the difficulties which keep artists *en concubinage* with the Muse, with her creative strength. Canova lived in his studio, like Voltaire lived in his study; Homer and Phidias must have lived in the same way." I wanted particularly to quote that passage, because, side by side with the good qualities of courage and hard work shown in it, qualities that do Balzac honour, we grasp his modern side—the strange inadvertence by which he disparages and outrages the beauty he pretends to follow. No, neither Homer nor Phidias lived *en concubinage* with the Muse. They always received and knew her chaste and severe.

M. de Bonald said "beauty is always severe." I need a few words of such authority; they are unchangeable sacred columns that I am anxious to point to in the distance, so that even our admiration and our meed of regret for a man of marvellous genius may not be carried beyond lawful bounds.

Balzac speaks somewhere of the artists who had "a prodigious success, a success likely to crush men whose backs were not broad enough to support it; which, he adds parenthetically, often happens. Indeed, the day after victory is for the artist a more terrible trial than the great battle he must sooner or later fight. To uphold his victory, to carry on his reputation, neither to be frightened nor discouraged, neither to sink nor fall under the blow, as Leopold Robert did, it is necessary to possess a real strength, and to be conscious of reaching only one's level. Balzac has proved that he had that sort of strength.

When people spoke of fame to him, he accepted the word as well as the omen; he sometimes spoke jestingly of it himself. "Fame," he said one day; "to whom are you speaking? I have known it, seen it. I was travelling with some friends in Russia, night was coming on, we demanded hospitality at a castle. On

our arrival the *châtelaine* and her ladies-in-waiting bustled about; one of the latter left the room immediately to fetch refreshments. In the interval my name was mentioned to the mistress of the house; we entered into conversation. When the lady returned, with a tray in her hands, she suddenly heard the words: 'Well, M. de Balzac, you think, then . . .' In an impulse of surprise and joy she let the tray fall, and everything was broken. Was not that fame?"

We smiled, he smiled himself, and yet he enjoyed it. The feeling supported and encouraged him in his work. The wittiest and most to be regretted of his disciples, Charles de Bernard, dead but a short time since, lacked that incentive; he suspected everything with irony and even with taste, and his remarkable work is a witness of it. Balzac's work gained in animation and ardour from the artist's excitement. An exquisite delicacy insinuated itself into the excitement.

All Europe was to him a park, in which he had only to take a walk in order to meet friends, admirers, cordial and sumptuous hospitality. The little flower he showed you, scarcely dry, he gathered the other morning returning from the Villa-Diodati; the picture he described to you he had seen yesterday in the palace of a Roman prince. It seemed to him that from one capital to another, from a Roman villa or from Isola-Bella to a Polish or Bohemian castle was but a step. A stroke of the wand transported him there. It cannot be said that it was a dream to him, for a devoted woman, one of those he deified in passing, fortunately realised for him what for a long while seemed the poet's dream and illusion.

All the artists of the time were his friends, and he placed them almost magnificently in his works He possessed excellent taste and had a great love of works of art, painting, sculpture, antique furniture. When he had leisure (and he often found means of getting it, giving up his days to imagination, spending his nights in work), he liked to go on a hunt for what he called *fine pieces*. In this way he knew all the bric-a-brac shops of Europe, and he expatiated on them admirably. When he afterwards put into a novel masses of objects, which, in the hands of another writer, would have resembled an inventory, it was with colour and life, and with love. The furniture he describes possesses a sort of life; the tapestries rustle. He describes too much, but usually the light falls in the right place. Even when the result does not correspond to the care he seems to have taken, the reader retains the impression

of having been moved. Balzac has the gift of colour and massing. By it he attracted painters who recognised in him one of themselves transplanted and strayed into literature.

He paid scant attention to criticism; he had cut his way into the world almost in spite of it, and his enthusiasm was not, I think, of the sort that could be moderated or guided. He said somewhere of a disheartened sculptor, fallen into idleness: "Become again an artist *in partibus;* he had great success in drawing-rooms, he was consulted by many amateurs, *he turned critic, like all weak men who do not fulfil their early promise.*" The last characteristic may be true of a sculptor or painter who, instead of working, spends his time in discoursing and arguing; but in the order of ideas, Balzac's saying, often repeated by a whole school of young men of letters, is (I ask their pardon) at once an injustice and an error. However, as it is always a delicate matter to prove to people in what they are or are not weak, let us pass on.

A true, sincere, intelligent Aristarchus, if he could have tolerated him, would have been useful to Balzac; for his rich and luxurious nature was lavish, and did not control itself. In a novel three things are to be considered: the characters, the action, the style. Balzac excels in the disposing of his characters; he makes them live, he chisels them in an indelible manner. There is exaggeration and minuteness, what does it matter? The characters have in them something enduring. With him we make refined, charming, coquettish, and merry acquaintances, at other times very unpleasant ones; but once made, we are sure of never forgetting either the one or the other. He is not contented with drawing his characters well, he names them after some strange, happy fashion, and so fixes them for ever in the memory. He attaches the greatest importance to baptising his men and women; like Sterne, he attributed a certain *occult power* to proper names in harmony or in irony with the characters. The *Marneffes*, *Bixious*, *Birotteaus*, *Crevels* are thus named by him in virtue of some indescribable onomatopœia which make the man and the name resemble each other. After the characters comes the action; with Balzac it is often weak, it wanders about, it is exaggerated. He is less successful in that than in the creation of the characters. His style is delicate, subtle, fluent, picturesque, owing nothing to tradition. I have sometimes wondered what effect a novel of Balzac would produce on an honest mind brought up on good ordinary French prose in all its frugality, on a mind of which there are no more, a mind formed by reading Nicole, Bourdaloue,

by the simple, serious, and scrupulous style *which goes far*, as La Bruyère said; such a mind would be giddy for a month. La Bruyère said that for every thought there is *only* one right expression, and it must be found. Balzac in writing ignores La Bruyère's saying. He has series of animated, unsatisfied, capricious, never definite expressions, *attempts* at expressions, which ever seek. His printers knew it well. In the course of the printing of his books he altered, he rewrote each proof in never-ending fashion. With him the mould itself was always at boiling heat, and the metal did not set. He had found the desired form, and sought it still.

Would the most friendly criticism, that of a friend, a companion as he was of Louis Lambert, have ever induced him to accept ideas of relative moderation, and to introduce them into the torrent of his genius, so that he might have restrained and regulated it a little? Without desiring to lose anything of his fertile manner, I wish there had been present to his mind a few axioms that are, I consider, essential to every art, to all literature:—

"Clearness is the varnish of masters."—VAUVENARGUES.

"A work of art ought only to express what elevates the soul, nobly rejoices it, and nothing more. The artist's feeling ought only to be directed to that, all the rest is false."—BETTINE *to Goethe's mother.*

"Good sense and genius are of the same family; wit is only a collateral."—BONALD.

In fact I wish that he who so much admired Napoleon, whom that great example, transported and reflected into literature, dazzled as it dazzled so many besides, had left aside the similes, the foolish emulations fit only for children, and that, if he felt absolutely obliged to seek his ideal of power in military matters, he had sometimes asked himself the question, eminently fitted to find a place in every good French treatise on rhetoric—"Which is finer, an Asiatic conqueror dragging countless hordes behind him, or Turenne defending the Rhine at the head of thirty thousand men?"

Do not let us force nature, and since death has closed his career, let us accept of the genius that is gone the rich and complex inheritance it has left us. The author of *Eugénie Grandet* will live. The father—I was going to say the lover of *Madame de Vieuménil*—of *Madame de Beauséant* will retain his place on the small tables of the most retired and select boudoirs. Those who seek joy, gaiety, expansion of heart, the satirical and frank vein of the rabelaisian Tourangeau cannot despise

the admirable *Gaudissart*, the excellent *Birotteau*, and all their race. There is something, it seems, for every one. If I had the space, I should like to speak of Balzac's last novel, in my opinion one of his most remarkable books, although not the most flattering to society. *Poor Relations* shows us Balzac's vigorous genius in its ripest maturity, in its widest scope. He is over-abundant, he swims, he seems completely in his element. Never was the *topsy-turvydom* of human worthlessness better displayed or put into motion. The first part of the novel (Cousin Bette) presents characters of much truth side by side with the exaggeration inseparable from this author. Bette, who lends her name to the novel, is one of the exaggerations; it does not seem that the poor creature who appears first as a simple Vosges peasant, ill-clothed, badly dressed, rough, a little envious, but neither wicked nor a rogue, could be the same who, at a given moment, is transformed into an almost beautiful woman of society, and extremely obstinate and wicked, a female Iago or Richard III.! Things do not happen thus in real life; that woman is of the race of *Ferragus* and *Treize*. Our degenerate and vitiated society does not admit of those atrocious hatreds and vengeances. Our sins are certainly not small; our crimes, however, are less great. But other characters of the novel are true, profoundly true, and especially that of Baron Hulot, with his immoderate love of women that step by step leads the honourable man to dishonour and the old man to degradation; and Crevel, excellent all round, in tone, in gesture, in humour, all the vices of the bourgeois clearly showing in his bearing and his self-importance. For note we are not here confronted only with caprice, eccentricity, nor even with human folly: vice is the mainspring, social depravity is the subject of the novel. The author plunges into it; to see his animation we might even say that in parts he enjoys it. A few lofty, pathetic scenes move us to tears; but the horrible scenes predominate, the sap of impurity overflows, the infamous Marneffe infects everything. The remarkable novel, studied by itself, would give rise to reflections which would affect not only Balzac but all of us, the more or less secret or avowed children of a sensual literature. Some men, sons of René, hide and envelop their sensualism in mysticism, while others frankly strip off the mask.

Balzac often thought of Walter Scott, and he says the genius of the great Scotch novelist roused his keenest interest. But in the midst of the vast work of the delightful wizard, did he not recognise, according to Lamartine's happy expression—

"The noble sentiments rising from the pages,—Like the perfume of odoriferous shores?"

Did he not breathe the universal charm of purity and health, salubrious breezes that blow even athwart the conflict of human passions? After reading *Poor Relations*, we feel the need of new vigour, of throwing ourselves into some healthful and limpid book, of plunging into some song of Milton *in lucid streams*, as the poet says.

In a more complete work, and if we were free to give ourselves full play, it would be interesting to establish and graduate the true relation of the genius of Balzac to that of his most celebrated contemporaries—Madame Sand, Eugène Sue, Alexandre Dumas. Of an entirely different style, but with a view of human nature neither more favourable nor more flattering, Merimée might be taken as a contrast in tone and manner.

Merimée has not perhaps a better opinion of human nature than Balzac, and if it has been slandered it is certainly not he who will reinstate it. But he is a man of taste, of nice discernment, of exact and rigorous sense, who even in the excess of the idea preserves a prudence and discretion of manner. He possesses the personal feeling for ridicule as much as Balzac lacked it, and in him, in the midst of the clearness, vigour of line, and precision of burin that we admire, we cannot help missing a little of the animation the other possessed in too high a degree. It might be said of him that the accomplished man of the world, the *gentleman*, as it was formerly said, held the artist in check.

Is it necessary to recall to mind that Madame Sand is a greater, surer, and stronger writer than Balzac? She never hesitates in expression. She is a greater painter of nature and landscape. As a novelist her characters in the beginning are often well conceived, well designed; but they soon turn to a Rousseau-like ideal which becomes almost a system. Her characters are not entirely alive; at a certain point they become types. She never calumniates human nature, neither does she adorn it; she tries to enrich it, but in aiming at enlarging it, she forces and distends it. She lays the blame on society, and disparages whole classes, and desires *in any and every case* to bring into notice, individuals, who are, notwithstanding, half abstract. In short, the masterly precision which she puts into expression and description is not found in an equal degree in the realisation of her characters. This is said, however, with all the reservation due to so many charming and natural situations and scenes. Her style, however, is a gift of the first quality, and of the finest stamp.

M. Eugène Sue (let us turn from the socialist and speak only of the novelist) is perhaps Balzac's equal in invention, fertility, and composition. He constructs wonderfully big frames; his characters live, and we remember them against our will; above all, he possesses action and dramatic machinery of which he thoroughly understands the manipulation. But the details are often weak; they are numerous and varied enough, but less delicate, of less research, showing less original and fresh observation than in Balzac. He also possesses gaiety, and seizes happy and natural types; but in addition he loves and affects eccentricities, and takes too much pleasure in describing them. With one, as with the other, we must set no store by wholesome nature; they prefer to work on what is corrupt or artificial. Eugène Sue cannot write so much, nor so badly, nor so subtly in regard to evil, as Balzac. He was wrong in not entirely abandoning himself to the instincts of his own nature, and in consulting the systems in vogue and in setting them forth in his later novels,—a thing Balzac never did. He at least only obeyed his instincts, his favourite inspirations, and abandoned himself to them more and more as an artist who never makes compromises. As regards the stream, Balzac has never followed any but his own.

Everybody knows M. Dumas' immense animation, high spirits, happy set scenes, and witty and always living dialogue. His graceful narrative runs on without stopping, and can remove obstacles and even space without becoming weak. He covers enormous canvases, and neither his brush nor his reader grows weary. He is amusing; he charms our imagination, but does not take tight hold of it like Balzac.

Of the three last, Balzac lays hold of things most closely, and sounds them most deeply.

The Revolution of February struck Balzac a keen blow. The whole edifice of refined civilisation, such as he had always dreamed of it, seemed ruined. For a moment, Europe, his own Europe, was to fail him like France. However, he soon took heart again, and meditated describing at close quarters the new society in the fourth dress in which it presented itself to him. I could sketch in his next novel, his last projected novel, of which he spoke with ardour. But of what use is one dream the more? He died of heart disease, as so many men who have worked too ardently in life die nowadays. Scarcely three years ago Frédéric Soulié succumbed to the same malady, a man it would be unjust to forget in grouping together the gods of that literature.

Perhaps, the place to repeat that that literature created its school and served its time, is over the grave of one of the most fertile of them, assuredly of the most inventive; the school gave us its most vigorous, almost gigantic talents; for good or bad it may be thought now that the best of its sap is exhausted. Let it at least cry truce and rest; let it also leave society time to recruit its strength after its excesses, to compose itself into some sort of order, and to present new pictures to painters of a fresher inspiration. There was latterly a terrible rivalry and a keen competition between the strongest men of that active, devouring, inflammatory literature. The mode of publication in *feuilletons*, which necessitated in each new chapter a striking situation that should impress itself on the reader, drove the effects and tones of the novel to an extreme pitch, discouraging and no longer tolerable. Let us compose ourselves a little. While admitting the advantage derived by men whose talent lacked the conditions necessary for a better development, let us desire for the future of our society, pictures, not less vast, but more satisfying, more consoling, and let us hope for those who paint them a quieter life, and an inspiration not more delicate, but more calm, more soundly natural and serene.

MONTAIGNE.

WHILE the good ship France is taking a somewhat haphazard course, getting into unknown seas, and preparing to double what the pilots (if there is a pilot) call the Stormy Cape, while the look-out at the mast-head thinks he sees the spectre of the giant Adamastor rising on the horizon, many honourable and peaceable men continue their work and studies all the same, and follow out to the end, or as far as they can, their favourite hobbies. I know, at the present time, a learned man who is collating more carefully than has ever yet been done the different early editions of Rabelais—editions, mark you, of which only one copy remains, of which a second is not to be found: from the careful collation of the texts some literary and maybe philosophical result will be derived with regard to the genius of the French Lucian-Aristophanes. I know another scholar whose devotion and worship is given to a very different man—to Bossuet: he is preparing a complete, exact, detailed history of the life and works of the great bishop. And as tastes differ, and "*human fancy is cut* into a thousand shapes" (Montaigne said that), Montaigne also has his devotees, he who, himself, was so little of one: a sect is formed round him. In his lifetime he had Mademoiselle de Gournay, his daughter of *alliance*, who was solemnly devoted to him; and his disciple, Charron, followed him closely, step by step, only striving to arrange his thoughts with more order and method. In our time amateurs, intelligent men, practise the religion under another form: they devote themselves to collecting the smallest traces of the author of the *Essays*, to gathering up the slightest relics, and Dr. Payen may be justly placed at the head of the group. For years he has been preparing a book on Montaigne, of which the title will be—

"MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE, a collection of unedited or little known facts about the author of the *Essays*, his book, and his other writings, about his family, his friends, his admirers, his detractors."

While awaiting the conclusion of the book, the occupation and amusement of a lifetime, Dr. Payen keeps us informed in

short pamphlets of the various works and discoveries made about Montaigne.

If we separate the discoveries made during the last five or six years from the jumble of quarrels, disputes, cavilling, quackery, and law-suits (for there have been all those), they consist in this—

In 1846 M. Macé found in the (then) Royal Library, amongst the "Collection Du Puys," a letter of Montaigne, addressed to the king, Henri IV., September 2, 1590.

In 1847 M. Payen printed a letter, or a fragment of a letter of Montaigne of February 16, 1588, a letter corrupt and incomplete, coming from the collection of the Comtesse Boni de Castellane.

But, most important of all, in 1848, M. Horace de Viel-Castel found in London, at the British Museum, a remarkable letter of Montaigne, May 22, 1585, when Mayor of Bordeaux, addressed to M. de Matignon, the king's lieutenant in the town. The great interest of the letter is that it shows Montaigne for the first time in the full discharge of his office with all the energy and vigilance of which he was capable. The pretended idler was at need much more active than he was ready to own.

M. Detcheverry, keeper of the records to the mayoralty of Bordeaux, found and published (1850) a letter of Montaigne, while mayor, to the *Jurats*, or aldermen of the town, July 30, 1585.

M. Achille Jubinal found among the manuscripts of the National Library, and published (1850), a long, remarkable letter from Montaigne to the king, Henri IV., January 18, 1590, which happily coincides with that already found by M. Macé.

Lastly, to omit nothing and to do justice to all, in a "Visit to Montaigne's Château in Périgord," of which the account appeared in 1850, M. Bertrand de Saint-Germain described the place and pointed out the various Greek and Latin inscriptions that may still be read in Montaigne's tower in the third-storey chamber (the ground floor counting as the first), which the philosopher made his library and study.

M. Payen, collecting together and criticising in his last pamphlet the various notices and discoveries, not all of equal importance, allowed himself to be drawn into some little exaggeration of praise; but we cannot blame him. Admiration, when applied to such noble, perfectly innocent, and disinterested subjects, is truly a spark of the sacred fire: it

produces research that a less ardent zeal would quickly leave aside, and sometimes leads to valuable results. However, it would be well for those who, following M. Payen's example, intelligently understand and greatly admire Montaigne, to remember, even in their ardour, the advice of the wise man and the master. "There is more to do," said he, speaking of the commentators of his time, "in interpreting the interpretations than in interpreting the things themselves; and more books about books than on any other subject. We do nothing, but everything swarms with commentators; of authors there is a great rarity." Authors are of great price and very scarce at all times—that is to say, authors who really increase the sum of human knowledge. I should like all who write on Montaigne, and give us the details of their researches and discoveries, to imagine one thing,—Montaigne himself reading and criticising them. "What would he think of me and of the manner in which I am going to speak of him to the public?" If such a question was put, how greatly it would suppress useless phrases and shorten idle discussions! M. Payen's last pamphlet was dedicated to a man who deserves equally well of Montaigne—M. Gustave Brunet, of Bordeaux. He, speaking of M. Payen, in a work in which he pointed out interesting and various corrections of Montaigne's text, said: "May he soon decide to publish the fruits of his researches: he will have left nothing for future *Montaignologues*." *Montaignologues!* Great Heaven! what would Montaigne say of such a word coined in his honour? You who occupy yourselves so meritoriously with him, but who have, I think, no claim to appropriate him to yourselves, in the name of him whom you love, and whom we all love by a greater or lesser title, never, I beg of you, use such words; they smack of the brotherhood and the sect, of pedantry and of the chatter of the schools—things utterly repugnant to Montaigne.

Montaigne had a simple, natural, affable mind, and a very happy disposition. Sprung from an excellent father, who, though of no great education, entered with real enthusiasm into the movement of the Renaissance and all the *liberal* novelties of his time, the son corrected the excessive enthusiasm, vivacity, and tenderness he inherited by a great refinement and justness of reflection; but he did not abjure the original groundwork. It is scarcely more than thirty years ago that whenever the sixteenth century was mentioned it was spoken of as a barbarous epoch, Montaigne only excepted: therein lay error and ignorance. The sixteenth century was a great century, fertile, powerful, learned, refined in parts, although in some

aspects it was rough, violent, and seemingly coarse. What it particularly lacked was taste, if by taste is meant the faculty of clear and perfect selection, the extrication of the elements of the beautiful. But in the succeeding centuries taste quickly became distaste. If, however, in literature it was crude, in the arts properly so-called, in those of the hand and the chisel, the sixteenth century, even in France, is, in the quality of taste, far greater than the two succeeding centuries : it is neither meagre nor massive, heavy nor distorted. In art its taste is rich and of fine quality,—at once unrestrained and complex, ancient and modern, special to itself and original. In the region of morals it is unequal and mixed. It was an age of contrasts, of contrasts in all their crudity, an age of philosophy and fanaticism, of scepticism and strong faith. Everything was at strife and in collision ; nothing was blended and united. Everything was in ferment; it was a period of chaos ; every ray of light caused a storm. It was not a gentle age, or one we can call an age of light, but an age of struggle and combat. What distinguished Montaigne and made a phenomenon of him was, that in such an age he should have possessed moderation, caution, and order.

Born on the last day of February, 1533, taught the ancient languages as a game while still a child, waked even in his cradle by the sound of musical instruments, he seemed less fitted for a rude and violent epoch than for the commerce and *sanctuary of the muses.* His rare good sense corrected what was too ideal and poetical in his early education; but he preserved the happy faculty of saying everything with freshness and wit. Married, when past thirty, to an estimable woman who was his companion for twenty-eight years, he seems to have put passion only into friendship. He immortalised his love for Étienne de la Boëtie, whom he lost after four years of the sweetest and closest intimacy. For some time counsellor in the Parliament of Bordeaux, Montaigne, before he was forty, retired from public life and flung away ambition to live in his tower of Montaigne, enjoying his own society and his own intellect, entirely given up to his own observations and thoughts, and to the busy idleness of which we know all the sports and fancies. The first edition of the *Essays* appeared in 1580, consisting of only two books, and in a form representing only the first rough draft of what we have in the later editions. The same year Montaigne set out on a voyage to Switzerland and Italy. It was during that voyage that the aldermen of Bordeaux elected him mayor of their town. At first he refused and excused himself, but warned

that it would be well to accept, and enjoined by the king, he took the office, "the more beautiful," he said, "that there was neither renunciation nor gain other than the honour of its performance." He filled the office for four years, from July 1582 to July 1586, being re-elected after the first two years. Thus Montaigne, at the age of fifty, and a little against his will, re-entered public life when the country was on the eve of civil disturbances which, quieted and lulled to sleep for a while, broke out more violently at the cry of the League. Although, as a rule, lessons serve for nothing, since the art of wisdom and happiness cannot be taught, let us not deny ourselves the pleasure of listening to Montaigne ; let us look on his wisdom and happiness ; let him speak of public affairs, of revolutions and disturbances, and of his way of conducting himself with regard to them. We do not put forward a model, but we offer our readers an agreeable recreation.

Although Montaigne lived in so agitated and stormy a time, a period that a man who had lived through the Terror (M. Daunou) called the *most tragic century in all history*, he by no means regarded his age as the worst of ages. He was not of those prejudiced and afflicted persons, who, measuring everything by their visual horizon, valuing everything according to their present sensations, alway declare that the disease they suffer from is worse than any ever before experienced by a human being. He was like Socrates, who did not consider himself a citizen of one city but of the world ; with his broad and full imagination he embraced the universality of countries and of ages ; he even judged more equitably the very evils of which he was witness and victim. "Who is it," he said, "that, seeing the bloody havoc of these civil wars of ours, does not cry out that the machine of the world is near dissolution, and that the day of judgment is at hand, without considering that many worse revolutions have been seen, and that, in the meantime, people are being merry in a thousand other parts of the earth for all this? For my part, considering the licence and impunity that always attend such commotions, I admire they are so moderate, and that there is not more mischief done. To him who feels the hailstones patter about his ears, the whole hemisphere appears to be in storm and tempest." And raising his thoughts higher and higher, reducing his own suffering to what it was in the immensity of nature, seeing there not only himself but whole kingdoms as mere specks in the infinite, he added in words which foreshadowed Pascal, in words whose outline and salient points Pascal did not disdain to borrow : "But whoever shall represent

to his fancy, as in a picture, that great image of our mother nature, portrayed in her full majesty and lustre, whoever in her face shall read so general and so constant a variety, whoever shall observe himself in that figure, and not himself but a whole kingdom, no bigger than the least touch or prick of a pencil in comparison of the whole, that man alone is able to value things according to their true estimate and grandeur."

Thus Montaigne gives us a lesson, a useless lesson, but I state it all the same, because among the many unprofitable ones that have been written down, it is perhaps of greater worth than most. I do not mean to underrate the gravity of the circumstances in which France is just now involved, for I believe there is pressing need to bring together all the energy, prudence, and courage she possesses in order that the country may come out with honour.[1] However, let us reflect, and remember that, leaving aside the Empire, which as regards internal affairs was a period of calm, and before 1812 of prosperity, we who utter such loud complaints, lived in peace from 1815 to 1830, fifteen long years; that the three days of July only inaugurated another order of things that for eighteen years guaranteed peace and industrial prosperity; in all, thirty-two years of repose. Stormy days came; tempests burst, and will doubtless burst again. Let us learn how to live through them, but do not let us cry out every day, as we are disposed to do, that never under the sun were such storms known as we are enduring. To get away from the present state of feeling, to restore lucidity and proportion to our judgments, let us read every evening a page of Montaigne.

A criticism of Montaigne on the men of his day struck me, and it bears equally well on those of ours. Our philosopher says somewhere that he knows a fair number of men possessing various good qualities—one, intelligence; another, heart; another, address, conscience or knowledge, or skill in languages, each has his share: "but of a great man as a whole, having so many good qualities together, or one with such a degree of excellence that we ought to admire him, or compare him with those we honour in the past, my fortune has never shown me one." He afterwards made an exception in favour of his friend Étienne de la Boëtie, but he belonged to the company of great men dead before attaining maturity, and showing promise without having time to fulfil it. Montaigne's criticism called up a smile. He did not see a true and wholly great man

[1] This essay appeared April 28, 1851.

in his time, the age of L'Hôpital, Coligny, and the Guises. Well! how does ours seem to you? We have as many great men as in Montaigne's time, one distinguished for his intellect, another for his heart, a third for skill, some (a rare thing) for conscience, many for knowledge and language. But we too lack the perfect man, and he is greatly to be desired. One of the most intelligent observers of our day recognised and proclaimed it some years ago: "Our age," said M. de Rémusat, "is wanting in great men."[1]

How did Montaigne conduct himself in his duties as first magistrate of a great city? If we take him literally and on a hasty first glance, we should believe he discharged them slackly and languidly. Did not Horace, doing the honours to himself, say that in war he one day let his shield fall (*relicta non bene parmula*)? We must not be in too great a hurry to take too literally the men of taste who have a horror of overestimating themselves. Minds of a fine quality are more given to vigilance and to action than they are apt to confess. The man who boasts and makes a great noise, will, I am almost sure, be less brave in the combat than Horace, and less vigilant at the council board than Montaigne.

On entering office Montaigne was careful to warn the aldermen of Bordeaux not to expect to find in him more than there really was; he presented himself to them without affectation. "I represented to them faithfully and conscientiously all that I felt myself to be,—a man without memory, without vigilance, without experience, and without energy; but also, without hate, without ambition, without avarice, and without violence." He should be sorry, while taking the affairs of the town in hand, that his feelings should be so strongly affected as those of his worthy father had been, who in the end had lost his place and health. *The eager and ardent pledge to satisfy an impetuous desire* was not his method. His opinion was "that you must lend yourself to others, and only give yourself to yourself." And repeating his thought, according to his custom in all kinds of metaphors and picturesque forms, he said again that if he sometimes allowed himself to be urged to the management of other men's affairs, he promised to take them in hand, not "into my lungs and liver." We are thus forewarned, we know what to expect. The mayor and Montaigne were two distinct persons; under his *rôle* and office he reserved to himself a certain freedom and secret security.

[1] *Essais de Philosophie*, vol. i. p. 22.

He continued to judge things in his own fashion and impartially, although acting loyally for the cause confided to him. He was far from approving or even excusing all he saw in his party, and he could judge his adversaries and say of them: "He did that thing wickedly, and this virtuously." "I would have," he added, "matters go well on our side; but if they do not, I shall not run mad. I am heartily for the right party; but I do not affect to be taken notice of for an especial enemy to others." And he entered into some details and applications which at that time were piquant. Let us remark, however, in order to explain and justify his somewhat extensive profession of impartiality, that the chiefs of the party then in evidence, the three Henris, were famous and considerable men on several counts: Henri, Duke of Guise, head of the League; Henri, King of Navarre, leader of the Opposition; and the King Henri III. in whose name Montaigne was mayor, who wavered between the two. When parties have neither chief nor head, when they are known by the body only, that is to say in their hideous and brutal reality, it is more difficult and also more hazardous to be just towards them and to assign to each its share of action.

The principle which guided him in his administration was to look only at the fact, at the result, and to grant nothing to noise and outward show: "How much more a good effect makes a noise, so much I abate of the goodness of it." For it is always to be feared that it was more performed for the sake of the noise than upon the account of goodness: "Being exposed upon the stall, 'tis half sold." That was not Montaigne's way: he made no show; he managed men and affairs as quietly as he could; he employed in a manner useful to all alike the gifts of sincerity and conciliation; the personal attraction with which nature endowed him was a quality of the highest value in the management of men. He preferred to warn men of evil rather than to take on himself the honour of repressing it: "Is there any one who desires to be sick that he may see his physician's practice? And would not that physician deserve to be whipped who should wish the plague amongst us that he might put his art into practice?" Far from desiring that trouble and disorder in the affairs of the city should rouse and honour his government, he had ever willingly, he said, contributed all he could to their tranquillity and ease. He is not of those whom municipal honours intoxicate and elate, those "dignities of office" as he called them, and of which all the noise "goes from one cross-road to another." If he was a man desirous of fame, he recognised that it was of a kind

greater than that. I do not know, however, if even in a vaster field he would have changed his method and manner of proceeding. To do good for the public imperceptibly would always seem to him the ideal of skill and the culminating point of happiness. "He who will not thank me," he said, "for the order and quiet calm that has accompanied my administration, cannot, however, deprive me of the share that belongs to me by the title of my good fortune." And he is inexhaustible in describing in lively and graceful expressions the kinds of effective and imperceptible services he believed he had rendered—services greatly superior to noisy and glorious deeds: "Actions which come from the workman's hand carelessly and noiselessly have most charm, that some honest man chooses later and brings from their obscurity to thrust them into the light for their own sake." Thus fortune served Montaigne to perfection, and even in his administration of affairs, in difficult conjunctures, he never had to belie his maxim, nor to step very far out of the way of life he had planned: "For my part I commend a gliding, solitary, and silent life." He reached the end of his magistracy almost satisfied with himself, having accomplished what he had promised himself, and much more than he had promised others.

The letter lately discovered by M. Horace de Viel-Castel corroborates the chapter in which Montaigne exhibits and criticises himself in the period of his public life. "That letter," says M. Payen, "is entirely on affairs. Montaigne is mayor; Bordeaux, lately disturbed, seems threatened by fresh agitations; the king's lieutenant is away. It is Wednesday, May 22, 1585; it is night, Montaigne is wakeful, and writes to the governor of the province." The letter, which is of too special and local an interest to be inserted here, may be summed up in these words:—Montaigne regretted the absence of Marshal de Matignon, and feared the consequences of its prolongation; he was keeping, and would continue to keep, him acquainted with all that was going on, and begged him to return as soon as his circumstances would permit. "We are looking after our gates and guards, and a little more carefully in your absence. . . . If anything important and fresh occurs, I shall send you a messenger immediately, so that if you hear no news from me, you may consider that nothing has happened." He begs M. de Matignon to remember, however, that he might not have time to warn him, "entreating you to consider that such movements are usually so sudden, that if they do occur they will take me by the throat without any warning." Besides, he

will do everything to ascertain the march of events beforehand. "I will do what I can to hear news from all parts, and to that end shall visit and observe the inclinations of all sorts of men." Lastly, after keeping the marshal informed of everything, of the least rumours abroad in the city, he pressed him to return, assuring him "that we spare neither our care, nor, if need be, our lives to preserve everything in obedience to the king." Montaigne was never prodigal of protestations and praises, and what with others was a mere form of speech, was with him a real undertaking and the truth.

Things, however, became worse and worse: civil war broke out; friendly or hostile parties (the difference was not great) infested the country. Montaigne, who went to his country house as often as he could, whenever the duties of his office, which was drawing near its term, did not oblige him to be in Bordeaux, was exposed to every sort of insult and outrage. "I underwent," he said, "the inconveniences that moderation brings along with it in such a disease. I was pitied on all hands; to the Ghibelline I was a Guelph, and to the Guelph a Ghibelline." In the midst of his personal grievances he could disengage and raise his thoughts to reflections on the public misfortunes and on the degradation of men's characters. Considering closely the disorder of parties, and all the abject and wretched things which developed so quickly, he was ashamed to see leaders of renown stoop and debase themselves by cowardly complacency; for in those circumstances we know, like him, "that in the word of command to march, draw up, wheel, and the like, we obey him indeed; but all the rest is dissolute and free." "It pleases me," said Montaigne ironically, "to observe how much pusillanimity and cowardice there is in ambition; by how abject and servile ways it must arrive at its end." Despising ambition as he did, he was not sorry to see it unmasked by such practices and degraded in his sight. However, his goodness of heart overcoming his pride and contempt, he adds sadly, "it displeases me to see good and generous natures, and that are capable of justice, every day corrupted in the management and command of this confusion. . . . We had ill-contrived souls enough without spoiling those that were generous and good." He rather sought in that misfortune an opportunity and motive for fortifying and strengthening himself. Attacked one by one by many disagreeables and evils, which he would have endured more cheerfully in a heap—that is to say, all at once—pursued by war, disease, by

all the plagues (July 1585), in the course things were taking, he already asked himself to whom he and his could have recourse, of whom he could ask shelter and subsistence for his old age; and having looked and searched thoroughly all around, he found himself actually destitute and *ruined.* For, "to let a man's self fall plumb down, and from so great a height, it ought to be in the arms of a solid, vigorous, and fortunate friendship. They are very rare, if there be any." Speaking in such a manner, we perceive that La Boëtie had been some time dead. Then he felt that he must after all rely on himself in his distress, and must gain strength; now or never was the time to put into practice the lofty lessons he spent his life in collecting from the books of the philosophers. He took heart again, and attained all the height of his virtue: "In an ordinary and quiet time, a man prepares himself for moderate and common accidents; but in the confusion wherein we have been for these thirty years, every Frenchman, whether in particular or in general, sees himself every hour upon the point of the total ruin and overthrow of his fortune." And far from being discouraged and cursing fate for causing him to be born in so stormy an age, he suddenly congratulated himself: "Let us thank fortune that has not made us live in an effeminate, idle, and languishing age." Since the curiosity of wise men seeks the past for disturbances in states in order to learn the secrets of history, and, as we should say, the whole physiology of the body social, "so does my curiosity," he declares, "make me in some sort please myself with seeing with my own eyes this notable spectacle of our public death, its forms and symptoms; and, seeing I could not hinder it, am content to be destined to assist in it, and thereby to instruct myself." I shall not suggest a consolation of that sort to most people; the greater part of mankind does not possess the heroic and eager curiosity of Empedocles and the elder Pliny, the two intrepid men who went straight to the volcanoes and the disturbances of nature to examine them at close quarters, at the risk of destruction and death. But to a man of Montaigne's nature, the thought of that stoical observation gave him consolation even amid real evils. Considering the condition of false peace and doubtful truce, the *régime* of dull and profound corruption which had preceded the last disturbances, he almost congratulated himself on seeing their cessation; for "it was," he said of the *régime* of Henri III., "an universal juncture of particular members, rotten to emulation of one another, and the most of them with inveterate ulcers, that neither required nor

admitted of any cure. This conclusion therefore did really more animate than depress me." Note that his health, usually delicate, is here raised to the level of his morality, although what it had suffered through the various disturbances might have been enough to undermine it. He had the satisfaction of feeling that he had some hold against fortune, and that it would take a greater shock still to crush him.

Another consideration, humbler and more humane, upheld him in his troubles, the consolation arising from a common misfortune, a misfortune shared by all, and the sight of the courage of others. The people, especially the real people, they who are victims and not robbers, the peasants of his district, moved him by the manner in which they endured the same, or even worse, troubles than his. The disease or plague which raged at that time in the country pressed chiefly on the poor; Montaigne learned from them resignation and the practice of philosophy. "Let us look down upon the poor people that we see scattered upon the face of the earth, prone and intent upon their business, that neither know Aristotle nor Cato, example nor precept. Even from these does nature every day extract effects of constancy and patience, more pure and manly than those we so inquisitively study in the schools." And he goes on to describe them working to the bitter end, even in their grief, even in disease, until their strength failed them. "He that is now digging in my garden has this morning buried his father, or his son. . . . They never keep their beds but to die." The whole chapter is fine, pathetic, to the point, evincing noble, stoical elevation of mind, and also the cheerful and affable disposition which Montaigne said, with truth, was his by inheritance, and in which he had been nourished. There could be nothing better as regards "consolation in public calamities," except a chapter of some not more human, but of some truly divine book, in which the hand of God should be everywhere visible, not perfunctorily, as with Montaigne, but actually and lovingly present. In fact, the consolation Montaigne gives himself and others is perhaps as lofty and beautiful as human consolation without prayer can be.

He wrote the chapter, the twelfth of the third book, in the midst of the evils he described, and before they were ended. He concluded it in his graceful and poetical way with a collection of examples, "a heap of foreign flowers," to which he furnished only the thread for fastening them together.

There is Montaigne to the life; no matter how seriously he spoke, it was always with the utmost charm. To form an opinion

on his style you have only to open him indifferently at any page and listen to his talk on any subject; there is none that he did not enliven and make suggestive. In the chapter "Of Liars," for instance, after enlarging on his lack of memory and giving a list of reasons by which he might console himself, he suddenly added this fresh and delightful reason, that, thanks to his faculty for forgetting, "the places I revisit, and the books I read over again, always smile upon me with a fresh novelty." It is thus that on every subject he touched he was continually new, and created sources of freshness.

Montesquieu, in a memorable exclamation, said: "The four great poets, Plato, Malebranche, Shaftesbury, Montaigne!" How true it is of Montaigne! No French writer, including the poets proper, had so lofty an idea of poetry as he had. "From my earliest childhood," he said, "poetry had power over me to transport and transpierce me." He considered, and therein shows penetration, that "we have more poets than judges and interpreters of poetry. It is easier to write than to understand." In itself and its pure beauty his poetry defies definition; whoever desired to recognise it at a glance and discern of what it actually consisted would see no more than "the brilliance of a flash of lightning." In the constitution and continuity of his style, Montaigne is a writer very rich in animated, bold similes, naturally fertile in metaphors that are never detached from the thought, but that seize it in its very centre, in its interior, that join and bind it. In that respect, fully obeying his own genius, he has gone beyond and sometimes exceeded the genius of language. His concise, vigorous, and always forcible style, by its poignancy, emphasises and repeats the meaning. It may be said of his style that it is a continual epigram, or an ever-renewed metaphor, a style that has only been successfully employed by the French once, by Montaigne himself. If we wanted to imitate him, supposing we had the power and were naturally fitted for it—if we desired to write with his severity, exact proportion, and diverse continuity of figures and turns—it would be necessary to force our language to be more powerful, and poetically more complete, than is usually our custom. Style *à la* Montaigne, consistent, varied in the series and assortment of the metaphors, exacts the creation of a portion of the tissue itself to hold them. It is absolutely necessary that in places the woof should be enlarged and extended, in order to weave into it the metaphor; but in defining him I come almost to write like him. The French language, French prose,

which in fact always savours more or less of conversation, does not, naturally, possess the resources and the extent of canvas necessary for a continued picture: by the side of an animated metaphor it will often exhibit a sudden lacuna and some weak places. In filling this by boldness and invention as Montaigne did, in creating, in imagining the expression and locution that is wanting, our prose should appear equally finished. Style *à la* Montaigne would, in many respects, be openly at war with that of Voltaire. It could only come into being and flourish in the full freedom of the sixteenth century, in a frank, ingenious, jovial, keen, brave, and refined mind, of an unique stamp, that even for that time, seemed free and somewhat licentious, and that was inspired and emboldened, but not intoxicated by the pure and direct spirit of ancient sources.

Such as he is, Montaigne is the French Horace; he is Horatian in the groundwork, often in the form and expression, although in that he sometimes approaches Seneca. His book is a treasure-house of moral observations and of experience; at whatever page it is opened, and in whatever condition of mind, some wise thought expressed in a striking and enduring fashion is certain to be found. It will at once detach itself and engrave itself on the mind, a beautiful meaning in full and forcible words, in one vigorous line, familiar or great. The whole of his book, said Etienne Pasquier, is a real *seminary* of beautiful and remarkable sentences, and they come in so much the better that they run and hasten on without thrusting themselves into notice. There is something for every age, for every hour of life: you cannot read in it for any time without having the mind filled and lined as it were, or, to put it better, fully armed and clothed. We have just seen how much useful counsel and actual consolation it contains for an honourable man, born for private life, and fallen on times of disturbance and revolution. To this I shall add the counsel he gave those who, like myself and many men of my acquaintance, suffer from political disturbances without in any way provoking them, or believing ourselves capable of averting them. Montaigne, as Horace would have done, counsels them, while apprehending everything from afar off, not to be too much preoccupied with such matters in advance; to take advantage to the end of pleasant moments and bright intervals. Stroke on stroke come his piquant and wise similes, and he concludes, to my thinking, with the most delightful one of all, and one, besides, entirely appropriate and seasonable: it is folly and fret, he said, "to take out your furred gown at Saint John because you will want it at Christmas."

MADEMOISELLE DE SCUDÉRY.

I AM not going to attempt a rehabilitation, but it is well to have accurate notions of certain names that often recur. Mdlle. de Scudéry's books are no longer read, but they are still talked of; she serves to designate a literary style, a fashion of genius in a celebrated age; she is a medal which almost ended by passing into circulation and becoming current coin. What is its value, and what right does it possess to the title? Let us do with Mdlle. de Scudéry what she herself liked so much to do, let us examine, distinguish, and analyse.

That lady of *extraordinary merit*, as she was called, was born at Havre in 1607, under Henri IV.; she did not die until 1701, at the age of ninety-four, towards the end of the reign, as she liked to say, of *Louis quatorzième*. Her father was from Provence; he had been transplanted to Normandy, and had married there, but he transmitted something of the southern temperament to his children. His son, George de Scudéry, was celebrated for his heroical verses, his boastings and rodomontades, in which he had the misfortune one day to encounter and offend Corneille, and posterity never pardoned him. Mdlle. Madeleine de Scudéry's talent was quite different from that of her brother; Normandy, if I may say so, was more conspicuous in her: she reasons, argues, pleads, as regards intelligence, like an able attorney and pettifogger. However, it would appear that she too had her fair share of the family vanity: she always said: "Since the ruin of our house." "You would think she was speaking of the fall of the Grecian Empire," observed the arch Tallemant des Réaux. The boast of the Scudérys was, in fact, that they were descended from a noble, ancient, and *very warlike* house, originally from the kingdom of Naples, and established for centuries in Provence. Whilst transforming persons of her acquaintance into heroes and princes in her romances, Mdlle. de Scudéry did not consider she was going out of her own house. Having lost her parents while young, Mdlle. de Scudéry had been brought up in the country by an uncle, a learned man and a gentleman, who took

great pains with her education, much more than was usual at that period with young girls. Writing, orthography, dancing, drawing, needlework, she learned everything, Conrart tells us, and what was not taught her she discovered for herself. "As she possessed at that time an extraordinary imagination, an excellent memory, an exquisite judgment, a lively disposition, and was naturally inclined to inform herself concerning all she saw, the curious things, and everything that she heard praised, she taught herself things connected with agriculture, gardening, the household, the country, the kitchen; the cause and effects of disease, the composition of an infinitude of remedies, perfumes, scented waters, distillations, useful or agreeable, for necessity or pleasure. She wanted to learn to play on the lute, and took a few lessons with some success." But the lute needed too much time, and, without giving it up, she preferred to apply herself more particularly to occupations of the mind. She learned Italian and Spanish perfectly, and her chief delight was in reading, and in select conversation, which she was able to obtain among her neighbours. The picture that Conrart gives us of Mdlle. de Scudéry's early education reminds us of Madame de Genlis's early education in Burgundy, and I will say from the first that in studying her as closely as I have just done, Mdlle. de Scudéry seems to me to have much of Madame de Genlis, but with virtue to boot. To learn everything, to know everything, from the properties of simples and the making of preserves to the anatomy of the human heart, to be early a marvel and a prodigy, to derive from everything that took place in society material for romance, portraiture, moral dissertation, compliment, and moral lesson, to unite a store of pedantry to an extreme delicacy of observation, and a perfect knowledge of the world, are characteristics common to both. It is not, however, less essential to note the differences. Mdlle. de Scudéry, "who was very nice-looking," and of a somewhat grand air, had no beauty. Tallemant tells us, "She is a tall woman, thin and dark, with a very long face." She was endowed with moral qualities that have never been denied. Respect and esteem were, for her, never separated from the idea of fame and glory. In a word, she was a Genlis of the time of Louis XIII., full of strength and virtue, who remained a virgin and a spinster till the age of ninety-four. The relations of unlikeness and likeness will, without our dwelling on them, reveal themselves as we proceed.

And, further, we must hear her speak of herself, whenever, under a thin disguise, she does so. In most of her dialogues,

when making her characters converse, she finds a way, at every pretty speech she puts into their mouths, to make the one who replies say: "All that you say is well said. . . . All that is wonderfully to the point." Or according to a phrase she delights in: "That is very clearly expressed." The indirect compliment she addresses to herself continually recurs, and she is inexhaustible in methods of approving herself. She has partly described herself in the character of Sapho in the tenth volume of the *Grand Cyrus*, and the name of Sapho stuck to her. Those who had read the *Grand Cyrus* never called Mdlle. de Scudéry otherwise than "the admirable Sapho." Here are some passages from the portrait, which certainly pointed to herself. After speaking of the long line of ancestors her heroine could boast,

"Sapho," she added, "enjoyed the further advantage of being daughter unto a father and mother who were persons of great spirits and virtue; but she had the misfortune to lose them so early that she received from them only her first inclinations unto goodness, for she was but six years of age when they died. It is true they left her under the tuition of a cousin. . . ."

The uncle is here changed into a cousin; but the rest continues to refer to herself—

"Indeed, madam" (it is a tale one of the characters is supposed to tell the Queen of Pontus), "I do not think all Greece ever had a person to be compared unto Sapho, yet I shall not now relate unto you any passages of her infancy; for she was so very little while a child that at twelve years of age she was spoken of as a person whose beauty, spirit, and judgment were already ripe, and made all the world to wonder. Only thus much let me tell you, that never was in any found inclinations more noble, nor a greater aptness to learn anything she desired to know."

And courageously attacking the subject of beauty, it is still of herself she is thinking when she says—

"Though you hear speak of Sapho as the most charming person of all Greece, yet you must not imagine her to be one of those in whom envy cannot find a fault. . . . Yet she is able to inspire greater passions than the greatest beauty of the earth. . . . As for her *complexion*, it is none of the highest lustre, yet so well as none can say but that she is very fair; but her eyes are so inexpressibly lovely, so fair, so sweet, so quick, so amorous, and so sprightly, as the lustre of them strikes to the very heart of those she looks upon. . . . That which

made their *greatest* lustre was, that there never was a *greater* opposition than was between the black and white of her eyes, and yet this *great* opposition did not cause any harshness to appear in them."

The carelessness of style, the repetitions and prolixity, are sufficiently noticeable. And I also abridge much—a thing Mdlle. de Scudéry never did; as I go along, I omit many *buts*, *fors*, and *althoughs*. But following these characteristics alone we catch more than a glimpse of the ideal she was not sorry to present of her beauty, or, if you prefer it, of the corrective of her plainness. Such might the Sapho of the Marais appear for a moment to prejudiced eyes at a time when Chapelain passed for a great epic poet, and boldly compared her to La Pucelle, at a time when Pellisson, the plainest of fine wits, made his passionate declaration to her.

And what must ever be most valuable for us in the portrait of Sapho is that at length she reaches the charms of the mind, and enlarges on them with a fresh access of delight:—

"For the charms of her wit do infinitely transcend those of her beauty. And indeed it is of so vast an extent, as it may most truly be said, that what she understands not cannot be reached by any other, and she is so wonderfully apt to learn anything that she hath made it her own before you would think she began to learn."

Then follows the enumeration of all her talents, verse, prose, and improvised songs:—

"She expressed herself in such things as were most difficult, most delicately, and she knew so well how to read an *anatomy* lecture upon an *amorous heart*, if it be lawful to say so, that she could make an exact description of all its jealousies, all its inquietudes, all its impatiences, all its joys, all its disgusts, its murmurs, its despairs, its hopes, its fears, its revolts, and all its tumultuous feelings, which are never properly understood except by those who feel them or who have felt them."

One of Mdlle. de Scudéry's pretensions was to know thoroughly, and to describe very well, the most secret impulses of love, although she had scarcely felt them, except by reflection: in fact, she often succeeded in all that was delicacy and refinement, in all that was not the passion itself. "You explain that so admirably," might be said to her with a character in her dialogues, "that if you had done nothing all your life but be in love you could not speak of it better." "If I have not been myself in love," she would reply, with her most charming smile, "I have lady friends who have been in love

for me, and they have taught me to speak of it." That is wit indeed, and of that Mdlle. de Scudéry had plenty.

In the portrait of Sapho, which is, in so great part, her own, she strongly insists that Sapho does not only thoroughly know what has to do with *love*, but she is also equally well acquainted with all that belongs to *generosity;* and this wonder of science and nature is, according to her, further crowned with modesty.

"Her discourse is so natural, so free, so easy, and so gallant, as one should never hear her talk in general company but of such things as a person of a good wit might talk of without having studied for what she knew. Not but that knowing men might see that nature alone could not arrive at that height she did; but it was because she was so careful to keep herself within the sphere of her own sex, as she almost never spoke of anything but such as was within the compass of a lady's knowledge."

It must be confessed that Sapho is very wise and modest, according to the notions of the seventeenth century and the last fashion in taste of the Place-Royale and the Hôtel Rambouillet.

Mdlle. de Scudéry, in fact, did not delay to bring herself into notice. She did not remain long in the country. Having lost her uncle, she hesitated between Rouen and Paris; but her brother, who at that time was held in some estimation among dramatic authors, and whose pieces were successful at the Hôtel de Bourgogne, decided her to come and establish herself in the capital. She appeared there directly with success, was welcomed and praised in the best society, and began to write romances, without, however, putting her name, but concealing herself under that of her illustrious brother. *Ibrahim on l'illustre Bassa* began to appear in 1641; *Artamenes, or the Grand Cyrus*, in 1650; and *Clélie* in 1654.

Mdlle. de Scudéry's real epoch is at that period, at the time of the Regency, in the happy days of Anne of Austria, before and after the Fronde, and her reputation lasted without any check until Boileau, true kill-joy as he was, made an attack on it. "That Despréaux," said Legrais, "knows nothing but how to talk about himself and criticise others. Why speak ill of Mdlle. de Scudéry as he has done?"

In order to understand rightly Mdlle. de Scudéry's success and the direction her talent took, the aristocratic society of Paris as it was before the rule of Louis XIV. must be described. For some years a taste for intelligence

and literary genius had prevailed, a taste which contained more zeal and emulation than discernment and enlightenment. D'Urfé's romance, Balzac's letters, the great success of the dramas of Corneille and of the other fashionable authors, Richelieu's slightly pedantic but real and efficacious protection, the foundation of the French Academy, had all contributed to awaken a great curiosity, especially among women, who felt that the moment for them to put society on their level was come. They were freed from antiquity and the classical languages; they wished to know their native language, and applied to professional grammarians. Men of the world acted as intermediaries between learned men properly so called and the drawing-rooms in which they desired, while instructing, to gain favour. But a vast want of experience was mingled with the first attempts at a serious and polished society. To render Mdlle. de Scudéry all the justice due to her, and to assign her her true title, she ought to be regarded as one of the *instructresses* of society at that period of formation and transition. That was her *rôle* and, in great part, her aim.

In the portrait and story of Sapho which occurs towards the end of the *Grand Cyrus*, she notes to what degree she was penetrated with it, and she brings to it more fine feeling and tact than from a distance, according to her reputation, she might be supposed to possess. Do not take her for a genius by profession, she vindicates herself of that at the very outset. "There is nothing more troublesome," she thinks, "than to have a good wit, to be treated accordingly, if one have any birth and nobleness of heart." She recognises better than any one all the disadvantages of a fine wit (especially a woman) who is received in society on that footing, and she states them like a woman of common sense and a lady of quality who has suffered from them. One of the greatest disadvantages, and one that is most productive of weariness, is, that people of society do not think they may approach a fine wit in the same fashion as any other person, or speak to him except in *grand style*.

"For I observe both men and women when they talk unto me are much perplexed because they have a fancy that they must not speak unto me as they do unto others. In vain do I speak to them of the fine weather, of current news, and such things as make ordinary conversation; they always return to their idea, and they are so persuaded that I constrain myself in speaking unto them, that they constrain themselves also to go beyond their last, insomuch that I wish I could un-Sapho myself."

Thus Mdlle. de Scudéry herself makes many remarks on the disadvantages of being a female fine wit and a learned woman. Long before Molière she said many very sensible things on that subject. But let us not forget the period of society and the kind of difficulties with which she had to contend. She carefully discusses the question, if it would be well for women in general to know more than they knew: "For although I am a declared enemy unto all women who are always in their altitudes of knowledge and wisdom, yet I cannot choose but extremely condemn the other extreme, and be ashamed to see so many women of quality so grossly ignorant, as, in my opinion, they dishonour their sex." There, in fact, lay the fault which it was first necessary to remedy. The education of women of quality at that time (1641-1654) was most defective. Granted a La Fayette and a Sévigné, what ignorance and strange carelessness even among women of intelligence and renown! Madame de Sablé, La Rochefoucauld's clever friend, could not spell.

"There are some women who speak well and write ill, and all merely by their own negligence. . . . In my opinion it is a most gross error to say they would have women *speak well and write ill.* . . . Most ladies seem to write purposely not to be understood, so little coherence is in their letters and such odd orthography. Yet those very same ladies who commit such gross faults in their writings, and have spent all their stock of wit in the first line, they will mock a whole day together at a poor stranger who has only mistaken one word for another."

One of the improvements Mdlle. de Scudéry most urged and contributed to, was to harmonise the manner of speaking and writing. She made persons of her sex ashamed of inconsistency. To write by rule, and even to talk a little by rule, was the twofold result of her doctrine and example. Her ideas on the education of women are, in theory, full of appropriateness and proportion—

"And seriously it is the oddest thing in the world to observe how women commonly are educated. They must not be any gossipers nor gallants, and yet they are taught with abundance of care every quality that belongs to gallantry, but never anything that will fortify their virtue or improve their wits. Indeed, do not all those scoldings they receive in early youth for not behaving well, for not dressing stylishly enough, and for not learning properly the lessons set them by their dancing and singing masters, prove what I say? And it is very strange that a woman who cannot with propriety dance for more than five

or six years of her life, spends ten or twelve in learning what she can only practise for five or six; and that this very same person who must necessarily have sense until her death and talk until her last sigh, should be taught nothing that can help her to converse agreeably and act with seemliness."

Her conclusion, which she only states with reserve (for on such a subject, which touches *diversity of minds*, there cannot be *universal law*), her conclusion, I say, is, that while demanding more knowledge for women than they had, she desired them never to act or speak like learned women.

"Though I would have women to know more than generally they do, yet I would not have them talk as if they were knowing at all. I would have them give others leave and cause to say, that they know more than they will vaunt of, that they have good wits, that they can speak well and write elegantly, but I would not have it said of them that they are learned, for those characters are so different that they do not in the least resemble each other."

Once more we observe her good sense, and in Mdlle. de Scudéry's books there is much of it, mingled, it is true, with too much argument and dissertation, submerged in what now seems to us romantic extravagances.

What is extravagance for us is exactly what, at that time, caused the instruction to pass from hand to hand, and more certainly to fulfil its purpose. Tallemant tells us that in conversation she had a tone of *master* and *preacher* which was by no means agreeable. The tone was not apparent in her romances, coming as it did from the mouths of her characters, and a certain amount of study is necessary now to discover its didactic basis. Of true imagination and invention Mdlle. de Scudéry had none. When she wished to construct and invent fictions, she took the plots most in vogue at the moment; she procured her materials from the fashionable shop and dressing-room; she imitated the process of d'Urfé in *Astrée*. In so doing she flattered herself that she combined fiction with history, and art with reality. "A wise man," she thought, "never permitted himself to invent things that could not be believed. The true art of falsehood is to resemble the truth." There is a conversation in *Clélie* where the "way to invent a fable," and the writing of romances, is discussed. Mdlle. de Scudéry nearly preaches observation of nature. She puts into the mouth of the poet Anacreon almost as good rules of rhetoric as could be found in Quintilian. It is a pity that she did not put them more into practice. At the present time it

would be impossible to speak of Mdlle. de Scudéry's romances, and to analyse them, without calumniating her, so ridiculous would she appear. We should impute to her alone what was the caprice of the time. To appreciate her romances properly as such, we should be obliged to go back to the models she set herself, and write the history of a whole branch of literature. What strikes us about her at first sight is, that she takes all the people of her acquaintance and circle, travesties them as Romans, Greeks, Persians, Carthaginians. The principal events play much the same part as is assigned them in history, but the characters are made to talk and think as she knew them in the Marais. *Amilcar* is the poet Sarasin; *Herminius* is Pellisson. Conrart became *Cléodamas*, and possessed near Agrigentum a pretty country-house, which is described at length, and is no other than that of Athys, near Paris. If she meets an historical character she harmonises him with the people of her acquaintance; she said of Brutus, of the Brutus who sentenced his sons to death and drove out the Tarquins, that he was born with "the most gallant, gentle, and amiable mind in the world;" and of the poet Alcæus she said that he was "a clever young fellow, full of wit and a great intriguer." The actions and conduct of all the characters (so much did she travesty them) were almost in accord with her artificial manner of presenting them; the same colour of artificiality covers the whole. But, it will be asked, how was it that such romances were so fashionable and so greatly in demand? How could the youth of Madame de Sévigné and of Madame de la Fayette be nourished on them? Firstly, we have no real idea of the spirit of various epochs, of the profound difference of manners in history. Further, nearly all the characters who figure in Mdlle. de Scudéry's romances were alive and contemporary, their names were known, their portraits and humours were recognised from the *Grand Cyrus*, in whom men wished to see the great Condé, to *Doralise* who was Mdlle. Robineau. All the characters, even the most secondary, were known in society; the key was given, the masks removed; and even now we ourselves, where we know the real names, do not run over the pages without curiosity. "You would not believe," said Tallemant, "how delighted the ladies are to be in her romances, or, to put it better, to see their portraits there; for only the character of the persons must be sought, their deeds are not there at all. Some, however, have complained. . . ." One who complained was one of the wittiest women of the day, who said many of those good things that are very bitter, and therefore survive.

Mdlle. de Scudéry, in the sixth volume of the *Grand Cyrus*, gave Madame Cornuel's portrait under the name of *Zénocrite*, and she made her one of the most charming and sensible jesters of Lycia. The portrait is perfectly true. Madame Cornuel justified the reputation of a bold jester in saying of Mdlle. de Scudéry, who had a very dark skin, that it could be well understood "that she was destined by Providence for a scribbler, since she perspired ink at every pore." A Marton or a Dorine of Molière could not have said more.

What is remarkable and really of worth in Mdlle. de Scudéry's romances are the Conversations, for which she had a particular talent, a true vocation. Later, when her romances were out of fashion, she made extracts from these conversations in little volumes, which appeared successively to the number of ten (she scarcely ever did anything except in ten volumes). "Mdlle de Scudéry has just sent me two little volumes of *Conversations*," wrote Madame de Sévigné to her daughter (September 25, 1680). "It is impossible that they can be anything but good, when they are not swamped in her big romance." The little volumes, and others of the same sort that followed later, lend a lustre to Mdlle. de Scudéry's old age; they are even now sought by the curious, and by those to whom nothing is unimportant that interested the *grand siécle*. It is not rare to hear it stated that Mdlle. de Scudéry's romances are hateful and unreadable, but not so the *Conversations*. It is well, however, to bear in mind that the *Conversations*, at least all the first, are taken from the text of *Cyrus*, *Clélie*, and her other romances.

One of the principal subjects she treats is Conversation itself: "As conversation is the bond of all humane society, the greatest pleasure of well-bred people, and the most ordinary means of introducing into the world not only politeness, but also the purest morals and the love of glory and virtue, methinks the company cannot entertain themselves more profitably nor more agreeably, said Cilenia (one of the characters she liked), than in examining what it is people call conversation." And they begin to examine what conversation, to be pleasant, and worthy of well-bred persons, ought to be, and therefore it should not be limited to family and domestic subjects, nor turn on purely futile subjects and dress, as so often happens among women when they are by themselves. "Are you not constrained to allow," observes one of Mdlle. de Scudéry's interlocutors, "that he who should write about what fifteen or twenty women say together would make the worst book that ever was? And even if that is so among those fifteen or

twenty women there would be a great deal of wit. But let only one man enter, and he not of the most elevated, that same conversation would change and suddenly become more regular, ingenious, and agreeable. In short, the most amiable women in the world, when they are a great number together, and there are no men, do hardly say anything that is to be valued, and are more tired than if they were alone. But as for such men as are civil and well-bred, it is not the same with them. Their conversation is not, without doubt, attended with so much mirth when there are no ladies as when there are. But, commonly, though it be more serious, yet it is more rational, and, in short, they can be easier without us than we without them." Those are excellent observations, and show knowledge of the world, almost of the court. The whole of the chapter "Of Conversation" proves careful study; and after having gone through the different defects of a conversation, *Clélie* or *Valérie*, or rather the author, in a summing-up, whose only fault is that of being too exact and methodical, comes to the conclusion that in order not to be dull, to be pleasing and rational at the same time, conversation ought not to be confined to one subject, but should turn a little on all. "I think," she says, "generally speaking, it ought oftener to be of common and gallant things than of great transactions; but, however, I conceive that nothing is forbidden; that it ought to be free and diversified according to the times, the places and persons with whom we are; and that the secret is of speaking always nobly of mean things, very plainly of high things, very gallantly of gallant things, without transport and affectation." But what is most necessary to make it pleasant and amusing is "that it should have a *certain spirit of politeness* which should absolutely banish from it all bitter railleries, as well as all those which may in any wise offend modesty. . . . But besides all I have now said I would have it likewise governed by *a certain spirit of joy*." That is truly well put, and, as one of the persons of the Discourse does not fail to observe, as charming as it is sensible. After that chapter read the one which treats "Of Writing Letters" (partly extracted from *Clélie*, which is in the *Conversations Nouvelles*), and you will understand how, under the romance-writer, who at a distance seems to us extravagant, there was in Mdlle. de Scudéry a serious Genlis, a Miss Edgeworth; indeed, what shall I say? an excellent *schoolmistress* for seventeenth century aristocratic society and young ladies of quality.

She treats in the same way every imaginable subject; she gives us a short complete treatise, often too complete, in which

she combines with the historical examples she had collected, the anecdotes she gathered from the society of her time. She analyses everything, she dissertates on everything, on perfumes, pleasures, desires, moral characteristics and virtues; once indeed her observations on the colour of the wings and on the flight of butterflies are almost those of a physicist or a naturalist. She conjectures, refines, symbolises; she seeks and gives reasons for everything. Never has more use been made of the word *because*. There are times when she is a grammarian, an academician, when she discusses the synonomy of words, and carefully distinguishes their acceptations; how *joy* and *enjoyment* differ; whether *magnificence* is not an heroic and regal quality rather than a virtue, for magnificence is only becoming to a few persons, while virtues are becoming to everybody; how *magnanimity* comprises more things than *generosity*, which has usually narrower limits, so that we may sometimes be very generous without being truly magnanimous. There are short essays which she names most charmingly, such as "On Ennui without a Cause." In some respects, in the *Conversations*, Mdlle. de Scudéry proves herself the Nicole of women, with more refinement perhaps, but with a foundation of pedantry and inflexibility that the clever theologian did not possess. And then Nicole ends everything by God and the consideration of the supreme end, while Mdlle. de Scudéry invariably finishes by the praises and apotheosis of the King; therein she puts a particular skill and industry noticed by Bayle, but which is all the same slightly displeasing.

In fact, the estimable lady, long ill-treated by fortune, early accustomed herself to pay compliments which might be useful to her. A certain amount of tact was at the bottom of all her bad taste. No one has combined more insipid praise with a mania for redressing the little faults of the society round her. What would you have? it was necessary to her to sell her books, and see them placed under illustrious patronage. And then to describe her friends and acquaintances at length, their town houses and their country houses, served, while flattering them, to fill pages and enlarge the volume. *Sapho* was not above such little methods of her craft. "Truly," said Tallemant, "she wants to leave no stone unturned. When I think seriously of it, I forgive her." She liked such positive proofs as little presents, favours, pensions, to be added to the consideration that never failed her. It somewhat contributed to lower the moralist in her, and to limit her view to the narrow circle of the society of the time.

In some places, however, we believe we recognise a firm and almost vigorous mind, a mind that approaches lofty subjects with critical acuteness, and understands their different aspects; and while always submitting to received opinions, is, above all, determined by considerations of propriety.

Mdlle. de Scudéry was approaching sixty years of age when Boileau appeared and began, in his early *Satires* (1665), to ridicule the long romances, and to regard an admiration for *Cyrus* as only permissible to country squires. The war boldly declared by Boileau against a false style in literature that had had its day, and only survived through superstition, struck it a mortal blow, and from that time Mdlle. de Scudéry was for the new generation merely an antiquated author out of date. Madame de la Fayette finished the work of reducing Mdlle. de Scudéry to the rank of a venerable antique by publishing her own two romances of *Zaïde* and the *Princesse de Clèves*, where she let it be seen how concise, natural, and refined it was possible to be. Vain are the attempts now made to protest against the irrefutable verdict, and to enumerate every consolatory testimony in favour of Mdlle. de Scudéry, the letters of Mascaron, Fléchier, Madame Brinon, lady superior of Saint-Cyr, Madame Dacier, the praises of Godeau, Segrais, Huet, Bouhours, and Pellisson. The last, who harassed and supplanted Conrart, became, as is known, Mdlle. de Scudéry's titulary lover, her platonic admirer, and under the name of *Sapho* he celebrated her in twenty gallant poems. But if anything proves to me that Pellisson, in spite of his elegance and the purity of his diction, was never a true Attic, and always ignored the real graces of style, it is precisely his avowed taste for such an idol. Nothing is to be concluded from the compliments that Madame de Sévigné and Madame de Maintenon addressed to Mdlle. de Scudéry in her old age: the gracious and high-bred ladies continued to respect in her, when they spoke to her face to face, one of the passions of their youth. And as regards all the other names mentioned, I except none, neither Fléchier, Mascaron, nor Bouhours, it is not, as may be remarked, by good taste or by sound and judicious taste that they shine; all have more or less preserved a pronounced colour of the Hôtel Rambouillet, and in some respects they were behind their age. Admiration of Mdlle. de Scudéry is a touchstone which proves them and passes sentence on them.

In 1671 the French Academy awarded, for the first time, the prize for eloquence founded by Balzac. The prize was at

first awarded for a sort of treatise or sermon on a Christian virtue. The first subject, fixed by Balzac himself, was "Praise and Glory." Mdlle. de Scudéry wrote an essay and gained the prize, to the great applause of all who remained of the old academicians of Richelieu's time. The Muse, who with the greatest ease carried off the first crown and led the procession of future laureates, was then sixty-four years old.

She continued to grow old and to outlive her fame, deprived of reputation in the outer world, but still enjoying glory in private, within the closed doors of her own room. Her merit and her estimable qualities gained her a little court of friends, who spoke of her as "the first woman in the world," and "the wonder of the age of Louis the Great." When she died, June 2, 1701, the *Journal des Savants* of the following month (July 11) recorded those magnificent eulogies. About the same time, and in the same quarter of the Marais, lived and grew old, nine years younger than she, a truly wonderful woman, who really possessed charm, gay urbanity, freshness and vigour of mind, the gift of rejuvenation, all that Mdlle. de Scudéry had not—Ninon de l'Enclos. The mere bringing together of those names furnishes a complete lesson in taste.

Be that as it may, Mdlle. de Scudéry deserves to be known as she really was. Her romances obtained a vogue that marks a particular date in the history of manners and the education of society. It will always be remembered that a volume of *Cyrus* was sent to distract the great Condé when he was a prisoner at Vincennes, and a volume of *Clélie* to M. d'Andilly, alone at Port-Royal, in order to delight him with a description of his solitude. As regards the false trappings of imagination, and the false historical equipment in which she enveloped her thoughts, Mdlle. de Scudéry is scarcely more ridiculous than Madame Cottin was forty years ago. The masquerade costume was borrowed. Mdlle. de Scudéry's particular talent was the manner of observing and describing the society around her, of seizing as they passed the persons of her acquaintance and introducing them living into her romances, making them converse with wit and intelligence. It is by that side that I judge her; and while recognising in her much distinction and ingenious acuteness of analysis, much moral anatomy, I add that the whole is abstract, subtle, of excessive argument, savouring of the thesis, without ease or enlightenment, at base dry and disagreeable. Her style resembles that of La Motte and Fontenelle, but possesses far less grace. She distinguishes, divides and sub-divides, classifies, instructs. There is never any fresh-

ness; what is elegant soon becomes didactic and forced. She is always careful to put an inkstand in the peaceful arbours, in the midst of the parks and gardens she describes. Such appears to me, in spite of all my efforts to find her more amiable, the geographer of the *Tendre* country, Pellisson's Sapho. If then it is necessary, in conclusion, to reply to the question asked at the beginning, I should henceforth attach to Mdlle. de Scudéry's name the notion not of ridicule but of esteem, a serious esteem, but certainly not any idea of charm or grace.

A woman of such great merit without charm is, nevertheless, unpleasing to describe and difficult to portray; we should so much like to give her what she lacks. But I wished there should be at least one character of that sort, in order that the collection should not be wholly flattering and favourable.

ALFRED DE MUSSET.

In a few days a collection of new poems, written by M. Alfred de Musset, from 1840 to 1849, will appear; his former delightful collection contained only the poems composed before 1840. A number of lyrics and others (songs, sonnets, epistles) have been published since that date in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* and elsewhere: they are those which have just been collected, with the addition of a few unpublished pieces. Thus I have a pretext of which, after all, there is scarcely any need for speaking of M. Alfred de Musset, and for forming a general opinion of the character of his talent, and of his place and influence in our poetry.

About ten years ago M. de Musset addressed a "Letter," in verse, to M. de Lamartine, in which he turned for the first time to the prince of the poets of the age, and made him the public and direct declaration that the singer of Elvire had for a long time been accustomed to receive from any one entering on the career of poet, but which M. de Musset, in defiance of etiquette, had delayed longer than most to make him. The poet of "Namouna" and "Rolla" told him in very fine lines that after doubting, denying, and blaspheming, a sudden light manifested itself within him. "I write, oh poet! to tell you of my love,—A ray of light has penetrated my soul,—And at a time of grief and supreme sorrow,—The tears I shed brought thought of thee to me."

In the midst of his passion and suffering, a sentiment of divine elevation, an idea of immortality, was, he said, awakened in his soul; the "angels of sorrow" spoke to him, and he naturally thought first of him who revealed the sacred sources of inspiration in French poetry. M. de Musset opportunely recalled the lines which the young Lamartine had addressed to Lord Byron when he was on the point of setting out for Greece; and without aspiring to an ambitious comparison, he asked Lamartine to welcome him and his offering now, as he had formerly been received by the "great Byron."

A journal has just published the reply in verse which M. de Lamartine made to M. de Musset, a reply bearing the date 1840. Its appearance now has almost an air of injustice, for it is many a long day since M. de Musset was the mere beginner that M. de Lamartine was pleased to see in him. He evidently took M. de Musset's modesty too literally. He forgot that in 1840 the "fair-haired child," the "youth with heart of wax," as he calls him, had written the "May Night" and the "October Night," poems that will survive as long as the "Lake," and that are equally passionate, and almost as pure. M. de Lamartine's criticisms on poetry are superficial; I remember his early criticisms of Petrarch and of André Chénier. In the poem to M. de Musset he stopped at the Musset of the songs, of the "Marquise," and the "Andalouse." He tells him things disagreeable to hear when spoken by any other than oneself. In the "Confession of a Child of the Century," and in many other places, M. de Musset made confessions that poetry in our age sanctions and defends. M. de Lamartine turns them into a moral lesson; he quotes himself as an example, and ends, according to custom, by insensibly suggesting himself as a model. This is to what we expose ourselves in addressing our homage to the illustrious men in whose footprints we tread. M. de Lamartine himself was not so cordially received by Byron as M. de Musset seems to think. In his *Memoirs* Byron speaks of the fine epistle "On Man" very lightly, of the early "Meditations" as the work of some one who thought fit to compare him to the devil, and to call him the "singer of hell." In fact, it is useless to demand justice and attention from illustrious predecessors when we are ourselves of their race; they are too full of themselves. How, I ask you, would Byron have welcomed advances from Keats, from the young wounded eagle who fell so soon, and whom he always treats so cavalierly—from the heights of his pity or contempt? How would M. de Chateaubriand himself, who so cleverly kept up appearances, have criticised the underlying principle of M. de Lamartine, the poet, if not as a man of great talent and melody who had had success with women and in drawing-rooms? Poets, go straight to the people for your diploma, and among them, to those who feel, whose minds and hearts are free, to the youths or to men who were youths yesterday and are old to-day, to those who read and sing you, to those, too, who read you again. It is among them that you will find faithful and sincere friends who will love you for your fine qualities and not for your faults; who will not admire you

because it is the fashion, and who, when it shall change, will defend you against the fashion.

M. de Musset came before the public when scarcely twenty years old, and from the very first wished to mark emphatically his unlikeness to the other poets then famous. In order that there should be no mistake he assumed from the first a mask, a fantastic costume, a manner; he disguised himself as a Spaniard and an Italian, although he had not yet seen Spain and Italy: hence ensued disadvantages which were not easily thrown off. I am certain that, endowed as he was with original power and an individual genius, even if he had begun more simply and without taking so much pains to make himself singular, he would soon have been distinguished from the poets whose society he disclaimed and whose sentimental and melancholy, solemn and serious temperaments were so different from his. He possessed a feeling for raillery which the others lacked, and a need of true passion they felt but rarely. "My first verses are those of a child, my second those of a youth," he said, criticising himself. M. de Musset wrote his juvenile poems, but with a brilliance, an insolence of animation (as Regnier says), with a more than virile audacity, with a page's charm and effrontery: he was Cherubino at a masked ball, playing the part of Don Juan. The early manner, in which we note a vein of affectation and traces of reminiscences, is crowned by two poems (if we may call poems things not composed as such), by two wondrous divagations, "Namouna" and "Rolla," in which, under the pretext of relating a story he always forgets, the poet breathed forth his dreams and fancies, and abandoned himself to unrestrained freedom. Wit, nudities and crudities, lyrical power, a charm and refinement at times adorable, the highest poetry for no reason, debauch along with the ideal, sudden whiffs of lilac that bring back freshness, here and there a scrap of *chic* (to speak the language of the studio), all these things mingled and compounded, produced the strangest and certainly the most astonishing thing that French poetry, the virtuous girl who, already elderly, had formerly espoused M. de Malherbe, had yet furnished. It may be said that in Namouna we find the faults and fine qualities of Alfred de Musset, the poet. But the latter are so great and of such a high order that they compensate for everything.

Byron wrote to his publisher, Murray: "You say that a half of 'Don Juan' is very fine: you are mistaken, for if it was true it would be the most beautiful poem that exists. Where is the poem

of which a half is of worth?" Byron was right in speaking thus about himself and his contemporaries; but opposite and above is the school of Virgil, the poet who wanted to burn his poem because he did not find it perfect enough as a whole. It was the same Byron who wrote: "I am like the tiger (in poetry): if I fail at the first leap I go back muttering to my cave." As a rule, modern French poets, Béranger excepted, have only aspired to making the first leap in poetry, and what they did not reach then they never attained.

I need not then hesitate to say that in the poems of "Rolla" and of "Namouna" there is a good half that does not correspond with the other. The fine part of "Namouna," the part in which the poet reveals himself with full power, is the second canto. It is there that M. de Musset unfolds his theory of Don Juan, and contrasts the two sorts of libertines who, according to him, share the stage of the world: the heartless libertine, ideal, full of egoism and vanity, finding it difficult to get pleasure out of anything, and only desirous of inspiring love without returning it, *Lovelace*, in fact; and the other type of libertine, amiable and loving, almost innocent, passing through all phases of inconstancy in order to reach an ideal that eludes him, believing he loves, the dupe of none but himself in his seductions, and changing only because he ceases to love. There, according to M. de Musset, is the real poetical Don Juan, "whom no one succeeded in drawing, whom Mozart dreamed of:—Whom Hoffmann saw pass before him to the sound of music,—In a divine lightning flash on one of his fantastic nights,—An excellent portrait he never finished,—And which in our time a Shakespeare might have painted." And M. de Musset attempts to paint him in the brightest and most charming colours, in colours which remind me (Heaven forgive me!) of those used by Milton when painting his happy couple in Eden. He shows him to us, handsome, twenty years of age, sitting by a meadow side near his sleeping mistress, and watching over her slumber like an angel. "There he is, young and handsome, under the sky of France . . . Bringing to nature a heart full of hope,—Loving, loved by all, open as a flower;—So candid and fresh that the angel of innocence—Would kiss on his brow the beauty of his heart.—There he is, look at him, divine his life for him.—What fate can be predicted for that child of heaven?—Love, in approaching him, swears to be everlasting! Fortune thinks of him. . . ." And all that follows. From a poetical point of view nothing could be more delightful, better imagined, and better carried out.

Nevertheless, in vain has the poet created, in vain has he desired to draw for us an unique Don Juan, a contradiction as he makes him, living almost innocent in the midst of his crimes; the "innocent corrupter" does not exist. He succeeded in evoking him, in giving momentary life by his magic to an impossible abstraction. It is said that words do no harm on paper. Such a combination and contrast of virtues and vices in the same being is all very well to write about, and especially to celebrate in verse, but it is true neither according to humanity nor nature. And then, why put us to the absolute alternative of choosing between the two sorts of libertines? Would poetry suffer, oh, poet! if there were no libertines? In the divine company of Virgil's Elysian Fields, in which the greatest of mortals hold a place, there is room in the first rank for the virtuous poets, for the poets who were entirely human, who uttered with emotion and tenderness the large accents of nature:

"Quique pii vates et Phoebo digna locuti."

How distant such subtleties were from those lofty and wholesome thoughts!

So much for my reservations. There are, however, in "Namouna" two or three hundred consecutive lines quite beyond comparison. Be incredulous, and turn them about in every sense; apply the surgeon's knife; cavil at your pleasure; a few stains, a little loud colouring may be discovered; but if you possess true poetic feeling, and if you are sincere, you will recognise the strength and power of the inspiration; the god—or if you prefer it, the devil—has touched it.

Young men, who in such a matter are scarcely ever mistaken, were the first to recognise it. When the poems of "Namouna" and "Rolla" had only appeared in the Reviews, and before they were collected in a volume, law students and medical students knew them by heart from beginning to end, and recited them to their friends, the new arrivals. Many of them still know the splendid exordium of "Rolla," the apostrophe to Christ, the other apostrophe to Voltaire (for there are many apostrophes), especially the enchanting slumber of the fifteen-year-old girl: "Oh! the flower of Eden, why hast thou let it fade,—Careless child, beautiful fair-haired Eve? . . ." I speak of young men as they were ten years ago. Then the whole of these youthful poems were recited; now, perhaps, a selection is already beginning to be made.

After "Namouna" and "Rolla," there remained one step for M. de Musset to take. He had gone as far as was possible in the attempt and anticipation of passion without being touched by passion itself. But by means of talking of it, by attributing to himself the desire and torment of it, patience! it will come. In spite of his insults and blasphemies, his heart was worthy of it. He who had described in burning stanzas the odious and selfish Lovelace, and had made a show of libertine pretensions, had at base the heart of an honest man and of a poet. For, observe carefully, that even with the author of "Namouna," coxcombry (if I dare say it) is only on the surface: he throws it off as soon as the flame of his poetry is kindled.

At length M. de Musset loved. He told and repeated it so often in his verse, his passion has made so much noise, and has been so loudly proclaimed on both sides and in all tones, that we commit no indiscretion in stating it here in simple prose. Besides, it is never a dishonour for a woman to have been loved and sung by a true poet, even when afterwards she seems to be cursed for it. The malediction is a supreme homage. A far-sighted confidant could say: "Take care, you love her still."

That love was the great event of M. de Musset's life, I mean of his poetic life. His talent was suddenly purified and ennobled; the sacred flame seemed on a sudden to reject all impure alloy. In the poems composed under that powerful star almost all the faults disappeared; his finer qualities, till then, as it were, scattered and fragmentary, were combined, assembled, and grouped in a powerful although sad harmony. The four poems M. de Musset called "Nights" are short, complex, meditative poems, marking the loftiest height of his lyrical genius. The "May Night" and the "October Night" are the finest for the flow and the inexhaustible vein of the poetry, for the expression of violent and unmasked passion. But the "December Night" and the "August Night" are also delightful—the latter for action and sentiment, the former for grace and flexibility of expression. The four, taken together, make one work, animated by the same sentiment, possessing harmony and skilfully contrived relations.

Parallel with De Musset's "Nights" I read over again the famous poems of Milton's youth, "L'Allegro," and especially "Il Penseroso." But in those compositions of supreme and somewhat cold beauty the poet was passionless; he waited for an impulse from without; he received his impressions successively from nature; he carried to it a grave, noble, sensible

temperament, but calm like a mirror slightly ruffled. The "Penseroso" is the masterpiece of meditative and contemplative poems; it resembles a magnificent oratorio, in which by degrees prayer slowly ascends to the Eternal. The contrast to the subject in hand is very noticeable. I am not instituting a comparison. Let us not displace august names from their proper sphere. All that is fine in Milton is beyond comparison; it reveals the calm habitude of high regions and a continuity of power. However, in the more terrestrial, and at the same time more human, "Nights" of M. de Musset, it is from within that the inspiration, the passion that paints and the breeze that makes nature fragrant, springs; or, rather, the charm consists in the combination and alliance of the two sources of impressions—that is to say, of a deep sorrow and of a soul still open to vivid impressions. The poet, wounded to the heart, shedding real tears, is conscious of a renewal of youth, and is almost intoxicated by the spring. He is more sensitive than before to the innumerable beauties of the universe, to the verdure and the flowers, to the morning sunlight, to the birds' songs, and fresh as at the age of fifteen, he brings us his posy of lilies and eglantine. M. de Musset's muse will always, even at the least happy moments, be conscious of such renewals; but in no other place will the natural freshness be so happily wedded, as in this case, to bleeding passion and sincere grief. Poetry, chaste consoler, was there treated almost with adoration and affection.

Which of the poets of this age will survive? Rash would be the man who should at the present time take upon himself the task of assigning lots and making a division. But in our day time runs on so swiftly that even now we can recognise its different effects on works which at their birth seemed equally likely to live. Consider the works that were at first most warmly greeted and applauded: how many places are already empty, how many colours already pale and faded! One of the poets most certain to survive, Béranger, said to me one day: "You all began too young, and before you arrived at maturity." He might easily speak thus. It is not every man's good fortune to meet obstacles which restrain and keep him back until the right moment—the moment at which the fruit as well as the flowers can be produced. Béranger (he or his good fairy) had the sense to let the poetry of the Empire die away before his came into being; had he planned his life himself, he could not have had a greater success. The others, a little sooner, a little later, all very young, some still children, entered the lists pell-mell entirely at hazard. What may be stated with

certainty is that a rich lyrical poetry, richer than France until then had suspected, but an unequal and motley poetry, resulted during several seasons from that assemblage of talent. The greater number of the poets abandoned themselves without curb or bridle to all the instincts of their nature, and moreover to all the pretensions of their pride and the foolishness of their vanity. Faults and fine qualities came out in all their freedom, and posterity will have to do the sorting. We feel it has begun already. Which among the poems written between 1819 and 1830 are read now with emotion and pleasure? I merely state the proposition, and have no intention of solving it, nor of following closely the faint yet visible line that, among illustrious men most sure of themselves, already divides the quick from the dead. Poets of to-day, there are three or four of you who will claim the sceptre, who believe that each is the first! Who knows which is he, who with our indifferent descendants will have the last word? Some of your accents will surely reach posterity, and therein lies your honour; it will cover the rest of them in a kindly oblivion. Nothing complete of the poets of the time will survive. M. de Musset will not escape that fate, and on that score he has perhaps little reason to complain; for his accents will reach much farther, and we may believe will pierce time the better, because they will have been thus purified. His accents are accents of pure passion, and it is in the "Nights" that they are specially to be found.

M. de Musset has quite a small school of imitators. What do they imitate in him? That which imitators usually copy, form, surface, the smart tone, the sprightly gesture, the dashing faults, everything that he knew how to carry off with a certain charm and ease, they religiously set to work to copy. They imitated his vocabulary in the names of gallants, "Manon, Ninon, Marion," his jingle of courtesans and marquises. They imitated his weak lines and his affectations of carelessness. They took the form and the bad habit; but the fire, the passion, the elevation, and the lyrical power they did not care, and for good reasons, to borrow from him.

Sometimes the French public criticises poetry in strange fashion. I mentioned above those who in the young generation were the first to admire M. de Musset with sincerity and candour. A piquant chapter concerning manners might be written, taking as a text the fine ladies and gentlemen and the enthusiasts who, following the rest, have fully adopted him, the same who five-and-twenty years ago would have admired Alexandrines, because they believed them to be cast in the mould of Racine,

and who now extol the slightest trifles of the brilliant poet equally with his best and really good work. It was not when he was at his best that he became the fashion and the vogue; as usually happens, it came later, but is now a fact. He is the favourite poet of the day; the boudoir outdoes the inns of court. When we are young, and new to the world, it is by Musset we prefer to attack modern poetry. Mothers do not advise their daughters to read it; husbands read it to their young wives from the first year of marriage. I believe I once saw a volume of his poems slipped among the wedding presents, an amusing circumstance, and not altogether displeasing to the poet. He should hasten to enjoy it, and should not rely on it.

The lyrics produced by M. de Musset since the "Nights," and which have just been collected, contain some remarkable poems. I point out one called "A Lost Evening," where he charmingly mingles a motive of André Chénier with a thought of Molière, a satire "On Idleness," in which the poet was influenced by reading Regnier; a pretty tale, "Simone," savouring of Boccaccio and La Fontaine; but especially a "Recollection," full of charm and feeling, where the inspiration came from himself alone. The poet once again revisited places dear to him, some forest, Fontainebleau maybe, where he had spent happy days. His friends feared the effect of the pilgrimage and of the awakening of his memories. There is no greater woe, says Dante, than the remembrance of past happy days in misery. But M. de Musset experienced the contrary; and he tells us how he found the awakening of the past that was feared for him, and that he himself feared, consoling and sweet. To be frank, that is the kind of poem I like in M. de Musset, and by no means the little verses "On three steps of rose-coloured marble," and other gew-gaws which savour of their source.

M. de Musset's taste has reached maturity, and it would be best henceforth for his talent to obey his taste and not to allow itself any more weaknesses. After so many varied attempts and experiences, after trying to love many things in order to discover the only and supreme one worthy of love, that is to say simple truth clothed at the same time with beauty, it is not wonderful that when we return to it and recognise it, we find ourselves less animated and more fatigued in its presence than we were in the presence of the idols. However, his genius possesses power of renewal, sources of youth of which he has more than once shown that he knew the secret, and which he has

not yet exhausted. For a few years his genius has exhibited itself to the public in a new form, and the poet has triumphed in a somewhat hazardous experiment. The delicate sketches, charming proverbs that he did not intend for the stage, suddenly became delightful little comedies that arose and walked before us. The success of his *Caprice* did honour, I do not fear to say it, to the public, and proves that for him who can awaken it, it still possesses delicate literary feeling. He has seen the circle of his admirers extend as if by magic. Many minds that would never have dreamed of seeking him out for his lyrical talent learned to appreciate him in his easy and graceful proverbs. He had more than ever the suffrages of men of the world, and of young women ; he made eccentric and inelegant critics angry ; nothing wanted to his success. For all that, I cannot say I am mad for his *Louison;* it is only a style. M. de Musset as a dramatic poet has still much to learn. On the stage a happy situation, ingenious dialogue are not enough ; invention, fertility, development, above all, action, are necessary to consummate, as it has been said, *the work of the devil.* But it is time to conclude, and without asking too much, without making more ceremony than M. de Musset himself, I shall end with a line of his own that puts a stop to argument—

"What do I say ? Such as he is, the world loves him still."

EUGÉNIE DE GUÉRIN.

I SHOULD like to share with others the impression made on me by the perusal of this little volume,[1] full of tender and lofty thought.

It must be remembered that on March 15, 1840, the *Revue des Deux Mondes* published, with a note by George Sand, which served as preface, a magnificent fragment by a poet who had died the year before at the age of twenty-nine, George-Maurice de Guérin. The composition, entitled "The Centaur," revealed a talent of a kind so new, powerful, and vast, that the application of the word genius seemed only natural. Now it is the poet's sister who, worthy of him in imagination and heart, dying in her turn, shows us, through the care of loving friends, the charms of her soul and her most secret effusions.

The two destinies, those of the brother and sister, are so closely allied that one cannot be mentioned without the other, for she speaks to us only of him.

Maurice de Guérin was descended from an ancient noble family coming originally from Venice, it is said, but which had been established for centuries in the South of France. The De Guérins figured in the Crusades, and a Guérin, bishop of Senlis, was said to have marshalled the forces at the battle of Bouvines. The family claimed the honour of having given grand masters to the Order of St. John of Jerusalem, cardinals to the church, and a troubadour to the beautiful sunny land of the south. "Guarins d'Apchiers," say manuscripts mentioned by Raynouard, "was a good chatelain of Gévadan, valiant, and a noble warrior, generous, a good trouvère, and a perfect knight, and he knew all there was to be known of the fine arts of gallantry and love." He is even said to have invented a new form of poetry. The perfect man who adorned the old house in the time of its splendour was to be seen again in its decline and decay. Maurice de Guérin was the last of the noble race, fallen in fortune, but lofty in feeling. He was born

[1] *Reliquæ.*

at the château of Le Cayla, near Albz, August 4, 1810, the last of four children. His sister Eugénie was the eldest of them, and five years older than he. She at once became his guardian and loving guide. In the *Memorandum* devoted to her brother's memory we read—

"*August* 4 (1840).—On a day like this a brother whom I was to love greatly, to weep for as greatly—alas! two things that often go together—came into the world. I saw his coffin in the same room, in the same spot where, when quite a little girl, I remember seeing his cradle, when I was brought home from Gaillac, where I was staying, for the christening. The christening was grand, a great rejoicing; more than that of any other of us, it was specially marked out. I enjoyed myself very much, and went back the next day delighted with the little new-born infant. I was five years old. Two years afterwards I came home, bringing him a frock I had made for him. I dressed him in it, and led him by the hand along the North Warren, where he walked a few steps quite alone, the first, and I told my mother in great glee: *Maurice, Maurice walked alone!* a recollection that breaks my heart."

Some years went by.

"Maurice," says his sister again, "was an imaginative and dreamy child. He spent a great deal of time under the trees looking at the sky. He was particularly fond of an almond tree, under which he took refuge whenever he felt the least emotion; I have seen him stay there standing for hours together.

"He is in the country, in the fine summer days, the breezes full of those country sounds, that Maurice called the sounds of nature; he listened to them long; and here are some of his impressions:—

"'Oh, how beautiful are the sounds of nature; the sounds spread themselves through the air, they rise with the sun, follow it, follow the sun as a splendid orchestra follows a king!

"'The sounds of water, of wind, of the woods, of the mountains and valleys, of the rolling of the thunder and of the spheres in space, magnificent sounds, with which are mingled the soft voices of the birds and a thousand singing creatures.'"

Those were his boyish games. He showed a taste for the church. At eleven years of age he was sent to the little Toulouse seminary; we have about that time a very charming childish letter, that might have been written by a pure and loving Eliacin. He was soon attacked with the disease of

ennui, a malady from which distinguished minds in the younger generations of the first thirty years of the century suffered. In 1833 he went to La Chênaie, in Brittany, where M. de La Mennais had founded an establishment for religious studies useful to Catholicism; but the master's mind was already beginning to take another direction, and he aspired to form very different pupils. He does not appear to have paid any particular attention to Guérin, nor to have discovered his talent. By the side of the pools, under the old oaks, he dreamed more than he studied. He took excursions along the sandy shore by the sea-side. He was a direct descendant of René. We have verses addressed by him at that time to M. Hippolyte Morvonnais, a Breton poet of his acquaintance, lofty verses of a tender inspiration and of a firm structure, but which are a little too much like Victor Hugo in his *Autumn Leaves*. He wrote others, in which he imitated for rhythm and sentiment the romance sung by Lautrec in *Le Dernier des Abencerrages*. Maurice de Guérin's originality was not there; it lay in a feeling for nature, rendered as no other French poet or painter has done it, a feeling not so much for details as for the whole, for the sacred universality, a feeling for the origin of things and the sovereign principle of life. He showed this in his composition, the "Centaur," with an overflowing vigour united to a beauty of form and art which, although a mere attempt, proclaims him a master. The author imagines that one of the race intermediate between man and the powerful animals, an aged Centaur, relates to a curious mortal, Melampe, who is seeking wisdom, and has come to ask the Centaurs about life, the secrets of his youth, and his impressions of vague happiness and intoxication in the unrestrained and vagabond courses of his early years. By means of that bold fiction we are directly transported into a primitive world, into the midst of a young nature glowing with life, and impregnated as it were with the inspiration of the gods. The mysterious sentiment of the soul of things, and of the chief virtue of nature, the poetical and wild delight which she affords all who passionately plunge into her and abandon themselves to her, has never been better expressed by a French writer; no one has brought to it such zest and majesty combined with so perfect a precision of metaphor. Guérin, under the form of a Centaur, produced his *René*, and related his own history, the actual source of his impressions, projecting them into fabulous horizons. He produced his *René*, his *Werther*, without

egoism, and entirely metamorphosing himself into a personification that remains ideal, even in what it possesses of the monstrous. He only took the form of a Centaur in order that it might carry him quicker and further. There is great strength in all that. He keeps within bounds, and only says what must be said. His Centaur, old and saddened, declares to the human visitor who consults him, that although he lived with such intoxication and enthusiasm, and closely examined and probed the whole of vast nature, he neither penetrated the great secret nor tore away the veil of its origin; he was only conscious of its breath without seizing its meaning or words, and that, for him, the last word as the first, was incomprehensible. But it is not for me to analyse Guérin's work; it is enough to recall its ideas and sound the *réveille;* it is at length announced that, thanks to the care of friends devoted to the honour of his name and the preservation of his memory, his complete works, prose and verse, are about to be published. It is now for me to speak of his sister.

What became of the watchful, pious sister, guardian of the altar and the hearth, during her young brother's enthusiastic impulses and ardent pursuits? She was anxious, she trembled for him, she prayed, she asked herself, "Will he return?" "Maurice," she cried after losing him, "I believe you are in heaven. Oh! I have the confidence your religious sentiments give me, that God's mercy inspires in me, God, so good, so pitiful, so loving, so fatherly, will He not show pity and affection for a son returned to Him? Oh! there are three years that afflict me: I should like to wipe them out with my tears."

"I put all my joy in you," she said again, "like a mother in her son; I was less sister than mother. Do you remember how I likened myself to Monica weeping for Augustine when we spoke of my distress for your soul, your beloved erring soul? How I prayed and implored God for your safety! A holy priest said to me, 'Your brother will return.' Oh! he returned and then left me for heaven—for heaven, I hope.

"I write this in the little room, the little room we loved so well, where we talked so much together, only we two. There is your place, and there mine. Here was your portfolio, full of secrets of the heart and mind, full of yourself, and of things that decided your life. I believe, I believe that your existence was influenced by circumstances. If you had stayed here, you would not have died. Dead! your sister's terrible and only thought."

Guérin's life, passed wholly in the struggles and storms of

an inward dream, is marked by no event, even a literary one; he never thought of publishing. Eight months before his death he married a young Creole lady, brought up in Calcutta, and settled in Paris a few years before. "She is indeed," said Mademoiselle de Guérin, "a charming creature in beauty and virtue, an enchanting Eve, come from the East for a brief taste of Paradise." The marriage was celebrated at the Abbaye-aux-Bois. The young couple lived in a small house, a pavilion in a garden at 36 Rue de Cherche-Midi. The disease, the seeds of which were in him at the time of his marriage, made rapid progress. His sister, who had come from Le Cayla in 1838 to assist at the marriage, succeeded, after a few months, in taking him away from Paris, believing the air of the city unwholesome and fatal to him. She detested the sky of Paris: "The iron-grey which you see, which you dislike, and which does so much harm to the soul," she wrote to one of her brother's friends. "Perhaps he would have lived longer, would have recovered in the pleasant warmth, for air gives life. The air of Paris killed him, I believe. I knew it, and could not take him out of it. It was one of my profoundest griefs in that past when I suffered so deeply." Guérin, brought back to Le Cayla, already dying, drank in his native air, smiled at the blue sky, lived over again his most cherished impressions, and, breathing forth his beautiful soul, July 19th, 1839, was laid to rest under the turf of the cemetery of Andillac. His sister had regained him, alas! and never more for a single moment lost sight of him.

We are filled with a pathetic and lofty interest in the admirable sister, the pure and holy Vestal, who knelt on his tomb. It is little to say that Mdlle. de Guérin was a Christian. She was a Christian of the times when faith was most fervent and sincere. She wished her brother to be the same; she was conscious that it was a vast and deep infidelity towards the humble primitive faith to follow it as he did, and to blindly embrace vague nature herself, to worship the god Pan—the most formidable of adversaries, perhaps the only one really dangerous; but she hoped and trusted in his words and feelings at the hour which was everything with her—the hour at which eternity sounds. "I found my greatest consolation," she said, writing again to one of her brother's friends, "in his death, in the primitive sentiments of faith expressed in prayer, and in the taking of the last sacrament, in the last ardent kiss of the crucifix. I tell you this, sir, on account of your affection, of the Christian interest which follows the soul into the other life." And as that friend was to write a few pages on Maurice, she entreated him not to omit

the final essential feature absent from his writings, and which the notice in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* did not mention. "But you, his friends who knew him, do better, and remove, I beg of you, from that Christian figure every philosophical and irreligious shadow."

Pathetic solicitude which belongs to the deepest springs of the soul! Mdlle. de Guérin's Christianity was of the sort that admits nothing vague, undecided, nothing aside or by halves, and in her lonely existence her thought, while becoming exalted, acquired strength. "Oh! keep us, poor human creatures," she cried; "keep us to the immutable anchor. Sir, I am grieved for so many lost souls. I seem to look on an ocean covered with vessels, without masts or sails, letting in water everywhere: thus the world appears to me. There is good reason to say: Happy are those who have left it, who on a beautiful day reached Heaven!" It is true that she immediately added, again addressing her brother's friend, who was saddened and widowed: "If in your grief it comforts you to imagine a beautiful country with tender affection, we can always command that in our good Angel, the heavenly friend; a spiritual consolation, if you like, but is it not the best? Alas, the others are so often imperfect!" The woman with her smile and her tenderness softened at times the seemingly too severe austerity of the noble feudal virgin. It is thus that in speaking of certain rustic and homely religious ceremonies in which she liked to take part, she said very charmingly: "Popular religious ceremonies please me by the attractiveness of their forms and the easy means of instruction they present. The secrets of the beloved truth are hidden, but they spring up joyfully, and win hearts in the name of the Virgin and her sweet virtue. I like the month of Mary, and the rest of the pleasant little ceremonies the Church allows and hallows—ceremonies springing up at the feet of faith like flowers at the foot of the oak."

She too was a poet; she had the genius of melancholy and the gift of figurative speech, a chaste Lucile, more faithful and as mournful as the Lucile who survived her René.

Mdlle. de Guérin, hindered by all sorts of reasons, and also by domestic difficulties, only left her retirement at Le Cayla for Paris to assist at the marriage which was so near to death. She was thirty-three. For a few months she saw society, the best society, that to which she was born. She met M. de Lamartine, M. Xavier de Maistre, who happened to be there. Those who knew her then say what may easily be

believed, that, from the first day, she took the place to which her distinction and manner entitled her. She belonged to those whom solitude does not render savage, but whom it forms and perfects; her refinement was more exquisitely developed, and no breath spoiled it. In the spring of 1839 she left Paris to spend a few months at Nevers and the environs with a friend. There we are in her confidence; she wrote down her thoughts in a book, ever thinking of the brother she left suffering in Paris.

"*April* 10 (at Nevers).—The weather is fine, everywhere the sun makes itself felt, and I am looking upon flowers that would do you good. Spring warmth will cure you better than all remedies. I tell you this in hope, alone in a little hermit-like room, with a chair, a crucifix, and a little table under the little window where I am writing. From time to time I see the sky and hear the bells and passers-by in the streets of this dull Nevers. Has Paris spoiled me, narrowed my mind, thrown a gloom over me? Never was a town more deserted, gloomy, wearying, in spite of the *delights inhabiting* its Marie and her agreeable family. Against some influences there is no charm. Oh! *ennui*, the most malign, tenacious, clinging thing, which enters by another door directly you've shut it out at one, and would, without much trouble, make itself ruler of the house! I've tried everything, even to taking my distaff from the bottom of its case, where it has reposed since my departure from Le Cayla."

But the chatelaine's distaff was powerless: *ennui* persisted. "Let it stay, then, this inexorable *ennui*, the basis of human life. To suffer, and to bear with each other, is the wisest of all things."

After receiving a letter from her brother, stagnation ceased, and her ideas took up their course again: "Your letter did me good; I listen to you again; I hear that you sleep a little, that your appetite is improving, that your throat is less painful. Oh! pray God it's all true! How I entreat, desire, and pray for your dear health, for the soul as much as for the body! I do not know if prayers made with so much human affection, with so strong a desire over the will of God, are good prayers. I want my brother to recover; that is the basis whereon I stand, but a basis of trust, and faith, and resignation, it seems to me. Prayer is a humble desire."

She left Nevers and went into the neighbouring country to Coques.

"Desert, calm, solitude, the life I like begins again. Nevers, with its little society, its little women, its long dinners, its toilettes, its visits, and other nuisances without compensation, bored me. After Paris, where at least pleasure and pain meet, heaven and

earth, the rest is empty. The country, nothing but the country, suits me.

"Our caravan set out from Nevers, Monday, at midday, the best time for walking in the April sun, the sweetest, the brightest. I looked with delight at the green cornfields, the trees putting forth their leaves alongside the ditches, carpeted with grass and flowers like those of Le Cayla. Then a clump of violets, and a lark singing as it soared and flying along like the musician of the cavalcade."

An April landscape! what brush other than that virginal pen could have so charmingly and smilingly put it before us?

The hidden, unused talent, the portion of genius she received at birth, at times stirred within her and wearied her. In the life of affection, silence, pleasant talk, longings and desires came to her.

"Marie (the friend with whom she was staying) is playing in the drawing-room underneath me, and I feel something respond to it in my head. Oh! yes; I have something in it? What can I do? A work into which I could put my thoughts, my opinions, my feelings about an object. I should put my whole life into it, all of my soul which turns to that side. If you were there I should consult you; you would tell me if I ought to do it, and what ought to be done. . . . But at what shall I aim? A purpose, a purpose! Let that appear, and I shall be calm and take refuge in it.

"The bird seeking the branch, the bee the flower, the river the sea, fly, run to their resting-place. My soul, my intellect resembles them, O my God! seeking its flower and branch. . . . All that is in Heaven."

It is to Heaven that she unceasingly aspired, and there she put the end and fulfilment of all her desires and hopes, only delayed and interrupted. She repeated it more emphatically later, after she had drained the cup of affliction: "For do you see, I have no love for this world—it is not worth the trouble; Heaven is the place of love."

The slightest incident, the least event, in her calm life produced a play of fancy, a tenderness full of charm. The receipt of a letter, if it brought hope, opened for her a boundless world of recollections.

"*April* 24.—How gay everything is! how the sun is alive! how sweet and soft is the air! A letter, news, good news, my dear invalid, and everything is transformed within me and without me. *I am happy to-day.* So rare a word that I underline it. At last the letter has come! I have it here before my eyes, in my

hand, at my heart, everywhere. I am always wholly wrapt up in a letter, sometimes sad, sometimes merry. The Lord be praised for the news I have to-day of your sleep, your appetite, your walk in the Champs Elysées with Caro (his wife Caroline), your guiding angel! I talked for a long while to Marie of this letter, and numberless things connected with it. The ties become so close between one thing and another that the world is sometimes united by a hair."

Her letters do not always come from Paris; she receives some from her beloved South, and from the friends of her childhood.

"*May* 19.—A letter from Louise full of interest in you; nothing but heart, mind, charm from one end to the other, a way of expressing things to be found nowhere but in the rocks of De Raynac. Solitude does that; ideas come which resemble nothing in the world, unknown, beautiful, like flowers or mosses."

But those delights were to pass away. Death came. Mdlle. de Guérin's grief was to take a character of elevation and constancy which allowed her to be cheerful no more. She is at Le Cayla, given up entirely to her religious grief, ripening it on the side of Heaven, and admitting no kind of distraction. Let us choose out a few words, a few deep notes. Eight days after the funeral she writes:—

"Always tears and regrets. It does not pass by: on the contrary, deep sorrow is like the sea, it advances, always grows deeper. To-night it is a week since you rested there at Andillac, in your earthy bed. O God, my God, comfort me!

"To-day a great influx of letters that I have not read. What is to be read in them?—words which say nothing. All human consolation is vain: I am indeed finding out the truth of the words of the 'Imitation'! Your nurse, poor woman, all in tears, came bringing cakes and figs you would have eaten. What grief those figs gave me! and the beautiful sky, and the grasshoppers, the murmur of the fields, the sound of the flail on the barn-floor, all that would have delighted you, distresses me. I see death in everything. The woman, the nurse who watched over you and held you for a year, sick, on her knees, brought me more grief than a pall could have done: heartrending apparition of the past—cradle and tomb.

"Maurice, my friend, what is Heaven like, the place of friends? Will you never give me a sign from there? Shall I never hear you, as it is said the dead are sometimes heard?"

She read Pascal; she borrowed his accents. She felt the charm of an ascetic life. There were moments when, had it

not been for her father, she thought of becoming a sister of mercy. "At least my life would be useful. What is the good of it now? I had given it all to you, poor brother." She reproaches herself for seeking consolation in letters from friends. "Wrote to Louise and Marie; it is nice to write to her. And to him, why not write to him, your brother (Maurice's most intimate friend)? Is he dead also? My God, how silence terrifies me now? Forgive me all that makes me fear: the soul which is joined to you, what has it to fear? Do I not love you, my God, only true and eternal love? It seems to me that I love you, said timid Peter; but not like John, who fell asleep in your bosom. Divine rest, what is wanting? What do I seek in human creatures? To make myself a pillow of the human breast? Alas! I saw how death deprives us of it. *Rather shall I rest on your crown of thorns!*"

Landscapes are still sometimes described by her pen with involuntary charm, and in them the one thought springs in its gloomy grandeur.

"*August* 30.—How pleasant it is this morning in the vineyard of Chasselas grapes which you liked! Finding myself there, putting my foot where yours had been, sadness filled my soul. I sat down under the shade of a cherry tree, and, thinking of the past, I wept. Everything was green, fresh, shining brightly in the sun, lovely to look upon. The approach of autumn is beautiful: the soft temperature, the cloudy sky, the colours of decay commence! I love it all; my eyes *revel* in it. I am penetrated with it to my heart, which turns into tears. *Seen alone*, it is so sad. You, you see Heaven."

With the months and years the gloom deepens; a sort of monastic calm settles around and within her—the peace and monotony of the desert. "There was a time when I described with calmness the most trivial things. Four steps out of doors, a sunny walk across the fields, or in the woods, gave me much to say. Is it because I talked to him, and that gave the heart abundance? I do not know, but, no longer taking delight in pleasing him, what I see has not the interest I found in it then. Yet nothing without is changed. It is I within who am different. Everything is of the same sad colour for me; all my thoughts turn to death."

That is the idea which surrounds her and never again leaves her. She almost reproaches herself for the human affections she keeps, and she nearly accuses herself: "If the heart is so much exercised here, there will be none for Heaven. I want to take my heart into the next world."

Peace comes in proportion as she feels that she herself is approaching a meeting with her beloved absent one. "The greatest friend, lost, nothing less than God can replace him; or rather, God was there before, but He now takes the empty place. Thus my life is broken yet supported; and then the tenderness of one's family, domestic consolations, a church to pray in, is enough to bless God for, and spend the remaining days serenely."

"Nothing but grief," she said, "makes us believe in immortality." And of her reading: "I do not read to instruct myself, but to raise myself."

Mademoiselle de Guérin, becoming more and more ethereal, cherished, however, amid her piety the earthly notion of seeing collected in one volume the productions, the too few essays, of her beloved brother, who, entirely devoted to poetry, had no time to think of fame. The success of the fragment published in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* showed her that Maurice had a faithful group of friends, a select public ready prepared. "Do not be anxious about our poet's course," she wrote to some one who expressed doubt; "his source is hidden in the slopes wherein flow rivers of gold, and it has only to gush forth. Indeed the book is expected with devotion. There are still many things to collect that I discover here and there. He scattered his powers with unjust indifference, esteemed himself as nothing, and departed without having enjoyed any of the gifts in which he was so rich. It is we who shall enjoy them. In that happiness, however, is a great inconsolable sadness." The satisfaction of seeing the projected work realised was denied her.

Mademoiselle Eugénie de Guérin, a woman out of the common, the sister of genius, belonging by elevation and ardour of thought to all that is most distinguished among faithful sisters, died about the middle of the year 1848. M. Barbery d'Aurevilly, in his notice, described her as an ancient muse, or rather a Christian virgin, holding her brother in her arms. "But what grace and divine passion in the mournful expression which includes a whole existence and binds it so closely to another, for she reared him and she buried him! Eugénie de Guérin dead, preserved the expression of her life. In her letters, where we always seem to see her with her arms round her brother's neck, she left a little of the immortality of her soul before taking it to Heaven."

MAURICE DE GUÉRIN.

On May 15, 1840, the *Revue des Deux Mondes* published an article by George Sand on a young poet, Georges-Maurice de Guérin. Until then his name was quite unknown; he had died the preceding year, July 19, 1839, at the age of twenty-nine. What gained him the posthumous honour of suddenly receiving a place among the stars of the *poets of France*, was a splendid and curious composition, "The Centaur." In it the vigorous powers of nature were felt, expressed, and strikingly personified, but with taste and proportion; it directly revealed a master, "the André Chénier of Pantheism," as a friend had already named him. Fragments of letters, effusions revealing an affectionate and beautiful mind, formed a sort of delightful choir of slightly veiled half-confidences around the colossal piece of antique sculpture; and the glimpse made the rest eagerly desired. At that period there was among the youth of France a select school, a small number of admirers who repeated to each other the name of Guérin, rallied round his young memory, secretly and fervently honoured it, and longed for the time when his whole work would be given to them, and his whole mind revealed to them. Twenty years have since gone by, and difficulties, scruples, an honourable discretion delayed the fulfilment of a desire demanded by friendship in the name of art. There has already been time enough for Guérin to be imitated by other poets, who, in the imitation, seemed wholly original, while Guérin himself was neither published nor known to the world. In the interval, however, five years ago, there appeared under the reservation of a semi-publicity the *Reliques* of Eugénie de Guérin, a sister of the poet, his equal if not his superior in talent and genius.[1] It served to increase and almost to irritate the desire of knowing and possessing the brother's complete works. We are now glad to announce that they are about to appear; the printed sheets are before me; faithful friends have chosen and

[1] *Eugénie de Guérin: Reliquæ* (1855).

prepared the material, and M. Trébutien, devoting to it the care a pious monk of the middle ages would have given to the writing and illumination of a sacred missal, has made the publication possible.

Nothing in the first impression received in 1840 was exaggerated; everything now justifies and confirms it, and the modern school may count another poet, another landscape painter. I want first to speak of Guérin as he was in his best time, in his real beginning. It was in 1833 that Maurice de Guérin, then only in his twenty-third year, began, in the circle of his friends, to expand and develop the earliest blossoms of the feeling seen now for the first time; they have retained all their fragrance. Born August 5, 1810, he belonged to the second generation of the century, that was not *two or three years old*, but ten or twelve, when it produced the new band of De Mussets, Montalemberts, and Guérins; I purposely connect those names. Born under the beautiful southern sky, of an ancient family, noble but poor, Maurice de Guérin, a dreamer from childhood, soon turned to religion, and of his own will inclined to the ecclesiastic profession. He was not twelve years old when, in the early days of January 1822, he left for the first time, poor exiled bird, the towers of Le Cayla, and arrived at Toulouse to pursue his studies,—I think at the little Seminary. He completed them in Paris at the Collège Stanislas. It was on leaving there, after some hesitation, after returning to his family, seeing his sister and his sister's friends, sad, sensitive, and his heart, we guess, secretly wounded, that he sought repose and oblivion at La Chênaie, and we have the more reason for thinking so, since the desire for a religious vocation that he brought with him was unfixed and uncertain.

During a period spent in the beautiful South, the last before his departure for La Chênaie, he loved, he wept, and sung his griefs. The lines dated from La Roche d'Onelle, referring to the autumn of 1832, testify to them—

"Time has worn hollows in the rocks, in which drops of rain-water repose, and the bird of passage resting there of an evening dips his beak into the pure liquid. Here I come to weep on La Roche d'Onelle, the cruel illusion of my first love; here my bleeding heart gives way to tears, and my tears fill the hollows of the rock. If, doves on the wing, you pass by here, drink not of these waters: tears are bitter."

A young Greek, a disciple of Theocritus or of Moschus, could not have put it better than has this young Levite seemingly in search of an apostle.

He arrived at La Chênaie in the beginning of winter; he was there on Christmas Day, 1832; he had found his asylum. La Chênaie was "a sort of oasis in the midst of the steppes of Brittany," where, in front of the château, stretched a large garden divided by a terrace planted with limes, with a small chapel at the end, M. de La Mennais's place of retirement, or, as he was familiarly called, M. Féli. He usually had with him four or five young men, who, in leading a country life, zealously pursued their studies with piety, concentration, and honest freedom. The time of Guérin's arrival was a memorable and decisive moment for La Mennais. Now that we have read his private correspondence during that period, we can say so with certainty and precision. His great passionate spirit, only finding satisfaction in extreme solutions, after attempting the union of Catholicism and democracy, and preaching it in the tone of a prophet in his paper, saw itself compelled to stop the publication of the *Avenir*. He went to Rome to consult the supreme authority; he returned, personally treated with deference, but clearly disapproved of, and he appeared to yield; maybe he considered himself very submissive, even while meditating and revolving inwardly vengeance and retaliation. M. de La Mennais, who was either one thing or the other, without any gradation, offered, in his double nature, a very strange contrast. Sometimes, and often, he had what Buffon, speaking of beasts of prey, called a "soul of anger;" sometimes, and not less often, he had a gentleness and tenderness which would have charmed little children, a perfectly delightful disposition; and he passed from one to the other in a second. The veil which has since been torn aside, and thus exposed to view the stormy and shifting basis of his doctrines, was at that time scarcely lifted. None of those who knew and loved M. de La Mennais in the time of sorrowful passion and crisis, no matter from what point of view they took, have, it seems, any cause for shame or repentance. He attempted a conciliation, impossible, I own, but lofty, suited to noble hearts, to generous and religious imaginations. Warned that he was deceiving himself, and that he was not approved of, he stopped in front of the obstacle, and bowed before the decisive verdict; he suffered, he was silent, he prayed. Seen close at times, it might have been said that he was dying. One day (March 24, 1833), sitting behind the chapel, under two Scotch firs which lifted their heads in that spot, he took his stick and drew a tomb on the turf, saying to one of his pupils near him: "There I wish to rest; but no tombstone, a simple mound of turf. Oh! how

well it will be with me there!" In fact, had he died then or in the following months, had he succumbed to the inward struggle, what a beautiful and unsullied memory he would have left! What a renown of a faithful man, a hero, almost a martyr! What a mysterious subject for meditation and reverie with those who love to cling to great destinies cut off in their prime!

But we are only here concerned with him as far as he influenced Maurice de Guérin. He, admirer and proselyte as he was, only felt La Mennais's influence as a passing phase; a year or two after he was wholly freed and delivered from it. If he gradually emancipated himself from faith, and if he let the spirit of the age influence him, it was not in the wake of the great deserter, but in a way of his own, and he went astray in his own peculiar method. In 1835 he was not the disciple of any person nor of any system. After three years of an independent and an entirely Parisian life, at the approach of death, his friends were consoled by seeing him return to Christianity.

But if he was to enfranchise himself, as far as intellect was concerned, by sensibility, by the depth of his impressions, by the early and truthful testimonies of genius, he belonged radically to the world of La Chênaie; so that in a literary retrospect he stands out like a detached figure in its own setting; he was to be La Chênaie's landscape painter and true poet. By the side of the brilliant names of Montalembert and Lacordaire, which resound abroad like trumpets, there was in that place—who would have thought it?—in the house of silence and peace, an unknown, timid young man, whom La Mennais, wrapt in his social apocalyptic visions, did not distinguish from the rest, in whom he supposed only quite ordinary faculties. While his master was forging on his anvil the thunderbolts called *The Words of a Believer*, the young man was writing familiar pages, much more natural, fresher—let us say the word, more beautiful, destined to touch for evermore minds in love with the life of the universe which is breathed forth from the midst of the woods, from the shores of the sea.

Guérin reached La Chênaie in winter, in the heart of the dead season, when everything is without verdure, when the forests are of *rust colour*, under the always cloudy Breton sky, "so low that it seemed to be falling on you;" but let spring come—*the sky will raise itself*, the woods will take on new life, everything will become cheerful. Winter, however, is slow to

depart ; the young and loving observer notes in his Journal its tardy flight, its frequent returns—

"*March* 3.—To-day was delightful. For the first time for a long while the sun appeared in all its glory. It made the buds of the leaves and flowers swell, and awoke in my heart numberless sweet thoughts.

"The clouds again assume their light, graceful shapes, and paint charming fancies on the blue sky. The woods have as yet no leaves, but they have an indescribable air of life and gaiety which gives them quite a new aspect. Everything is making ready for Nature's great festival."

The so much desired festival, of which a glimpse had been caught, was long delayed ; many stormy days had still to be lived through. Everything is noted, described, and, above all, felt. The child of the south from the very first, with an indescribable individual melancholy, is endowed with a particular instinct for understanding and loving the nature of the north, the neighbour of storms :—

"*March* 8.—A snowy day. A south-east wind whirls the snow into great spouts of dazzling whiteness. It melts in falling. After a smile or two from spring, we are taken back almost to the middle of winter. The wind is fairly cold ; the new-born song-birds shiver, and the flowers too. The partitions and casements groan as in January, and I, in my poor covering, shrink like nature.

"*March* 9.—Still snow, hail showers, gusts of wind, cold. Poor Brittany, you need some verdure to cheer your gloomy aspect. Oh ! quickly put off your winter coat and don your spring mantle woven of leaves and flowers. When shall I see your skirts fluttering in the breeze !

"*March* 11.—It snowed all night. As soon as I got up, I saw through my loosely fastened shutters the great white covering silently stretched over the country. The black trunks of the trees rose up like columns of ebony in an ivory courtyard ; the harsh and sharply defined contrast, and the desolate look of the woods, greatly depresses me. Not a sound is to be heard. Except a few sparrows, who, whimpering, take shelter in the firs which stretch out their long branches laden with snow, not a living creature is in sight. The inner side of the bushy trees is impenetrable to the frost ; it is a shelter prepared by Providence, the little birds know it well.

"I paid a visit to our primroses. Each bore its little load of snow, and bowed its head under the weight. The pretty, richly-coloured flowers produced a charming effect with their

white hoods. I saw tufts of them entirely covered with a single mass of snow; the sweet flowers, veiled and leaning one on the other, were like a group of young maidens surprised by a shower and sheltering themselves under a white apron."

It reminds us of Bernadin de Saint-Pierre. Without system, by free choice, by affinity of genius, Guérin is of his school. At that time he finished reading and enjoying the charm of Saint-Pierre's *Studies of Nature.* "It is one of the books," he said, "we should like never to end. Science has little to gain from it, but poetry, the elevation of the soul, and the contemplation of nature, much. The book brings out and lights up a sense we all possess, but a sense that is veiled, vague, deprived of almost all activity, a sense that gathers together the beauties of nature, and gives them up to the soul." And he insisted on the second work of reflection that spiritualises, mingles, and harmonises into a whole the real characteristics when they are once chosen. Such is Guérin's own method; in the faithful images of nature he gives us, the man, the soul is always there; it is life reflected and described by life. His merest sketches have meaning and charm.

"*March* 19.—A walk in the forest of Coëtquen. Came upon a spot quite remarkable for its wildness. The road descends by a sudden slope into a little ravine, through which a brook flows over a slaty bed, which makes the water of a blackish hue, at first unpleasant, but ceasing to be so when we observe the black trunks of the old oaks, the dark green of the ivy, and its contrast with the smooth, white trunks of the birches. A high north wind blew violently over the forest, making it send forth deep groans. The trees struggled with the blast like madmen. Through the branches we saw the clouds scudding swiftly along in black, odd-shaped masses, which seemed to brush the tops of the trees. Sometimes the big, gloomy, moving veil was broken, and, like a flash of lightning, a ray of sunlight came athwart the depths of the forest. The sudden passing of the light lent something gaunt and strange to the majestic depths of gloom, like laughter on the lips of the dead.

"*March* 20.—Winter departs smiling; it bids us farewell with the beautiful sun shining in a sky clear and bright as a Venetian mirror. Another step of Time that ends. Oh! why can it not, like the Courses of the Immortals, reach the limits of its duration in four springs and leaps?"

There is more than one way of looking at and describing nature, and I welcome all, provided they are true. But those are the bits of landscape I like best; delicate, well-expressed,

painted; it is painted on the spot with the eye on Nature, but without crudity. Nothing smells of the palette. The colours are fresh, true, and delicate. They have passed into the mirror within and are seen by reflection. Above all, we seize their aspect, and breathe in them the very soul of things.

"*March* 28.—Every time we allow ourselves to penetrate into Nature, our soul opens to the most moving impressions. There is something in Nature, whether she is gay and decks herself as on fine days, whether she is pale, grey, cold, rainy, as in autumn and winter, which stirs not only the surface of the soul, but also its most hidden secrets, and awakes a thousand recollections that have apparently no connection with the outward view, but which doubtless carry on an intercourse with the soul of Nature by sympathies unknown to us. To-day I was conscious of that marvellous power, while lying in a wood of beeches breathing the soft spring air."

And on April 5.—"A perfect day. Clouds, but only those necessary to make a landscape in the sky. They assume more and more their summer shapes. Their varied groups are motionless under the sun, as flocks of sheep in the pastures when it is very hot. I saw a swallow, and heard the bees humming over the flowers. Sitting in the sun to penetrate into the very heart of the divine spring, I was conscious again of some of the impressions of my childish days: for a second I thought of the sky and its clouds, the earth and its woods, its songs, its murmurs, as I did then. Such a renewal of the first aspect of things, of the physiognomy they presented to us when first looking at them, is, in my opinion, one of the sweetest memories of our childhood during the course of life."

But soon a struggle, scruples came to him. Guérin was still a strict Christian. He reproached his soul for feeling so vividly the promptings and delights of nature on a day of divine contrition and mourning, for that April 5th was a Good Friday. The penitential retirement in which he was shut up during Passion Week wearied him, and consequently he blamed himself. Within him routine was at war with dreaming His instinct was to travel, to wander, to pursue the infinite in the breezes and in the murmur of winds and waters, in the odours and fragrance of the spring; while projecting travel he said: "There is a delight in wandering. When we wander, we are conscious of following the true purpose of humanity; therein, I think, lies the secret of its charms." At that period of his life he tried to reconcile Christianity with the worship of nature; he sought, if possible, a mystical relation between the worship

of nature, which concentrates itself in the heart of man and sacrifices itself there as on an altar, and the eucharistic immolation of the same heart. Vain effort! he attempted the impossible and the irreconcilable; and thus delayed without preventing the fulfilment of the unconquerable impulse that was approaching. For there is no middle course; the cross prevents more or less the free, unrestrained sight of nature; great Pan has nothing to do with the divine Christ. A certain mistrustful and timorous moderation is imposed, as a first condition on the Christian contemplative man. And Guérin, on the contrary, did not resist; every event of nature, an April shower, a March squall, a light, capricious, May breeze, all spoke to him, took hold of, possessed him, and carried him away. In vain did he stop now and again and cry, "My God, how can my calmness of mind be changed by what takes place in the air, and the peace of my soul abandoned to the caprices of the winds?" He neither prevented nor hindered it, he abandoned himself to it, grew intoxicated with the life of things, and desired to be mingled with them and to become one with the universe.

"*April* 25.—It has just been raining. Nature is fresh, brilliant; the earth seemed to drink in the life-giving water with delight. It might be said that the birds' throats are also refreshed by the rain; their song is purer, clearer, louder, and resounds marvellously in the sonorous, ringing air. Nightingales, bullfinches, blackbirds, thrushes, golden orioles, chaffinches, wrens are singing and rejoicing. A goose shouting like a trumpet adds a charm by the contrast. The motionless trees seem to be listening to the sounds. Numberless apple trees in blossom look from a distance like balls of snow; the cherry trees, white also, stand erect in pyramids or spread out fans of flowers.

"Sometimes the birds seem to aim at orchestral effects in which all the instruments are mingled in one mass of harmony.

"If we could identify ourselves with the spring, force the mind to the point of believing that it breathes in all the life and love which ferments in nature! to feel, oneself, flower, verdure, bird, song, freshness, elasticity, pleasure, serenity all at once! How would it be with me? There are moments when by force of concentrating myself on that idea, and by fixedly looking at nature, I believe I experience something like it."

A month passed; the moment at which the spring, so long brooded over and nourished, burst forth both in flowers and in leaves, when verdure overflowed, when for two or three

mornings there was an almost sudden inundation of verdure, is admirably described.

"*May* 4.—A day to rejoice in, full of sun, a warm breeze, fragrance in the air, happiness in the soul. Verdure gains on the sight; it flies from the garden into the thickets; it rules all along by the pond; it leaps, so to speak, from tree to tree, from thicket to thicket, into the fields and up the hill-sides; and I see it has already gained the forest and begins to spread over its vast surface. Soon it will have flowed over everything as far as the eye can reach, and all the great space enclosed by the horizon will be heaving and murmuring like a vast ocean—an ocean of emerald. A few days more and we shall have all the splendour, all the array of the vegetable kingdom."

And the period when all that was once only flower without leaf has become germ and foliage, when vegetable loves are over, and the nutrition of the fruit begins:—

"*May* 22.—There are no more flowers on the trees. Their mission of love ended, they die, like a mother who perishes in giving life. The fruit has set, and breathes the vital, reproductive energy that is to create new fruits. An innumerable generation is actually hanging from the branches of the trees, like children at their mother's breast. The germs in countless number and variety are there suspended between heaven and earth in their cradles and abandoned to the wind, whose duty it is to rock them. Future forests are hanging there imperceptible to the living forests. Nature is looking after her vast maternity."

Devotedly fond of Brittany as he was, the child of the south sometimes awoke in Guérin; Mignon did not forget the blue sky of the land where the olive trees bloomed. The guest of La Chênaie had no illusions about the splendour, and the wooded, forest-like beauties of Brittany that are never far from becoming again arid and barren; La Chênaie, Brittany, altogether "had the effect on him," he said, "of a wrinkled, grey-headed old woman transformed by the fairies' wand into a young and charming maiden of sixteen." And at certain times under the young maiden the old woman was visible. One morning in the middle of June the fine weather went no one knew where; an east wind, like a wet shepherd chasing before him his innumerable cloud-flocks, invaded everything. It is almost winter, with the verdure, with the sad contrast in addition; and even where there is beauty, summer on its festival days "has always," he feels, "something sad, veiled, limited, about it. It is like a miser who goes to expense;

there is niggardliness in its magnificence. Long live our Languedoc sky, so prodigal of light, so blue, so loftily arched!" Thus wrote the man who was almost an exile and dreamed of his sweet nest of Le Cayla and of La Roche d'Onelle. It was during his excursions in the country, and when he crossed the sandy steppes, that nature seemed barren and gloomy, wearing the dress of beggary and poverty; but he did not, on that account, despise her: he composed penetrating verses on the subject, in which the ruggedness of the country is described to the life; he well understood that ruggedness, and pressed it so closely to him, that he triumphed over it. Like the Cybele of the Homeric hymn, who first presented herself to the young girls seated by the roadside in the disguise of a sterile old woman and afterwards changed into the fertile and magnificent goddess, Breton nature in the end yielded to Guérin all it possessed. If for a moment he did not appreciate it, he quickly repented, and was forgiven; it ceased to be unpleasing in his eyes, and became as beautiful as was in its power; the sandy soil became full of life, and was clothed with indescribable charm.

Those last things he said in verse, and that is the reason I do not quote them. Guérin's poetry is natural, easy, flowing, but unfinished. He generally and by preference used a metre I know well, because in my time I tried to introduce and apply it, I mean the ordinary Alexandrine, broken by a conversational tone, lending itself to all the ins and outs of familiar talk. "Your verses sing too much," he wrote to his sister Eugénie; "they do not talk enough." He steered clear of the strophe, because it took too early to galloping, and to running away with its rider; he steered equally clear of the Lamartinian stanza, because it rocked its dreamer and gondolier too gently. He believed great advantage was to be gained from Alexandrines, which, well managed, are less stiff than they look, and are capable of many subtleties and much graceful neglect of rules. The theory seems to me correct, and it is also mine. It is only in the application that Guérin was at fault, as we may have been ourselves; but he was so much more than is absolutely necessary; he applied himself to it too much by chance, and what he said of one of his friends may also be said of him—it comes from him like "water from a spring." Some of his verses are very happy, frank in detail, but the sentences drag, are lengthened out, and are complicated as if it was prose; he cannot cut it enough, shorten it in time, and after a certain number of rough, irregular lines, return to the even tone and mark the melody. The name

of Brizeux, the Breton poet, naturally contrasts itself with that of Guérin, the Breton landscape-painter. Guérin must have read Brizeux's "Marie," but I have not discovered any mention of it. We must not exaggerate: the charming "Marie" in her first dress was only a little peasant girl after the manner and measure of Paris. It was not until later that Brizeux thought of making her Breton for good and all. His poem entitled "The Bretons" contained two or three great and powerful pictures, but as a whole it is wanting in interest and guiltless of charm. I do not mention the various collections which followed, because, except for a few rare poems, they are only the unpleasing and more and more spasmodic productions of a barren and exhausted faculty. Now, what Guérin possessed in a high degree was flow, talent, charm, width, and power; the author of the "Centaur" was of a different stuff from the discreet lover of "Marie." But Brizeux was an artist in verse, and Guérin was not enough of one. Brizeux understood the science of verse, and if, for good reasons, he let its spring flow too little, if he never let it loose and had what the generous poet Lucretius called the "magnum immissis certamen habenis," the impetuous charge at full speed, he, at least, always gathered up the folds of his girdle, and discovered skilful and charming ways in which to fasten it.

In 1833, Guérin, Breton by adoption, and at that time, by genius and soul, more of a Breton than Brizeux, lived wholly in the rural calm, poetical, and Christian life whose vigour flowed into his genius and communicated its freshness to the pages written for himself alone. He had his troubles, his inward weaknesses, I know. We shall indicate, at least, the weak side of his mind and will; later, when his conscience was less disturbed, his talent was stronger, but at that period he was in all the tender bloom of youth. There was one single moment at which all shades of feeling were combined, all adoration united and mingled together. We may imagine him at La Chênaie, still called a holy house, on Easter Day, April 7, 1833, a bright morning, and how pathetic was what took place there for the last time! He, who was still the Abbé de La Mennais, celebrated the Easter mass, his last mass,[1] in the chapel, and administered the communion with his own hand to the young disciples who were still faithful, and believed him faithful too. They were Guérin, Elie de Kertangni, François du Breil de Marzan, an

[1] Not quite the last mass he said, but the last he celebrated at Easter time. I believe the assertion, thus modified and understood, is correct.

ardent young poet, happy in leading to the communion-table a new recruit, a friend who was his elder by ten years, Hippolyte de La Morvonnais, himself a poet. There were then at La Chênaie, or there were about to come there, a few men whom it was a pure joy to meet and talk with—the Abbé Gerbet, a gentle spirit of tender urbanity, the Abbé de Cazalès, an affectionate soul, well understanding a man's innermost feelings—other names, some of which have since become distinguished in different paths of knowledge, Eugène Boré Frédéric de La Provostaie: it was a pious and learned group. Who then could have told them that their master, who had just administered the communion to them with his own hand, would never again give it to any one, would refuse it for ever himself, and would soon take for crest an *oak* broken *by the storm*, with the proud legend, "I break, but I do not bend"? A Titan, Capaneus-like device! "Oh!" wrote one of them, "had we been told, what a shudder would have run through our veins!" But for us who have here to speak only of literature, it is impossible not to note such a memorable moment in the moral history of that time, not to connect with it Guérin's genius, not to regret that the eminent and impetuous spirit, already brooding over storms, did not, like the obscure disciple hidden under his wing, open his heart and ear to the sounds of the pastoral flute; that, instead of inveighing against society from an entirely unpractical point of view, and seeing in it only hell, dungeons, cellars, sinks (images which perpetually come to him, and by which he was beset), he did not, in order to soothe and calm himself, look more often on nature. However, a few months later M. de La Mennais wrote to one of his pious lady friends in Italy:—"You are just getting into spring in the country in which you dwell, earlier than in France: I hope the effect on your health may be beneficial. Give yourself up to the sweetness possessed by that season of new birth; become a flower with the flowers. Through our own fault, we lose a portion of the greatest part of the Creator's benefits; he surrounds us with his gifts, and by some foolish obstinacy in tormenting ourselves, we refuse to enjoy them. In the midst of the fragrant atmosphere emanating from him, we make a compound of all the mortal vapours breathed from our cares, anxieties, and sorrows—a fatal diving-bell which isolates us in the midst of the vast ocean." And who put himself under the diving-bell, and took more pleasure in remaining there than La Mennais?

I have something more to say about De Guérin's residence at La Chênaie and in Brittany—the *nutritive* period of his genius,

II.

Speaking of La Mennais as he appeared in 1833 to the eyes of that faithful group, it is impossible not to draw attention to the portrait Guérin painted of him in a letter of May 16, to M. de Bayne de Rayssac, one of his friends in the South. It is a living, speaking likeness of a side of La Mennais scarcely conceivable when we know him only from his books, of a side of his mind which, while he talked, seemed to be perfectly unrestrained, it was so merry and charming, but when his brow was knitted, and his countenance suddenly grew dark, it was swiftly eclipsed. Guérin's letters to his friends serve to complete the impressions noted in his Journal during that time, and some of its pages are simply passages from his letters deemed by him worthy of transcription before being lost for ever. Indeed the artist, the painter, who, at all hazards, was preparing his cartoons, was trying his strength. One of the holidays he most desired, a holiday he promised himself on his arrival in Brittany, was a short trip to the sea-shore. Once, in a longer walk than usual with the Abbé Gerbet and another companion, looking northwards from the top of some rising ground, he saw the Bay of Cancale, and the water shining in the distance formed a bright line of light on the horizon. But the real trip, when he could cry "At last I have seen the sea," did not take place until April 11. On that day, the Thursday after Easter, in fine weather and a fresh breeze blowing, he set out on foot at one in the afternoon with Edmond de Cazalès, who was not yet in orders. The distance they had to go was not less than eighteen or twenty miles ; but to have a great end in view, and to traverse a long road with a friend is twofold happiness. Guérin was conscious of both, and he tells us—"There is no happiness like travelling, going to see the ocean with so perfect a travelling companion. We never ceased talking the whole way from La Chênaie to St. Malo, and, our eighteen miles done, I should have liked a long stretch of road still before us ; for conversation is truly one of those pleasant things we should always like to prolong." He has given us some idea of the conversation, which included the world of the emotions and of nature, touched on poetry, on tender recollections, on hope, on all the loving curiosity of youth. I think those delightful talks resembled in spirit the conversation of Basil and Gregory on the shores of Attica, that of Augustine and his friends on the shores of Ostia. The picturesque descriptions,

the *sea-scapes* painted later, gained in beauty, for the elevated tone of the talk made a heaven of them.

The last days Guérin spent at La Chênaie possessed charm, but often a troubled charm; he felt that his retired life was coming to an end, and that the holidays would entail on him the necessity of choosing his path in life. So much the more then, when his imagination permitted him, did he enjoy the unruffled and deep calm of the last hours.

"*August* 14.—I rather like on some fine morning, after a long series of bright days, to find the sky all grey, and nature, as it were, resting from her festival days in melancholy calm. It is like that to-day. An immense motionless veil, without folds, covers the whole of the sky; the horizon has a crown of bluish vapour; not a breath is stirring. By reason of the silence distant sounds reach the ear: they are labourers' songs, children's voices, the cries of horses and animals, and now and again the barking of a dog, I don't know where, and the cocks answering each other like sentinels. In my heart also all is calm and restful. A grey and somewhat gloomy veil is stretched over my soul, like the peaceful clouds over nature. A great silence is there, and I hear, as it were, the voices of a thousand sweet and tender recollections which rise in the distance of the past and come and whisper in my ear."

At four o'clock on September 7, he went into M. Féli's room to bid him farewell. After a residence of nine months "the doors of the little paradise of La Chênaie closed behind him." M. de La Mennais's relations with the diocesan authority were always ambiguous and difficult, and had latterly grown worse; it was thought best for the little school to be broken up. Guérin, however, did not leave Brittany; he remained there until the end of January 1834, sometimes at La Brousse, with the family of M. de Marzan, sometimes at Le Val de l'Arguenon, in the hermitage of his friend Hippolyte de La Morvonnais, sometimes at Mordreux with Morvonnais's father-in-law. It formed a new and important stage in his life. He came to La Chênaie with a secret pain at his heart, I do not say a passion, but an emotion. It awoke afresh at the sight of some beeches he saw from his window by the side of a pond; they recalled cherished and agitating memories. There were nights when he dreamed; let us listen to one of his dreams.

"*June* 15.—Strange dream! I dreamed I was alone in a vast cathedral. I was under the impression of the presence of God, and in that condition of mind in which we are conscious only of God and of ourselves, when a voice became audible. The

voice was infinitely tender—a woman's voice, that filled the whole church with a sound as of a big orchestra. I recognised it directly; it was Louise's voice, sounding silver-sweet." Such dreams, recalling those of the young Dante in the "Vita Nuova," took place only when the mind was exalted, and there was a way of curing them. And to speak out what we think, Guérin was not made for the great and violent passions of love. One day some years later, reading the letters of Mdlle. de Lespinasse, and discovering in them passion unknown to him, he was moved, and astonished that he should be moved. "Truly, I did not know I possessed imagination tender enough to cause my heart to be moved to such a degree. Do I not know the measure of my heart? It is not made for passions in which we say, 'To love you, and to see you, or to cease to live!'" No event of his life, not even the inclination which led to his marriage, belied that judgment of himself; he loved only on the surface, and, so to say, in front of the curtain that hid his soul; the depths were mysterious and concealed. I think that he, a lover of nature, was too conscious of the universality of things to love only one being. However that may be, at that time he suffered, and leaving La Chênaie, and living in the sweet companionship of Hippolyte de La Morvonnais and his wife, his trouble was cured. Guérin was one of those young men who was calmed instead of excited by the sympathetic friendship of a young woman. The chaste wife's pure affection, the happiness of which he was a witness, did not efface or wipe out the other image, but made of it merely a pleasant recollection of the past. Everything fell into its place again, and Guérin, about to launch himself into the midst of the world, enjoyed a few months of entire harmony.

The pictures drawn by him of the autumn and winter days spent in the hospitable house by the sea-side, with the "Thebaid of the sandy shores," as Morvonnais was rather ambitiously called, are beautiful passages, worthy of a place by the side of the best of the kind we know. The striking contrast between the peaceful hearth and the almost unceasing storms of the ocean, sometimes the other contrast, not less striking, of the calm sea, of the restfulness of the meadows, and the agitated heart of the contemplator, give life and variety to the different pictures.

"And see how full of goodness is Providence for me. Fearing lest the sudden passing from the sweet and gentle atmosphere of a religious and solitary life to the torrid zone of life in the world might be too trying for my soul, it led me, on

leaving the holy shelter, to a house built on the borders of the two regions, where, without being in solitude, I am still not in the world—a house whose windows look on the one side on the plain agitated with the stir of mankind, and on the other on the desert where chant the servants of God ; on one side on the ocean, on the other on the woods ; and the metaphor is a reality, for the house is built on the sea-shore. I wish to write down the history of my sojourn there, for the days are full of joy, and I know that in the future I shall often turn to it and read over my past happiness. A pious man and a poet ; a woman, who is so well suited to him that we might call them but a single soul doubled ; a child named Marie, like its mother, who, resembling a star, lets the first rays of her love and intelligence pierce the white mist of childhood ; a simple life in an old-fashioned house; the ocean, which night and morning lends its harmony; a wanderer, who, coming down from Carmel on his way to Babylon, leaves his staff and sandals at the door, and sits at the hospitable table. There is material for a biblical poem, if I could express things as I feel them."

I do not in the least regret the biblical poem ; he tells us enough even while saying he could not do it. We shall have presently a whole day, a model day; but first let us look with him on the spectacle of the sea in a storm, and on the human mind contemplating it.

"*December* 8.—Yesterday there was a strong west wind. I saw the sea in a storm, but to my mind the disturbance, however sublime, is far from equalling the sight of the sea when it is calm and blue. But why say one does not equal the other? Who can measure the two sublimities, and say the second surpasses the first? I must however confess that my mind takes more pleasure in calm than in tempest. Yesterday there was a grand battle on the watery plains. To see the waves leap, it might have been said that they were the innumerable cavalry of the Tartars that gallop unceasingly over the plains of Asia. The entrance to the bay was, as it were, defended by a chain of granite islands. You should have seen the waves rush to the attack and throw themselves furiously on the mass, shouting hoarsely ; you should have seen them race and do their best to clear the black head of the reef. The boldest or most nimble leaped on to the other side, uttering loud cries ; others, heavier or less skilful, broke against the rock, throwing up foam of a dazzling whiteness, and drew back with a dull deep growl, like watch-dogs beaten off by the traveller's stick. We saw the strange combat from the top of the cliff, where we could scarcely

stand against the fury of the wind. We were there, our bodies bent, our legs apart to keep us firmer and offer a greater resistance to the storm, our hands grasping our hats to keep them on our heads. The immense tumult of the sea, the noisy rushing of the waves, the clouds scudding along not less rapidly than silently, the sea-birds floating in the air and poising their slender bodies on two arched wings spread out to the utmost, all the wild and resounding harmonies converging to the souls of two beings five feet high, planted on the top of a cliff, shaken like leaves by the fury of the wind, scarcely more visible in the immensity than two birds perched on a mound of earth; oh! it was a strange and wondrous thing, one of those moments of sublime emotion and deep reverie when the soul and nature brought face to face, rise to their greatest height.

"A few steps from us was a group of children who had taken shelter under a rock, and a grazing flock had spread itself over the steep hill-side.

"Place a ship in danger on the scene, everything changes: only the ship is visible. Happy is he who can contemplate deserted and solitary nature! Happy if he can look on it abandoning itself to its terrible sport without harming any living creature! Happy the man who from the summit of the mountain sees the lion spring and roar in the plain, while neither a traveller nor a gazelle passes by! Hippolyte, heaven be thanked, that happiness was yesterday ours.

"From the top we descended into a creek which affords a marine shelter (as the ancients would have described it) to a few waves of the sea that came to rest there, while their furious brothers beat the reefs and struggled together. Enormous masses of grey granite, variegated with white mosses, were spread irregularly over the slope of the hill, a hollowing in which forms the cove. So curiously are they placed, and so near falling do they look, that it might be said a giant one day amused himself by rolling them from the top of the hill, and that they stopped wherever they met any obstacle, some only a few paces from the spot they left, others half-way down; but the obstacles must have rather suspended than stopped their course, for they seem ever on the point of rolling further. The noise of the winds and waves engulfed in the sonorous hollow makes the most beautiful harmony. We stopped there some time, leaning on our sticks, admiring.

"Regaining Le Val, we admired the position of a little house inhabited by an old man. It was built up against a rounded

projection, and turned its back on the sea like a true solitary that only wished to hear the sound of things from below. A small, well-cultivated garden, in which there was a little of everything, stretched in front of it, as far as a little brook that falls into the sea. It is a bit of landscape such as Virgil loved.

"In the evening the voice of the ocean was hoarse and low."

English poets of home life, Cowper, Wordsworth, never described more charmingly the joys of a pure home, of domestic happiness, the recollections of Eden, than did the wanderer in his temporary sojourn under a peaceful roof.

"*Le Val, December* 20.—I do not think I have ever so closely and calmly felt the happiness of family life. Never has the fragrance which pervades all the apartments of a pious and happy house wrapped me round so delightfully. It is like perpetually breathing a cloud of invisible incense. All the minor details of domestic life, whose succession fills up the day, are to me like so many shades of a prolonged delight that goes on developing itself from one end of the day to the other: the morning greeting which in some sort renews the pleasure of the first arrival; the formula with which we begin the day is very much the same, and the separation of the night is like longer separations, full as they are of danger and uncertainty; breakfast, a meal which celebrates the joy of being once more together; the walk which follows, a sort of greeting and worship we render to nature, for in my opinion, after worshipping God directly in the morning prayer, it is good to bend the knee before the mysterious power He has provided for the secret worship of some men; our return, and shutting ourselves into an old-fashioned wainscoted room, looking on the sea, inaccessible to household noises, in fact, a real sanctuary of work; dinner announced, not by a bell as in a college or a big house, but by a soft voice which calls us from below: the merriment, the lively jests, conversations continually interrupted, float around the table during the meal. The fire, sparkling with dry logs, round which we draw our chairs after the sign of the cross that carries our thanksgivings to Heaven; the pleasant things said in the warmth of the fire which crackles while we talk; and if there is any sun, a walk on the sea-shore, that sees coming towards it a mother carrying her child in her arms, the child's father and a stranger, the two last with sticks in their hands; the little lips of the tiny girl who speaks at the same time as the waves, sometimes the tears she sheds, and the cries of childish sorrow on the sea-shore; our own particular thoughts in seeing the mother and the laughing or weeping child, the

mother trying to soothe it with tender caresses and voice, and the ocean ever rolling up its series of waves and sounds; the dry twigs we cut in the copse to kindle a bright fire quickly on our return; the woodman's labour brings us nearer to nature by immediate contact with it, and reminds me of M. Féli's delight in the same work; the hours of study and poetical expansion which bring us to supper; the meal to which we are summoned by the same sweet voice is as pleasant as the dinner, only a little less noisy, for evening veils and softens everything; the evening, begun by the sparkle of a bright fire with reading and conversation, ends in sleep; and to all the delights of such a day add some indescribable angelic effulgence, some indescribable enchantment of peace, freshness, and innocence that fair hair, blue eyes, silvery voices, small feet, tiny footsteps, the laughter, the little pouts full of intelligence of a child of whom I am sure more than one angel might be envious; who enchants and attracts you, who with the least movement of her lips makes you love her passionately, so much power is there in weakness. Add to that all your imagination says to you, and you will be still far from sounding the depths of those mysterious pleasures."

But the delights of family life were too keenly felt by a soul destined never to enjoy them on its own account, and he was too greatly affected by them; he tells us he came to weep for nothing, "like little children and old men." The continual calm, the sweet monotony of family life, prolonging itself on one tender note, but always the same, in the end enervated him, exalted him, took him too much out of himself, or confined him too much within himself. Too much calm acted on him like a new kind of storm; his soul was *in prey*, and on that side, unless he had found a counterbalance, a powerful distraction in the contemplation of nature, just as at another time there had been danger of the sovereign attraction and powerful voice of nature absorbing and dominating him entirely, it was in danger of some indescribable intoxication of languor. For Guérin was a strange being, very sensitive, very impressionable, but without guarantee or defence against himself. This time he was able to turn aside before it was too late, and to vary the fashion of his sensibility.

"I began to consider it (nature) more attentively than usual, and by degrees the excitement lessened; for out of the fields, the waves, and the woods came a gentle, beneficent power that penetrated me, and turned my transports into melancholy dreams. The fusion of the calm impressions of nature with the stormy reveries of the heart will produce a disposition of mind I want to retain a long time, a most desirable condition

for a dreamer like me. It resembles a moderate and calm ecstasy that draws the soul out of itself, without depriving it of the consciousness of a permanent and somewhat stormy gloom. It thus happens that the soul is insensibly penetrated with a languor that crushes the vivacity of the intellectual faculty, and sends it to sleep in a semi-slumber empty of all thought, yet in which it is conscious of the power to dream of beautiful things.

"Nothing can more faithfully describe that state of mind than the evening just now ending. Grey clouds, with lightly-silvered edges, are spread equally over the whole surface of the sky. The sun, but a few minutes ago gone to its rest, left behind it light enough to soften for some time the dark shades, and, in a way, to make the fall of night pleasanter. The winds are silent, and the calm sea, when I listen to it from the threshold of the door, sends to me only a melodious murmur that spreads over the soul like a beautiful wave over the sand. The birds, the first to feel the influence of oncoming night, fly towards the woods, and their wings rustle in the clouds. The trees that cover the slope of the hill of Le Val resound all day with the chirping of the wren, the merry piping of the woodpecker, and the various cries of a multitude of birds, but there is no longer any sound in the paths and brakes of the hill except the shrill whistle of the blackbirds who play together and chase each other while the rest of the birds have already their heads under their wings. The noise of men, always the last to cease, gradually fades from the fields. All the usual noises are ended, and the only sounds come from villages and hamlets, where even far into the night children cry and dogs bark. Silence wraps me round; everything tends to rest, except my pen, which perhaps disturbs the slumber of some living atom, asleep in the creases of my note-book, for it makes a little noise in writing these idle thoughts. And therefore let it cease; what I write, have written, and shall write, will never be worth the slumber of an atom."

Those passages are instinct with the beauty of fine poetry. The Lake poets and their poems were discussed, and La Morvonnais was, about that time, greatly attracted by it, to the point even of visiting Wordsworth at Rydal Mount, near the Westmoreland lakes, and keeping up a correspondence with that grand, calm spirit, with the patriarch of the familiar muse.[1] Guérin, without thinking much about it, resembled the Lake

[1] I have been told that he did not make the journey; but I am at least sure of the correspondence, for I saw in it with grateful surprise that my name was known to Wordsworth.

poets the more in that he did not aim at imitating them. There is not in their works a more limpid pastoral ode, there is not in Cowper's walks a more transparent picture, than the page we have just read, so real and tender, so vividly and so deeply felt. The humble sentiment with which it ends, which takes into account the tiniest atom breathing, might cause envy to a kindly Indian poet.

But Guérin was to tear himself away from that solitude where, if he did not take care, he would forget himself and eat more of the lotos fruit than was good for him. In a last walk, on a bright winter afternoon, on the cliffs, along the path that had so often led him through the box and hazel trees, he breathed his farewells, and carried away with him all he could of the soul of things. The next day he was at Caen, a few days later in Paris. His timid disposition, as trembling and shuddering as that of a frightened fawn, experienced a secret horror on his arrival. He distrusted himself—he was afraid of men.

"*Paris, February* 1, 1834.—My God, close my eyes, keep me from seeing all that multitude, the sight of which raises in me such bitter, disheartening thoughts. Make me, when passing through it, deaf to the noise, inaccessible to the impressions that overwhelm me when I walk in the crowd; and therefore put before my eyes a vision of the things I love, a field, a valley, a sandy plain, Le Cayla, Le Val, something of nature. I shall walk with my eyes fixed on those lovely forms, and shall pass along without feeling discomfort."

Here we must penetrate a little into the secret of Guérin's nature. He was two-sided: one part of his soul felt exterior nature passionately, desperately, was capable of plunging into it with boldness, with a superb frenzy, of realising in it, by means of imagination, the fabulous existence of the ancient demigods. He retired within himself, he analysed himself, he purposely humbled and thought little of himself; he hid himself with discouraging humility. His was a soul, born, so to speak, Christian, a soul that felt the need of accusing itself, of repenting, of finding outside itself a pitying and compassionate love, a soul that early confessed and will always feel the need of confessing. I have known such souls, and formerly described one in a novel, in which the hidden affinity procured De Guérin's acceptance of it with indulgence. He, too, was of the race of René, but in so far as he did not consider himself a superior being, he only half belonged to it: far from it, he looked upon himself as poor, weak, wretched, and on his best days as a nature rather *apart* than *superior*.

"For such a man as I am to be loved," he whispered to himself, "it would be necessary to meet a soul willing to descend to its inferior, a strong mind which would bend before a weak one, not to worship it, but to serve it, comfort it, protect it, as we do a sick man; a soul endowed with a sensibility as humble as was profound, a soul that would put off pride so natural even in love, to bury its heart in an obscure affection of which the world would understand nothing, to devote its life to a weak creature, inwardly languishing, that would determine to concentrate its light on a colourless, paltry, and always trembling flower, that would give it perfumes whose sweetness delights and penetrates, but never those which intoxicate and exalt to the happy ecstasy of rapture."

His friends combated this timid soul of his as much as possible, and now and again he let them see its passionate outbursts, its inward ebb and flow, with an exquisite refinement, with a terrifying lucidity; they begged him, in entering on practical life, to set himself a plan of study, to make steady endeavour, and to apply and concentrate his intellectual powers methodically, and on fixed subjects. It was hoped at that time that he might obtain the Chair of Comparative Literature there was talk of founding at the Collège de Juilly, then directed by MM. de Scorbiac and de Talinis; but the idea was not carried out, and Guérin had to content himself with a provisory class at the Collège Stanislaus, and with a few lectures delivered at different places. A good-hearted Breton friend who happened to be in Paris (M. Paul Quemper) took upon himself the task of smoothing Guérin's early difficulties, and succeeded. Homage paid to material necessities, Guérin took, in hours set apart, all the more refuge in the life of the heart and the imagination; he gave full play to his own special nature, and retired as if into his hole in a little garden in the Rue d'Anjou, near the Rue de la Pepinière. In his imagination he returned to the grand and beautiful things he had seen in the west; in his weariness of spirit he embraced the stems of the lilac tree "as the only being in the world against which he could support his trembling nature, as the only thing capable of enduring his embraces." But it was not long before the air of Paris, through which he was obliged to walk every day, acted on the desolate being of twenty-four. The attractions of society gradually gained on him; new friendships were formed that, without effacing the old ones, put them insensibly into the background. Any one meeting him two years later, worldly, elegant, even *fashionable*, a conversationalist holding his own with brilliant talkers, would, to see him, never have dreamed he was thus sociable *in spite of himself.*

There is nothing like a timid man broken loose, when once he has felt the goad. And at the same time the talent of which he was always doubtful developed and grew bold. He at last applied it to subjects of composition, to exterior creation, and the artist, properly so called, manifested itself in him.

And here the piety of the sister who presided over the monument raised to the delightful genius, suggests a reflection. In the just tribute paid to the memory of the beloved dead nothing unjust to the living ought to enter, yet the omission itself may be an injustice. The three or four years Guérin lived in Paris a life of privation and struggle, of study and of the world, of various relations, are years neither to despise nor to conceal. It was the life that many of us know and still lead. Doubtless he lost on one side, but gained on another. He was partly unfaithful to the freshness of his youthful impressions, but, like all who are not too faithless, he only developed the more. Genius is a plant that likes to be sown in virtue, but it often abandons and overreaches it; it is even seldom that at the moment of its blossoming it belongs to it entirely, and it is only to the inspiration of passion that it yields all its fragrance.

Preserving all his refinement of mind, his impressions of rural nature and of landscape which in hurried journeys he from time to time renewed, Guérin, divided between two worships—the *God of Cities* and the *God of Deserts*—was the better prepared to attack art and compose and venture on a work. It is true he continued to write in his journal that he did not believe in his talent, but his genius was demonstrated to the uttermost in subtle and charming pages which fully proved that he possessed it. When he ventured to say such things to his friends, men of intelligence who thoroughly understood the art of letters, men of wit, animation, and spirit—to D'Aurevilly, to Scudo, to Amédée Renée,[1] and others—he was pitilessly laughed at and rebuked, and, what was of more value, he was reassured against himself and insensibly borrowed their energy and boldness.[2]

[1] In the collection of verses published by Amédée Renée in 1841, under the title *Hours of Poetry*, there is a beautiful poem dedicated to the "memory of Maurice de Guérin." In it his poetical nature is well brought out: he is called the "invalid of the infinite."

[2] When he was in the depths of his depression how often did Barbey d'Aurevilly bring him out of it by causing the secret voice of his dæmon to sound in his ear! None of those who knew that strange creature, an intelligent man infected with bad taste, would have thought his influence in the long run could have been good for any one; but *relatively*, and for a very short time, Barbey was useful to Guérin.

And thus one day Guérin entered into full possession of his powers. The idea of the "Centaur" came to him during several visits made with M. Trébutien to the Museum of Antiquities. He then read Pausanias, and wondered at the multitude of objects described by the Greek antiquary. "Greece," he said, "was like a big museum." We witness the two kinds, the two series of ideas that met in him and were united in a fruitful alliance.

"The Centaur" is by no means an imitation of Ballanche; it is an original conception peculiar to Guérin. We have seen how he loved to give himself up to and almost take root in nature; at certain periods he resembled wandering plants whose roots float on the surface of the water at the mercy of the waves. He often expressed that diffuse, unfixed sensation; there were days when, in his love of calm, he envied "the vigorous and dumb life existing under the bark of the oaks." He dreamed of some indescribable transformation into a tree; but the old man's destiny, the end worthy of Philemon and Baucis, and fit at most for the wisdom of a Laprade, clashed with the ardent impetuous vigour of a young heart. Until then Guérin was seeking his form, and had not found it; it suddenly revealed itself to him, and was personified in the shape of "The Centaur." The great primitive organisations in which Lucretius did not believe, and in which Guérin almost makes us believe, organisations in which the genius of the man was allied to as yet untamed animal power, and made one with it, in which nature scarcely emerged from the waters was overrun, possessed, or at least encompassed by unrestrained, interminable courses, seemed to him to deserve a sculptor, and also an auditor capable of repeating the mystery. He imagined the last of the Centaurs on the top of a mountain, at the entrance of his cave, interrogated by a curious mortal, and in his melancholy old age narrating to him, to the diminutive Centaur called man, the pleasures of his youth; for man, regarding him from the mythical, majestic point of view, would only be a Centaur, degraded and *put on his feet.* There is nothing more powerful than that dream of a few pages; there is nothing more perfect and classical in execution.

Guérin dreamed more; that was a mere beginning. He wrote a "Bacchante" that has not been found,[1] an anticipatory fragment of some prose poem whose subject was "Bacchus in India"; he meditated an "Hermaphrodite." The Gallery of

[1] It has now been discovered, and is included in the second edition of the work (1862).

Antiquities offered him moulds into which he could pour and so fix all his collected impressions of moorland and of sandy shores. The first phase of his genius opened. But the artist face to face with his ideal temple only made the statue for the entrance; he was to fall on the first step. Happy in a recent marriage with a young and pretty Creole lady, assured of a home and of leisure, he was seized with a real malady that only too clearly revealed the source of his ordinary weakness. Then were the obstinate laments of so rich a nature understood; the germs of extinction and premature death placed at the basis of a man's organs, in the roots of life, frequently transfer themselves to the mental faculties by the inexpressible sentiment of discouragement and exhaustion. The young man, carried dying to the South, died in the summer of 1839, almost as soon as he saw his native sky, where he found the freshness of early affection and piety. Familiar angels watched, praying at his bedside, and consoled his last look. He was only twenty-nine years of age. The two volumes now published will make him live; and in just compensation for a destiny so cruelly cut off, what is but scanty, written down and noted for himself alone, what he had no time to put together and transform according to art, becomes his most beautiful crown, and, if I mistake not, a crown that will never fade.

SIR WALTER SCOTT.

THE long hopeless agony which for several months beset one of the most glorious and brilliant lives of the age has at length ended: Walter Scott died last Friday, at his estate of Abbotsford. It is not a grief for England only; it is a sorrow for France and the whole civilised world, for whom Walter Scott, more than any other writer of the time, was, as it were, a generous wizard and a kindly benefactor. Doubtless the vigorous and fertile genius to which we owe so much noble enjoyment, so many hours of pure emotion, so many marvellous creations which have become a portion of ourselves and of our memories, doubtless the splendid genius had begun to grow sensibly weaker. We dared no longer expect of it masterpieces to be compared with the old ones; we even feared to see it regard complacently a feeble posterity, as happens with great men in their decline, as Corneille in his old age could not quite avoid. It is permissible to believe that, in dying, Walter Scott has not taken with him any great unfinished idea; his genius had expanded at ease and with abundance; he had said enough for his glory and our delight. Although he was only sixty-two years old he died full of works, and had satisfied the world. But it is always a profound grief, an irreparable loss, to see one of the lives that have instructed and charmed us, extinguished. At this particular moment it seems that over the whole of Europe the old generations are expiring in the persons of their more august representatives; a solemn regeneration is taking place; the sacred heads of the masters of intellect and art are falling, mown down on all sides. In Germany, Goethe, the last of his age, died, after seeing nearly all the poets born with him, or from him, pass away; a different era, an era of politics and social methods, is being inaugurated, and it is still seeking its men. In England, also, the great poets are dead or in the act of becoming silent—Crabbe, Shelley, Byron, Walter Scott have passed away; the illustrious political philosophers are likewise disappearing—Bentham, Godwin, Mackintosh sleep in the tomb. France also has suffered losses that all deplore. May the continual disappearances, the mysterious

blows which strike, as if by design, revered groups of geniuses in their zenith, the last chiefs of a movement that has done its work, have the force of religious warnings, bidding the new generation hasten and draw its ranks closer into the paths in which it is walking, and where soon it will be left to guide itself! The new period, it may rest assured, will not be lacking in great men; the brilliant age of the poets is not yet ended, and indefatigable humanity has not perhaps exhausted all the geniuses. But in leaving to Providence the care of calling to life the geniuses in their good time, the new generations, in the presence of the glorious tombs whose stones they are called upon to lay, ought to make a sacred promise not to stop on the road of civilisation and helpful knowledge, but to remain honest and sincere friends of progress, liberty, and justice. Whether it be the tomb of the minister of State, Goethe, or that of Baron Cuvier, the courtier of power, or that of the tory Walter Scott, which is being closed (what matters it whose tomb?), the duty of the new generation, its nicely discriminating respect for the names of men whose greatness and good deeds atoned for their weaknesses, consists, failing the genius which God alone gives, in not falling into a cowardly sleep, nor into narrow and vulgar interests, in checking paltry ambitions, in not crouching in the lap of some corrupted and corrupting power, but in walking firmly, developing its thought, defending its rights, giving up no portion of the truth but seeking it in meditation and study, spreading it abroad by words, and remaining faithful to all which elevates and honours humanity. In such a generation, geniuses, when they present themselves, will be naturally stronger and better; they will bear and preserve the impression of the civic morality that has often failed them; they will present less of the sorrowful contrasts which console envy and offend virtue; they will no longer be benefactors by halves to the world, and grief for their loss will be twice holy to their admirers.

Walter Scott, if he lacked the political character suited to the new requirements, and was on that point the slave of the prejudices of his education, and perhaps also of his poetical predilections, had the good fortune to combat very seldom in word or deed the legitimate development in which nations are engaged. France addressed several reproaches to him on account of the strange opinions with which he filled *Paul's Letters to his Kinsfolk* and *The History of Napoleon Bonaparte;* but it was on his part thoughtlessness and habitual prejudice rather than ill-will and system. Author, poet, story-teller above all, he obeyed, in the course of a long and laborious

career, an easy, fertile inspiration, independent of pressing questions, a stranger to the struggles of the time, loving past ages, whose ruins he frequented and whose spirits he invoked, searching out every tradition to revive and rejuvenate it. He was, in his novels, one of the natures we are forced to call impartial and disinterested, because they can reflect life as it is in itself, describe man in all the varieties of passion or circumstances, while they apparently mingle in the paintings and faithful representations nothing of their own impressions or personality. Those kinds of natures which have the gift of forgetting themselves and of transforming themselves into an infinitude of personages, whom they make live, speak, and act in countless pathetic or diverting ways, are often capable of ardent passion on their own account, although they never express it directly. It is difficult to believe, for instance, that Shakespeare and Molière, the two highest types of that order of mind, did not feel the affairs of life with a deep and sometimes unhappy passion. It was not thus with Scott, though he was of the same family; he possessed neither their power of combination, their philosophical reach, nor their genius of style. Of a kindly, facile, pleasantly cheerful disposition, of a mind eager for culture and various sorts of knowledge, accommodating himself to prevailing manners and accredited opinions, of a somewhat dispassionate soul in so far as it appears habitually fortunate and favoured by circumstances, he developed on a brilliant and animated plane, attaining without effort those of his creations which will remain the most immortal, complacently looking on, so to speak, at their birth, and nowhere stamping them with the indescribable excess of sharp, personal imprint which always betrays an author's secrets. If he described himself in any character of his novels, it was in persons such as Morton in *Old Mortality*, that is to say in a pale, undecided, honest, and good type. Walter Scott's life is in its entirety very simple; the abundant memoirs which he has left will soon yield us anecdotes, the various events of his life, and all sorts of treasures. What, at the present date, most satisfactorily supplies their place, is a collection of the notes he added to a recent edition of his poems; the collection, skilfully made by an English review, was reproduced in the fifty-eighth number of the *Revue Britannique* under the title of "Autobiographical Memoirs of Sir Walter Scott." He was born at Edinburgh, August 15, 1771; his father was a man of law, writer to the Signet, but it was to his mother, a bit of a poet, that he especially owed his brilliant and natural qualities. Young Scott was early destined to study law with a view to being called to the Bar.

However, in his childhood he became acquainted with all the poetry of that fine country, adventurous expeditions, the current legends, and afterwards the memoirs of Beattie, and the songs of Burns. He studied German with several of his companions, and, from the first, delighted in Bürger's ballads. A barrister at twenty-one years of age, he married at twenty-seven, and was successively Deputy-Sheriff of the county of Selkirk, and later one of the clerks to the Court of Session. He takes care to warn us, in one of the interesting notes indicated above, that he never, like so many poets in the beginning of their careers, had to pass through a rough and needy time. His studious and imaginative tastes were never opposed, and he had only to expand in the pleasant leisure of an atmosphere in every way favourable. After some imitations of German ballads, and a translation of "Goetz von Berlichingen," Scott published, from 1802 to 1814, a series of poems full of charm and freshness—"Sir Tristram," "Marmion," "The Lady of the Lake," "The Lord of the Isles," "Rokeby," which placed him in a very high rank among the poets of the new school, and procured him the name of the Ariosto of the North. In the first part of his literary life, Scott, however, only continued and brilliantly supported the impulse given to English poetry at the end of the century by Beattie, Cowper, and Percy's *Reliques*. But when, about 1812, Byron appeared, Scott candidly confessed that he felt a very dangerous rival was entering the lists; and as, in addition, the poetic vein he had followed began to be exhausted, he hastened to abandon it, and threw himself into prose and the novel. *Waverley* appeared in 1814, and was the first of the series of masterpieces which have been the delight and joy of Europe for the last fifteen years. Several critical, antiquarian, and editorial works were written in the short intervals of the enchanting productions that succeeded each other every six months. After the *Fair Maid of Perth*, which deserved its title, a rapid decline, and symptoms of exhaustion were observed. Walter Scott's last years were saddened by losses and money difficulties, due to the failure of his publishers. Universal sympathy, a redoubling of respect and veneration, the homage of his sovereign and the British nation in that last voyage undertaken at the expense of the State, helped to compensate him, and he died as he had lived, happy, kindly, peaceable, and even in his extremest sufferings not out of love with life. Posterity will doubtless admire his works less than we do, but he will always remain a great creator, a grand man, an immortal painter of humanity!

LORD CHESTERFIELD.

EVERY epoch has produced treatises written for the purpose of educating the gentleman, the man of fashion, the courtier if we live for courts, the perfect cavalier. If in succeeding ages these treatises on good breeding and politeness are opened, at the first glance they seem as much out of date as the fashions of our fathers or the cut of their coats; the pattern has evidently changed. But on looking more closely, if the book was written by a man of sense, who really knew mankind, a certain profit may be derived from the study of the models set to former generations. The Letters, containing a whole school of good manners and knowledge of the world, addressed by Lord Chesterfield to his son, possess a particular interest, inasmuch as he had no intention of providing a model, but merely desired to instruct, in familiar fashion, one excellent pupil. They are confidential letters, suddenly given to the light, and they reveal the secrets and ingenuous artifices of fatherly solicitude. If, reading them now, we are struck by the excessive importance attached to accidental and fleeting things, to mere details of dress, the durable part that belongs to the observation of men in all ages is not less striking; that part is much more considerable than a first superficial glance leads us to believe. Occupying himself with the son he desired to instruct in all that befits a gentleman of society, Lord Chesterfield did not, like Cicero, write a treatise "On Duty"; but he left letters which, by reason of their mixture of accuracy and playfulness, of a certain frivolous tone insensibly joined to serious beauties, hold a middle place between the *Memoirs of the Count de Grammont* and *Telemachus.*

Before going further into the subject, we must know who Lord Chesterfield, in his time one of the most brilliant wits of England, and of a temperament very closely allied to the French, was. Philip Dormer Stanhope, Earl of Chesterfield, was born in London on September 22, 1694, the same year as Voltaire. Descended from an illustrious race, he knew its value, and desired to uphold its honour; but for all that he found it difficult not to laugh at pretensions of birth pushed to extremes.

To keep himself from like folly, he placed two old pictures of a man and a woman among his family portraits; under one was written, "*Adam* of Stanhope," and under the other, "*Eve* of Stanhope." That was his method, while holding fast to honour, of checking chimerical desires.

His father took no trouble over his education, and left him to the care of his grandmother, Lady Halifax. He was soon conscious of a desire to excel and take the lead in everything; he tried later to rouse the same desire, which, for better or worse, is at bottom of every great deed accomplished, in his son's heart. As in his early youth he was without guidance, he more than once mistook the objects of his emulation and clung to a false sense of honour. He confesses that in the time of his inexperience he indulged in wine to excess and other extravagances to which he was in no way prompted by nature, but it flattered his vanity to hear himself called a man of pleasure. It was the same with gambling, which he considered a necessary ingredient in the composition of a man of pleasure; he plunged into it at first without desire, but could not later tear himself away from it, and for a long time impaired his fortune. "Take warning by my conduct," he said; "choose your pleasures for yourself, and do not let them be imposed upon you."

The desire of excelling and distinguishing himself did not always lead him astray in that manner, and he often pursued his end with care; his early studies were of the best. Sent to the University of Cambridge, he learned all that was taught there, civil law, philosophy; he attended the mathematical lectures of the blind and learned Saunderson. He read Greek with ease, and reported his progress in French to his old tutor, a French refugee pastor, M. Jonneau. Lord Chesterfield learned French in his childhood from a Norman maidservant who had waited on him. On his last visit to Paris, in 1741, M. de Fontenelle, observing something of a Norman accent in his pronunciation, mentioned it to him, and asked him if he had not first learned French from a native of that province; it was in fact the case.

After two years at the University, according to the custom of young English noblemen, he made a tour on the Continent. He visited Holland, Italy, France. He wrote from Paris to M. Jonneau, December 7, 1724:—

"I shall not give you my opinion of the French, because I am very often taken for one of them; and several have paid me the highest compliment they think it in their power to

bestow, which is, 'Sir, you are just like ourselves!' I shall only tell you that I am insolent; I talk a great deal; I am very loud and peremptory; I sing and dance as I walk along; and, above all, I spend an immense sum in hair powder, feathers, and white gloves!"

We perceive the mocking, satirical, and slightly insolent spirit which cracks its joke at the expense of the French; later he rendered justice to their serious qualities.

In the Letters to his son he described himself, when he was first introduced into society, with the rust of Cambridge still about him, as shy, embarrassed, silent, at length taking courage to say to a pretty woman near him, "Madam, don't you find it very warm to-day?" But Lord Chesterfield told his son that anecdote, not to discourage him, but to show him that it was possible to change very greatly. He does the honours of his own person in order to embolden the youth and attract him the more to himself. I have no intention of taking him literally in the anecdote. If he was for a moment embarrassed in society, the moment must have been very short, and even then his shyness could not have been apparent.

Queen Anne was just dead; Chesterfield welcomed the accession of the House of Hanover, of which he was to be one of the avowed champions. He early had a seat in the House of Commons and made a good beginning. It is said, however, that an apparently trifling circumstance kept him back and somewhat paralysed his eloquence. One of the members of the House, distinguished for no other talent, possessed that of imitating and mimicking to perfection the speakers to whom he replied. Dread of ridicule was Chesterfield's weakness, and, on many occasions, he remained silent more than he would have wished from fear of being parodied by his colleague and opponent. On his father's death he succeeded to the peerage and passed to the House of Lords, a platform better suited to the grace, refinement, and urbanity of his eloquence. He did not, however, regard the two places as alike in the importance of debate and in the political influence to be obtained in them.

"It is unheard of," he said later to Pitt, when the great orator consented to enter the Upper House under the title of Lord Chatham, "that a man in the fulness of his power, and in the utmost gratification of his ambition, should withdraw from the House of Commons (which procured him his power, and which alone could insure it to him) to go into that Hospital for Incurables, the House of Lords."

It is not for us to criticise here Lord Chesterfield's political career. If I dared venture an opinion on it as a whole, I should say that his ambition never found complete satisfaction in it, and that the brilliant distinctions that filled his public life covered many unfulfilled desires and the loss of many hopes. Twice, in two decisive events of his political life, he failed. Young, and in the first heat of ambition, he staked everything for the heir-presumptive to the throne, who became George II.; he was one of those who, on the accession of the prince, might most have counted on his favour and on attaining some influential office. But the clever man, wishing to turn to the side of the rising sun, did not find the road with perfect skill; he paid court to the prince's mistress, believing her destined to influence him, and neglected the lawful wife, the future queen, who, however, alone possessed real power. Queen Caroline never forgave him; it was the first check to his political fortunes. At that time Lord Chesterfield was thirty-three years old and in the full swing of hope. In too great a hurry, he took the wrong turning. Robert Walpole, less clever and apparently less wide awake, took his measures and made his calculations more accurately.

Thrown with his brilliant reputation into the Opposition, especially after 1732, when he had to resign his offices at Court, Lord Chesterfield worked for ten years with all his might to bring about Walpole's fall, which did not take place until 1742. But even then he did not obtain office, and remained outside the combinations. When he entered the Government two years later, in 1744, first as Ambassador at the Hague and Viceroy of Ireland, and then as Secretary of State and member of the Cabinet (1746-1748), it was by a fictitious rather than a real title. In short, Lord Chesterfield, though at all times a considerable politician, whether as one of the leaders of the Opposition or as a clever diplomatist, was never a leading, or even a very influential minister.

In politics he certainly possessed the far-sightedness and comprehension of the future which belong to breadth of mind, but he doubtless had in a much higher degree the patient perseverance and practical firmness in the present, so necessary to statesmen. Of him, as of La Rochefoucauld, it is correct to say that politics turned an imperfect man of action into a perfect moralist.

In 1744, at the age of fifty, his political ambition seemed partly worn out; his health was sufficiently enfeebled to make retirement desirable. And now we know the object of his

secret ideal and real ambition. Before his marriage he had, about 1732, a natural son by a French lady (Madame Du Bouchet), whom he met in Holland. To this son Lord Chesterfield was affectionately attached. He wrote to him in all sincerity: "From the first day of your life the dearest object of mine was to make you as perfect as the weakness of human nature permits." All his desires, all his worldly and affectionate predilections turned to the education of his son, and, whether Viceroy in Ireland, or Secretary of State in London, he found time to write him long detailed letters to guide him in his least acts, and perfect him in all that was serious and polite.

The Chesterfield we prefer to study is the intelligent and experienced man who only took up affairs, and entered political and public life to learn their inner workings and explain them to us. From his youth he was the friend of Pope and Bolingbroke, he introduced Montesquieu and Voltaire into England, and corresponded with Fontenelle and Madame de Tencin. The Academy of Inscriptions enrolled him among its members, and he combined the temperaments of the two nations. In more than one witty essay, but particularly in the Letters to his son, he proved himself an amiable and perfect moralist, and a past master in the art of living. We are studying, in fact, an English La Rochefoucauld.

After the publication of the *Esprit des Lois*, Montesquieu wrote to the Abbé de Guasco, who was then in England: "Tell Lord Chesterfield that nothing pleases me more than his approval, and that since he is reading me for the third time, he will be the more competent to tell me what there is to correct and improve in my work; nothing could teach me more than his observations and criticism." It was Chesterfield who, speaking once to Montesquieu of the readiness of the French for revolutions, and their impatience of gradual reform, uttered the phrase which sums up all French history: "You Frenchmen can make barricades, but you will never erect barriers."

Lord Chesterfield certainly liked Voltaire; he said of *The Age of Louis XIV.*: "Lord Bolingbroke taught me how history should be read; Voltaire shows me how it should be written." But at the same time, with the practical sense that scarcely ever deserts intelligent Englishmen, he was conscious of Voltaire's imprudences, and disapproved of them. Already old, and quite retired from the world, he wrote to a French lady: "Your fine writers are my chief resource. Voltaire especially charms me, almost to his impiety, with which he cannot help interlarding all that he writes; he would do better to suppress it, since,

all said and done, we ought not to disturb the established order of things. Let each think as he likes, or rather as he can, but if his opinions are of a nature likely to trouble the repose of society he should keep them to himself."

What he said in 1768 Chesterfield had already said more than twenty-five years before, writing to Crébillon fils, a strange correspondent, and as far as morals go a stranger confidant. On that occasion Chesterfield was discussing Voltaire's tragedy of *Mahomet*, and the audacities it contained. "What I do not forgive him, and what is not pardonable," wrote Chesterfield to Crébillon, "is the impulse he gives to the propagation of a doctrine as destructive to civil society as it is contrary to the received religions of all countries. I greatly doubt if it is permissible for a man to write against the worship and belief of his country, although he might, in all good faith, be convinced that there were errors in it, because of the trouble and disturbance it might cause; but I am sure it is never permissible to attack the foundations of morality, and to break bonds so necessary and already so much too weak to keep men to their duty."

In speaking thus, Chesterfield did not misapprehend Voltaire's great inconsistency. It may be stated in a couple of words; Voltaire was pleased to regard men as fools or children, and had not humour enough to laugh at them; he put loaded fire-arms into their hands, without troubling himself as to the use they might make of them.

I ought to mention that Lord Chesterfield himself was accused by his puritanical countrymen of a breach of morals in his Letters to his son. The austere Johnson, whose criticisms of Lord Chesterfield were not quite fair, and who considered he had matter for complaint, said, when the Letters were published, "that they taught the morals of a courtesan, and the manners of a dancing-master."

Such a criticism is most unfair, and if in particular cases Chesterfield insists too much on charm of manner and on the art of pleasing at any cost, it is after he has provided the solid part of education, when his pupil is in no danger whatever of sinning on the side that makes a man *respectable*, but rather on the side that makes him *amiable*. Although more than one passage of the Letters may seem strange as coming from a father to his son, the whole is animated by a true spirit of affection and wisdom. If Horace had had a son, I think he would have spoken to him much after the same fashion.

The Letters commence at the A, B, C of education and instruction. Chesterfield taught and recapitulated in French the

first elements of mythology and history. I do not regret the publication of those early letters; he interpolated in them capital advice. Before little Stanhope was eight years old his father drew up a lesson on the elements of oratory, and tried to instil in him elegance of language and distinction in the manner of expressing himself. He chiefly recommended him *attention* in all he did, and gave the word its full significance: "There is no surer sign in the world of a little, weak mind, than inattention. Whatever is worth doing at all, is worth doing well; and nothing can be done well without attention." He continually repeated the precept, and, as his pupil grew older and became able to take in all its significance, he varied its application. Pleasure or study, he desired everything he did to be well done, to be done completely and in proper season, without allowing himself to be distracted by anything else: "When you read Horace, attend to the justness of his thoughts, the happiness of his diction, and the beauty of his poetry; and do not think of Puffendorf's *De Homine et Cive:* and, when you are reading Puffendorf, do not think of Madame de St. Germain; nor of Puffendorf when you are talking to Madame de St. Germain." But the independent and firm disposal of the thought at the command of the will belongs only to great and rare minds.

M. Royer-Collard used to say that "the thing most wanting in our time was, in morality *reverence*, and in intellect *attention*." Lord Chesterfield in his less serious manner was capable of such a remark. It was not long before he became conscious of what was lacking in the child he wished to educate, and who formed the business and aim of his life. "In the strict scrutiny which I have made into you," he said, "I have (thank God) hitherto not discovered any vice of the heart, or any peculiar weakness of the head; but I have discovered laziness, inattention, and indifference; faults which are only pardonable in old men, who, in the decline of life, when health and spirits fail, have a kind of claim to that sort of tranquillity. But a young man should be ambitious to shine and excel." Now it was exactly the divine fire, the spark which makes the Achilles, Alexanders, and Cæsars, the desire *to be first in everything one undertakes*, the motto of great minds and eminent men of all sorts, that nature had omitted to put into the honest but decidedly commonplace mind of young Stanhope. "You seem to want," his father told him, "that *vivida vis animi* which spurs and excites most young men to please, to shine, to excel." "When I was your age," he says again, "I

should have been ashamed for another to have learned his lesson better, to have surpassed me in any game, and I should have found no rest until I had gained the advantage." The whole of the little treatise on education contained in these letters presents a sort of continuous dramatic interest. We watch a refined, distinguished, energetic nature like Lord Chesterfield's struggling with an honest but indolent disposition, and a pliant but somewhat tardy temperament; he wanted, at any cost, to make of it a perfect, lovable, and original masterpiece, but only succeeded in producing a sort of adequate and respectable copy. What sustains and almost touches the reader, in the struggle in which so much art is expended, where the ever-recurring advice under so many metamorphoses always comes to the same thing in the end, is the real fatherly affection which animates and inspires the refined and excellent master; he is patient as well as energetic, great in resources, skilful, never discouraged; untiring in sowing elegance and grace on a barren soil. Not that the son, the object of so much culture and zeal, was, in anything, unworthy of his father. It has been alleged that no one was heavier or more ill-humoured than that son, and a harsh remark of Johnson is quoted in support of the opinion. Those are caricatures which overstep the truth. According to more reliable testimony, it appears that Mr. Stanhope, without being a model of grace, had the manners of a well-bred, polite, and educated man. But do you not perceive that the discouraging part of it is just there? It would have been almost better to have wholly failed and to have succeeded in making an original only in the inverse sense, than to have produced with so much care and trouble merely an insignificant and ordinary man of the world, a man of whom for all criticism we say there is nothing to note; if he had not been a father, there would indeed have been cause to despair of and take pity on his work.

Lord Chesterfield from the first thought that France would be the very place to *polish* his son, and give him the affability so impossible to acquire later. In the private correspondence of a lady in Paris, whom I take to be Madame de Monconseil,[1] it appears he meant to send him while he was a mere boy. "I have a son," he wrote to this friend, "who is now thirteen years old. I must openly confess to you that he is not legiti-

[1] It is no longer a conjecture but a fact, after what I read in Lord Mahon's edition of *Lord Chesterfield's Letters* (1847). Cf. vol. iii. I was not acquainted with that edition when I wrote my article.

mate ; but his mother is of good birth, and has been kinder to me than I deserve. As for the boy, maybe it is partiality, but I find him lovable ; he is nice-looking, and has much vivacity and I think intelligence for his age. He speaks French perfectly, he knows a good deal of Latin and Greek, and he has ancient and modern history at his fingers' ends. He is now at school ; but as in this country no one dreams of forming the morals and manners of young people, and as they are nearly all uncouth, awkward, and unpolished, such indeed as you see them when they come to Paris at the age of twenty or twenty-one, I do not want my boy to remain here long enough to acquire such bad habits ; that is why, when he is fourteen, I intend to send him to Paris. . . . As I love the child infinitely and am anxious to make something good of him, for I believe the material is there, my idea is to unite in him what I have never yet found in the same person, I mean all that is best in the two nations."

And he entered into the details of his scheme and the means he intended to employ : an English tutor for the mornings, a French tutor for the afternoons, aided by good society and well-chosen companions. The war which broke out between France and England postponed the project of Parisian education, and the young man did not go to Paris until 1751, at the age of nineteen, after having travelled in Switzerland, Germany, and Italy.

Everything was arranged by the most careful of fathers for his success and favourable reception there. The young man resided at the Academy with M. de La Guérinière ; he pursued his studies in the morning, and devoted the rest of the day to society. " Pleasure is now the principal remaining part of your education. It will soften and polish your manners ; it will make you pursue and at last overtake the Graces." But on the last point he was exacting and unflinching. He always recurs to the *graces*, for should they be lacking all effort is useless. " If they do not come to you, run away with them," he cries. He speaks without hesitation, ignoring the fact that to gain possession of them, it was first necessary to own them.

Three ladies, friends of his father, are specially charged to watch over and guide the young man at the outset : they are his titulary governesses, Madame de Monconseil, Lady Hervey, and Madame Du Bocage. But those guides were only of use in the beginning : afterwards the young man must walk alone and choose some more confidential and charming director. Lord Chesterfield entered on the delicate subject of women. " I shall not speak to you on this subject as a theologian, as a

moralist, nor as a father," he says; "I put aside my age, in order only to consider yours. I intend to speak to you as one man of pleasure to another, if he has taste and intelligence." And, accordingly, he declares his views, urging the young man as much as possible to *honourable affairs* and refined pleasures, in order to deter him from loose and coarse habits. He held the principle "that an honourable arrangement is most suitable for a gallant man." His whole morality in that respect might be summed up in Voltaire's line, "There is no evil in good company." It is especially at those passages that the modesty of the austere Johnson takes fright; ours is content to smile at them.

Seriousness and trifling are mingled in the letters at every turn. Marcel, the dancing-master, is often recommended; Montesquieu not less so. The Abbé de Guasco, a sort of hanger-on of Montesquieu, is a personage useful now and again for introducing the young man into good society. "Between you and me," writes Chesterfield, "he has more knowledge than parts. *Mais un habile homme sçait tirer parti de tout;* and everybody is good for something. President Montesquieu is, in every sense, a most useful acquaintance. He has parts joined to great reading and knowledge of the world. *Puisez dans cette source tant que vous pourrez.*"

Among authors, those whom Chesterfield particularly recommended and whom he mentions most often in his counsels are La Rochefoucauld and La Bruyère. "If you read in the morning some of La Rochefoucauld's maxims, consider them, examine them well, and compare them with the real characters you meet with in the evening. Read La Bruyère in the morning, and see in the evening whether his pictures are like." But excellent guides, by themselves, are of no more use than a map. Without personal observation and experience they would be useless, and would even be as misleading as a map might be, if we desired an exact knowledge of towns and countries. It is better to read one man than ten books. "Society is a country no one has ever known by means of descriptions; each one of us must traverse it in person, in order to be initiated into it."

Here are a few precepts and observations worthy of the masters of human morals:

"To know mankind well, requires full as much attention and application as to know books, and, it may be, more sagacity and discernment. I am at this time acquainted with many elderly people, who have all passed their whole lives in the great world,

but with such levity and inattention, that they know no more of it now than they did at fifteen."

"Human nature is the same all over the world, but its workings are so varied by education and custom, that we ought to see it in all its costumes to gain an intimate knowledge of it."

"Almost all people are born with all the passions to a certain degree; but almost every man has a prevailing one, to which the others are subordinate. Search every one for that ruling passion, pry into the recesses of his heart, and observe the different workings of the same passion in different people. And when you have found out the prevailing passion of any man, remember never to trust him, where that passion is concerned."

"If you wish particularly to gain the favour and affection of certain persons, men or women, try to discover their most striking merit, if they have one, and their ruling weakness, for every one has his; then do justice to the one, and a little more than justice to the other."

"Women have usually but one object, their beauty, on which there could scarcely be any flattery too gross for them to swallow."

"Women who are either indisputably beautiful or indisputably ugly, are best flattered upon the score of their understanding."

If at times he is contemptuous in regard to women, in other places he makes them reparation, and, whatever may be his opinion, does not allow his son to speak too much ill of them:

"You seem to think that from Eve downwards they have done a great deal of mischief. As for that lady, I give her up to you; but, since her time, history will inform you that men have done much more mischief in the world than women; and, to say the truth, I would not advise you to trust either more than is absolutely necessary. But this I will advise you to, which is, never to attack whole bodies of any kind.

"Individuals forgive sometimes, but bodies and societies never do."

Chesterfield advises in general, circumspection and a sort of prudent neutrality, even with regard to the knaves and fools with whom society abounds: "After their friendship there is nothing more dangerous than to have them as enemies." It is not the morality of Cato or Zeno, but that of Alcibiades, Aristippus, and Atticus.

Replying to certain decisive opinions expressed by his son on

religion, he said: "Every man's reason is, and must be, his guide; and I may as well expect that every man should be of my size and complexion, as that he should reason just as I do."

He is of opinion that in everything we ought to know the good and the best, but need not make ourselves its champions. Even in literature, we must know and tolerate the weaknesses of others: "Let them calmly rejoice in their errors of taste as of religion." Oh! what a lack of such wisdom is there in the intolerance of the profession of criticism as we practise it.

He does not, however, advise falsehood; on that count he is explicit. His principle is not to say everything, but never to lie. "I have invariably observed," he often repeats, "that the greatest fools are the greatest liars. I judge of a man's veracity by the range of his intellect."

Thus the serious and the agreeable are prettily combined. He continually asks of the mind something firm and subtle, gentleness of manner, strength of foundation. Lord Chesterfield recognised the serious side of the French nation, and all that was germinating and was so much to be dreaded in the eighteenth century. According to him, "Duclos, in his *Reflections*, observed, very truly, *Qu'il y a un germe de raison qui commence à se développer en France.*" "And," adds Chesterfield, "I foresee that before the end of the century, the trade of both king and priest will not be half so good a one as it has been." In 1750 he clearly predicts the Revolution.

He warns his son against the notion that the French are simply frivolous: "The colder inhabitants of the north look upon the French as a frivolous people, who are always whistling, singing, and dancing; that opinion is far from the truth, although maybe the coxcombs seem to justify it. But those coxcombs, ripened by age and experience, often change into very capable men." According to him, the ideal would be to unite the good qualities of the two nations; but in the combination he seemed to incline towards the side of France: "I have often said, and I really think, that a Frenchman who combines the manners and good breeding of his country with a store of virtue, erudition, and good sense, attains the perfection of human nature."

He himself well united the advantages of the two nations, with one characteristic, however, that is entirely of his own race. He had imagination even in intellect. Hamilton possessed that distinctive feature, and joined it with French intellect. Bacon, the great moralist, was, in his manner of expression, almost a poet. We cannot say quite as much of Lord Chester-

field, but there was more imagination in his flashes of wit and in the expression of his intellect than is to be found in Saint-Evremond and our clever moralists generally. In that respect, Chesterfield resembles his friend Montesquieu.

If, without being unduly severe, we have to reflect on certain points in the Letters to his son, of a slightly corrupt morality, we must, in compensation, indicate the serious and excellent passages; for instance, where he speaks of the Cardinal de Retz, of Mazarin, of Bolingbroke, of Marlborough, and many others. It is a book full of good things. Every page contains some happy observations worthy to be remembered.

Lord Chesterfield intended his much-loved son for the diplomatic service, but his illegitimate birth formed an obstacle. To remove the objections, he caused his son to enter Parliament: it was the surest means of overcoming the scruples of the Court. In his maiden speech, Mr. Stanhope hesitated a moment and was obliged to refer to his notes. He did not make a second attempt at public speaking. It seemed he would have a better chance of success in diplomacy, in a secondary *rôle*, where only solid merit was needed. He filled the post of Envoy Extraordinary to the Court of Dresden. His health, always delicate, declined before he became old, and to his father's grief he died before attaining the age of thirty-six (1768).

Lord Chesterfield was then, on account of his infirmities, of which the worst was total deafness, living wholly retired from the world. Montesquieu, whose sight was growing weak, once said to him: "*I know how to be blind.*" But Lord Chesterfield could not say as much: he did not know how to be deaf. He corresponded the more with his friends, especially with those in France. "Communication by means of letters," he remarks, "is the conversation of the deaf, and their only link with society." He found consolation in his pretty country-house at Blackheath, which he called, after the French fashion, by the name of *Babiole*. He occupied himself in gardening and cultivating melons and pines; he liked to vegetate *in their company*.

"I vegetated the whole of this year," he writes to a lady friend in France (September 1753), "without pleasure and without pain: my age and my deafness forbid me the first; my philosophy, or perhaps my temperament (for one is often deceived), guarantees me the last. I derive the most I can from the quiet amusements of gardening, walking, and reading, while I wait for death without either desiring or fearing it."

He undertook no long works, feeling too worn out, but he

sometimes sent pleasantly written essays to a periodical called *The World.* The essays correspond with his reputation for refinement and urbanity. But nothing comes up to the work which was no work, the Letters he never expected any one to read, and on which his reputation as an author now rests.

His somewhat premature old age dragged on for a long while. His wit played with the sad theme in many fashions; speaking of himself and one of his friends, Lord Tyrawley, equally old and infirm: "Tyrawley and I," he said, "have been dead two years, but we did not wish any one to know it."

Voltaire, who affected to be always on the point of death, and who yet retained his youth much longer, wrote to him on October 24th, 1771, the following charming letter, signed *the old invalid of Ferney:—*

"After passing through the experiences of life, enjoy an honourable and happy old age. Enjoy your intellect and preserve the health of your body. Of the five senses that are ours, you have only one impaired, and Lord Huntingdon guarantees that you have a good digestion, a fact well worth a couple of ears. It will perhaps be my lot to decide which is sadder, to be deaf or blind or to have a bad digestion: I can judge of the three conditions with knowledge of the subject, but I have long left judging of trifles, let alone things of such importance. I limit myself to believing that if you have sunshine in the beautiful house you have built, you will have tolerable moments; it is all we can hope for in this age. Cicero wrote a fine treatise on old age, but he did not prove his book by facts; his last years were very unhappy. You have lived longer and more happily than he. You have had nothing to do with perpetual dictators or with triumvirs. Your lot has been, and still is, one of the most to be desired in the great lottery where prizes are rare, and where no one has as yet obtained lasting happiness. Your philosophy has never been disturbed by chimæras that sometimes turned even sound brains. *You were never in any sort of thing a charlatan or the dupe of charlatans,* and I regard that as a very uncommon merit, and one which contributes to the shadow of happiness that may be enjoyed in this short life."

Lord Chesterfield died March 24, 1773. In drawing attention to his delightful treatise on worldly education, we thought it not out of place, even in a democracy, to derive from it lessons in good breeding and politeness, and to receive them from a man whose name is so closely allied with those of Montesquieu and

Voltaire. More than any of his countrymen at that time, he had a singular liking for France, and perhaps took an almost unreasonable delight in the amiable qualities of the French, although he was at the same time conscious of their more serious qualities. It may be said of him, for all praise, that, had he not put into the animation and vivacity of his flashes of wit, the indescribable imagination and colouring which prints on him the seal of his own race, he would have possessed the mind and temperament of a Frenchman.

MARY STUART.

"WELL, they may say what they will—many a true heart will be sad for Mary Stuart, e'en if all be true men say of her." These words, which Sir Walter Scott puts into the mouth of one of the characters of his novel, *The Abbot*, when he is preparing the reader for an introduction to the beautiful queen, is the last word of posterity as of her contemporaries, the decision of history as of poetry. Elizabeth living, triumphed, and her policy, after her, still triumphs and obtains, so that Protestantism and the British Empire are one and the same thing. Mary Stuart fell in her own person and in that of her descendants; Charles I. under the axe, James II. in exile carried on and increased her heritage of error, imprudence, and disaster; the whole race was cut off, and seems to have deserved its fate. But though vanquished in the real order of things, in the empire of fact and inexorable reason, the beautiful queen regained everything in the domain of imagination and pity. There, from century to century, she found knights, lovers, and avengers. A few years ago a distinguished Russian, Prince Alexander Labanoff, searched the archives, collections, and libraries of Europe with unrivalled zeal for all documents emanating from Mary Stuart, the most as well as the least important of her letters. These he collected, and in addition to furnishing material for history, he formed an authentic reliquary, never doubting that a serious and affectionate interest would spring more powerful than ever from the midst of the truth. It was on the occasion of Prince Labanoff's collection that M. Mignet published in the *Journal des Savants*, from 1847 to 1850, a series of articles, and not content with criticising the documents put forth, he added on his own part papers till then unedited, and thus contributed fresh knowledge. Afterwards M. Mignet, abandoning the form of criticism and dissertation, took up the attractive subject as a whole, and wrote a complete, serious, concise, interesting, and definitive account of it, which he has just published.

In the interval, nearly a year (1850), a *History of Mary*

Stuart appeared, by M. Dargaud, a talented author, whose book was greatly praised and widely read. M. Dargaud made, in his fashion, many researches concerning the heroine of his choice. He purposely made a journey to England and Scotland, to visit as a pilgrim all the places and scenes of Mary Stuart's residences and various imprisonments. In drawing largely on his predecessors, M. Dargaud rendered them their due with cordiality and effusion; into every line of his history he put the sentiment of poetry and exalted pity for the memory of the royal and Catholic victim, by which he was animated. He deserved the beautiful letter of congratulation Madame Sand wrote him from Nohant (April 10th, 1851), in which she almost refrains from criticism, and, above all, speaks gracefully and eloquently of Mary. If then I do not dwell longer on M. Dargaud's work, I will confess that I do not belong to the sensitive school which seeks to enervate history and render it pathetic. I do not believe history need be tiresome and dull, but even less do I think it ought to be emotional, sentimental, or magnetic. Without desiring to depreciate M. Dargaud's good qualities, which are too much in the taste of the time not to recommend themselves, I prefer to follow a sterner historian, whose opinions and method of proceeding inspire every confidence.

Mary Stuart, born December 8th, 1542, six days after her father's death, who, like all the kings that came before him, was fighting with his turbulent barons, began her variable and unfortunate lot as an orphan. Trouble assailed her from the cradle, "As if from that time inhuman Fortune wished to suckle me on sadness and pain," an old poet makes her say in some tragedy. Crowned at the age of nine months, already disputed in marriage by English and French suitors who sought to prevail in Scotland, she was, through the influence of her mother, Mary of Guise, sister of the famous Guises, soon betrothed to the dauphin of France, son of Henri II. On August 13, 1548, Mary Stuart, not six years old, landed at Brest; engaged to the young dauphin, who became Francis II., and brought up with the children of Henri II. and Catherine de Medici, she remained in France as dauphiness or queen till the premature death of her husband. She lived there exactly like a French princess. The twelve or thirteen years' residence in France was her joy and delight and the beginning of her ruin. She became accustomed to the atmosphere of the most polished, learned, and gallant court of that day, shining there in her budding bloom as one of the

rarest and most admired prodigies, knowing music and all the arts (*divinæ Palladis artes*), learning the languages of antiquity, holding arguments in Latin, commanding orations in French, enjoying the intercourse of poets and emulating them in poetry of her own. During all this time Scotland seemed to her a wild and barbarous country, which she hoped never to see or at least dwell in again. She indulged in the hope of always ruling it through her mother, who was regent. Brought up amid a system of courtly and personal politics, she was made to sign at Fontainebleau at the time of her marriage (1558) a secret gift of Scotland to the kings of France; about the same period she publicly signified her adherence to the conditions attached by commissioners from Scotland to the marriage, promising to preserve the integrity, laws, and liberties of her native kingdom. Thus, by a gratuitous act and with full authority, she secretly made a gift of the whole kingdom. The French court taught her perfidy from the age of sixteen. Another impolitic indiscretion, which attracted the greatest public notice, was when, on the death of Mary Tudor, Henri II. caused Mary Stuart the dauphiness to assume the arms of England by the side of those of France, making her from that moment Elizabeth's avowed competitor and rival.

When Mary Stuart suddenly lost her husband (December 5, 1560), it was determined that instead of remaining in her dower of Touraine, she, a widow of eighteen, should return to her Scotch kingdom, and put down the civil disturbances that had arisen there. That decision caused universal mourning in France among the young noblemen, noble ladies, and poets. They recorded their regret in many a poem, which vividly described Mary Stuart as she was at that decisive moment, the first really sad hour of her life. In those songs she appeared delicate, charming, with a dazzling fair complexion, a queenly or goddess-like figure and bust, and l'Hôpital himself, in his fashion, wrote in a serious Epithalamium:—

> "Adspectu veneranda, putes ut Numen inesse:
> Tantus in ore decor, majestas, regia tanta est!"

with a long, elegant, slender (*gracilis*) hand, a brow of alabaster shining under the crape, golden hair which calls for some remark. It was a poet, Ronsard, who spoke of "the gold of her curled and braided hair," but it is well known that poets use words a little vaguely. Madame Sand, speaking of a portrait

she saw when a child at the Couvent des Anglaises, says without hesitation, "Mary was beautiful, but red-haired." M. Dargaud mentions another portrait, in which "a sunbeam," he says rather curiously, "makes locks of hair shine living and electric in the light." But Sir Walter Scott, reputed the most exact of historical novelists, describes Mary Stuart a prisoner in Lochleven Castle; he shows us, as if he had seen them, the thick dark-brown tresses which at a particular moment escape from under the queen's cap. There we are well away from red hair, and I see no means of reconciling it at all, except by resigning ourselves to hair "beautiful, blond, and ash-coloured," which Brantôme, an ocular witness, admired; hair which captivity must have whitened, and at the moment of death, in the hands of the executioners, made the poor queen of forty-five appear, as l'Estoile says, "hoary-headed." But at the age of nineteen, at the time of her departure from France, the young widow's beauty was at its height, with the exception of a certain brilliance of complexion, that at the death of her first husband gave place to greater paleness.

The enchantment will be understood when to all that we add a light, engaging, gay temperament, French raillery, an animated soul, capable of passion and open to desire, a heart unable to restrain itself when inspired by fancy or love: such was the adventurous and poetic queen who tore herself weeping from France, whom politic uncles sent to uphold authority in the midst of the wildest and most savage of Frondes. Scotland, since Mary Stuart left it as a child, had undergone great changes, of which the most important was the religious Reformation that had taken root there and spread with vigour. Knox, the great reformer, preached the new doctrine; it found strong, austere minds ready to receive it. Thus the old struggle of barons and nobles against the king became complicated and strengthened by that of the towns and people against the showy beliefs of the Court and the Catholic hierarchy. The birth of modern society, of civil equality, of respect for the rights of all, was laboriously taking place amid barbarous scenes and even fanaticism. Alone and without advice, at strife with the lords and nobility, as they had been with her ancestors, Mary Stuart, impulsive, fickle, influenced by her predilections and antipathies, was already powerless: how was it then, when she found herself face to face with a religious party, formed and grown up during recent years, face to face with a "logical and gloomy, moral and bold" party, discussing rationally, Bible in hand, the rights of kings, and thrusting logic into prayer? Come from a

cultivated and artificial Court, she was not fitted to understand the vast and deep agitation of the people, and how in adapting herself to it, to check it, or to turn it to her own advantage: "She returned," said M. Mignet, "full of regrets and disgust to the wild mountains and uncouth inhabitants of Scotland. More amiable than clever, passionate and in no way circumspect, she returned there with charms that were out of place, with a dangerous beauty, a lively but variable intelligence, a generous but passionate soul, a taste for art, a love of adventure, all the passions of a woman combined with the freedom of a widow." And to add to the dangers of her precarious situation, she had for neighbour in England a rival queen, Elizabeth; Mary had already offended her by claiming her title, and Mary's feminine and striking superiority of beauty did not help to appease her. Elizabeth was capable, powerful, severe, and dissimulating; she represented the hostile religious belief, and was surrounded by clever, trusty, and consistent councillors, pledged to the same cause. The seven years spent by Mary in Scotland, from her return from France, August 19, 1561, until her imprisonment, May 18, 1568, are full of the errors and faults a young, frivolous, passionate, and thoughtless princess could commit, a princess who, except in the case of her passions, possessed neither skill nor talent, especially as regards a general political plan. Madame de Longueville's policy during the Fronde seems to me of that kind.

The other faults, poor Mary Stuart's moral faults, are as well known and as well proved as faults of that kind can be. Madame Sand, always indulgent, considers the abandoning of Chastellard, the pretended affection for the unfortunate Darnley, and the desertion of Bothwell, the three chief blots on Mary's character.

Chastellard, as is well known, was a gentleman of Dauphiné, a musician and poet, belonging to the queen's train of cavaliers and lovers; she had at first looked on him with favour. Chastellard was among the troop which formed Mary's escort at her departure for Scotland, and urged by passion he returned there some time after; but he could not control himself, or, as was becoming, content himself with a poetical passion, until such time as he should compel her to return his real passion. Twice he was found hidden under the queen's bed; the second time she lost patience and delivered him up to justice. Poor Chastellard's head was cut off. It is said that he died reciting a hymn of Ronsard, and crying aloud: "O cruel Lady!" After allowing the perpetration of so cruel a deed, from fear of

scandal, and in order to put her honour above all reproach and suspicion, Mary Stuart had, it seems, only one course to take, to continue to be the most sedate and virtuous of princesses.

But her severe treatment of Chastellard, meant, as it was, to astound society, is a mere peccadillo by the side of her conduct to Darnley, her second husband. By marrying him, her vassal, but of the name of Stuart and of her own family (July 29, 1565), Mary avoided the various political combinations into which attempts were made to draw her by a second marriage, and she might, perhaps, have done a sensible thing, had it not been before everything an act of caprice and passion. For she fell in love with Darnley in one day, and as quickly grew tired of him. A tall, frail young fellow, timid and vain by turns, with a heart "as impressionable as wax," he possessed none of the qualities which overawe and subjugate a woman. A woman like Mary Stuart, variable, ardent, swayed by passion, full of the sentiment of her weakness and loneliness, likes to find her master and at times her tyrant in the man she loves, while she soon despises in him her slave and creature when she discovers that he is nothing more; she prefers the strong arm to the gentle hand. Mary, disgusted less than six months after her marriage, consoled herself with an Italian, David Rizzio, a man then about thirty-two years old; equally useful in business and pleasure, he advised and served her as secretary, and possessed the musician's talent so well fitted for concealing and introducing to women that other talent of love-making. The weak-minded Darnley discovered his jealousy to the discontented lords and nobles, and in their own interests they urged him to vengeance, and offered him the assistance of their swords. Presbyterian ministers and pastors joined. It was all planned and arranged with perfect harmony under pretence of divine chastisement, and what was more, with a regard for formal acts and conventions that simulated legality. Before they could have any suspicion, the queen and her favourite were caught in a net. David Rizzio was seized by the conspirators one evening at supper (March 9, 1566) in Mary's boudoir, Darnley being present, and thence dragged into the next room and stabbed. Mary at that time was pregnant. Outraged, wounded in her honour and affection, from that day she conceived a fresh access of contempt mingled with horror for Darnley, and swore to be avenged on the violent perpetrators of the murder. For that end she waited, dissimulated, and for the first time in her life put constraint on herself and kept her impulses within bounds. As is generally the case with passionate

women, she only became politic in the interest of her passion and vengeance.

This is the most serious and irreparable deed of her life. Even when it is put to us that such atrocities and deeds of perfidy were tolerated by the ordinary standard of morality in the sixteenth century, it is scarcely possible to allow the excuse. At first Mary Stuart desired to avenge herself on the lords who had lent assistance to Darnley, rather than on her feeble husband himself. To attain her end she made it up with him, and weaned him from the conspirators, his accomplices. She forced him to disown them, and thus finished degrading and ruining him. Things remained in that condition until a new passion for another man increased her consummate contempt. In the meantime she was confined (June 19), and made him father of a son who inherited the bad qualities of both and became James I. of England, the soul of a casuist in a king. But already a new passion had sprung up in Mary's accessible heart. The man on whom her choice had fallen this time possessed neither the weakness of Darnley nor the drawing-room graces of Rizzio: it was Earl Bothwell, a man of thirty years of age, far from handsome, but of a martial figure, brave, bold, violent, and capable of any daring. Mary's weak and yielding nature henceforth clung to him as her support. She found her master, and as is the case in all desperate passion, she obeyed him in everything without scruple or remorse.

How was she to get rid of a husband now become so hateful? How was she to be united to the man she loved and whose ambition was not of a kind to content itself with half measures? Here again, not to excuse but to explain Mary Stuart, it is necessary to bear in mind the morality of the age. Many of the same lords who had taken part in Rizzio's murder, and were leagued together by act and seal, offered her their assistance, and, to regain favour, helped her to devise a means of getting rid of a burdensome and importunate husband. At first she responded to their overtures only by speaking of divorce and the difficulty of obtaining it. But the unscrupulous men, making Lethington, the cleverest and most politic of them, their spokesman, said to her: "Madam, soucy ye not, we are here of the principal of your Grace's nobility and council, that shall find the means well to make your Majesty quit of him without prejudice to your son; and albeit that my Lord of Murray here present (Mary Stuart's natural brother) be little less scrupulous for a Protestant than your Grace is for a Papist, I am sure he will look through his fingers, and will

behold our doings, and say nothing to the same." The word once launched, Mary, like her brother Murray, had, vulgarly speaking, only to "look through her fingers" and, without interfering, to let things take their course. She was obliged, however, to lend her assistance: she had to draw Darnley, just recovering from small-pox, into the snare by a simulated return of affection. She dissipated his suspicions without much trouble and regained her power over him. She persuaded him to come from Glasgow to Edinburgh in a litter, to Kirk-of-Field, at the gates of Edinburgh, to a sort of parsonage little suited for the reception of a king and queen, but well adapted for the crime to be committed there. There Darnley, strangled together with his attendant, perished on the night of February 9, 1567. In order to make people believe it was an accident, the house was blown up with a barrel of gunpowder. During the time Mary was at a masked ball at Holyrood Palace; she did not leave her husband until evening, when every detail was ready. Bothwell, who was present at the ball for a little while, left Edinburgh after midnight and presided over the whole job. The circumstances are irrefutably proved by the depositions of witnesses, by the confessions of the actors, and by Mary Stuart's own letters, of which M. Mignet in a final exposition puts the authenticity beyond doubt. She felt that in thus yielding to Bothwell's projects she was furnishing him with arms against herself, and giving him cause to mistrust her in his turn. He might say with Norfolk that "the pillow of such a woman was scarcely a safe sleeping-place." In the preparations for the horrible trap, she more than once testified her repugnance to deceive the poor, credulous invalid who trusted in her. "As if I shall ever rejoice," she said, "in deceiving him who trusts in me. Nevertheless, you can command me in everything. Do not conceive a bad opinion of me, for you yourself are the cause of it; I should never treat him thus for my own private vengeance." Indeed the part of Clytemnestra, or of Gertrude in *Hamlet*, was not natural to her, and could only be imposed upon her. But this time passion rendered her insensible to pity, and she herself confesses that it made her heart "hard as adamant." Mary Stuart soon put the culminating stroke to her intemperate passion and desire by marrying Bothwell; by that act she arrayed the whole nation against her, for the people, fanatical as they were, were at least not depraved, and were more upright than the nobles.

The crime became known across the sea. L'Hôpital, the representative of human conscience in a terrible age, learned, in

the retirement of his country-house, the misconduct of her whose first marriage and early charm he had sung; he registered his indignation in a new piece of Latin verse, in which he related the horrors of that fatal night, and did not hesitate to stigmatise the wife and young mother as the murderess of the father of the child still at her breast. On May 15, three months, only three short months after the murder, in the beginning of spring, the marriage with the assassin was solemnised. Mary Stuart completely justified Shakespeare's words: "Frailty, thy name is woman!" And no one was ever more a woman than Mary Stuart.

I cannot admit Madame Sand's third reproach, which touches Mary Stuart's abandonment of Bothwell; on the contrary, it seems to me that in the crosses and dangers which immediately followed the marriage, Mary's one idea was not to be separated from her violent and masterful husband. She loved him so madly that (April 1567) she said to any one who would listen, "that she cared not to lose France, England, and her own country, and shall go with him to the world's end clothed in a white petticoat, before she leave him." And soon afterwards, forced by the lords to tear herself away from Bothwell, bitterly reproaching them, she asked only one thing, "that they would put them both together into a ship and send them whithersoever fortune might lead." It was only absence, final imprisonment, and the impossibility of communication which necessarily brought about the rupture. It is true that Mary, when a prisoner in England, requested the estates of Scotland to cancel her marriage with Bothwell in the hope of espousing the Duke of Norfolk, who was in love with her and her crown, and whom in fact she never saw. But with Bothwell a fugitive and ruined, is Mary Stuart to be reproached for a project from which she hoped restoration and deliverance? Her passion for Bothwell was a frenzy, carried even to the complicity of crime. The fever abated, Mary Stuart turned her attention to the resources that presented themselves, and among them was the promise of her hand. Her fault does not lie there; in the midst of so many infidelities and horrors it would be pushing delicacy too far to demand eternity of feeling for the remains of an unbridled and bleeding passion. When such passions do not leave hatred after them, oblivion alone is fitting and best for them.

Conduct and deeds like those, crowned by her ill-considered flight into England and the imprudent surrender of her person to Elizabeth, are scarcely likely to make Mary Stuart the

touching and pathetic heroine it is the custom to cherish and admire. Nevertheless, she deserves pity, and in order not to render it her inconsiderately, it is sufficient to follow her into the third and last part of her life, and to look upon her during the long, unjust, and miserable captivity of nineteen years (May 18, 1568, to February 5, 1587). Defenceless, engaged in a struggle with a wily and ambitious rival, subject to every recoil from without, victim of a grasping and tenacious policy which never let go its prey and spent a long time in torturing it without destroying it, she was never for a single moment disheartened; her spirits rose. Hope, which so often deceived her, became now a grace and a virtue in her. She roused the whole world in the interests of her misfortunes, and by her powerful charm stirred it to indignation. Her cause grew in importance, and was transformed. It was no longer the frivolous and passionate woman, punished for her frailty and inconstancy, it was the lawful heir to the English Crown, who, in her dungeon, was exposed to the eyes of the world, a faithful, resolute Catholic, who, even to save her life, refused to sacrifice her faith to the interests of ambition. The beauty and grandeur of the *rôle* were exactly fitted to attract the tender and naturally believing soul of Mary Stuart. She was penetrated by it, and from the first moment substituted it for all her old personal feelings: they gradually died out and subsided with the fleeting occasions that had called them into existence. She seemed to remember only the murmur of the ripples and the foam of the waves of the beautiful lakes she had crossed. For nineteen years the whole Catholic world was agitated and stirred on her account, and she, half heroine, half martyr, gave the signal and waved her banner through the prison bars. Do not accuse her, a captive, of plotting against Elizabeth; for, according to her ideas of divine right and of absolute loyalty between sovereign and sovereign, if one of the two was imprisoned by the other, to seek the triumph of her cause was not to make plots, it was simply to make war. Besides, from the moment Mary Stuart is a prisoner, humiliated, deprived of all consolation, weak, and, alas! grey before her time, when in the longest and most remarkable of her letters to Elizabeth (November 8, 1582) she tells her for the twentieth time: "Your unjust and illegal imprisonment has entirely destroyed my body, of which, if it continues much longer, there will soon be an end, and my enemies will not have much time to wreak their vengeance on me; only my soul remains, which it is not in your power to take captive;" when we listen to the mixture of pride and complaint, our pity

is awakened, our heart speaks. The tender charm with which she was endowed, and which subjugated all who approached her, takes once again the upper hand, and works on us even at a distance. We cease to judge her by the deposition of a clerk, or with the cold reason of a statesman, but we estimate her instead with the heart of a knight, or, to put it better, of a man. Humanity, pity, religion, supreme poetical grace, all the invincible and immortal powers are interested in her personality, and cry aloud for her through the ages. "Spread the news," she said to old Melvil at the moment of death, "that I die firm in my religion, a true Catholic, a true Scotchwoman, a true Frenchwoman." All the creeds, patriotisms, and nationalities then invoked by Mary Stuart made of her one long echo, and they answered her with tears and love.

Besides, how can we reproach her, when after nineteen years of punishment and moral torture, on the night preceding her death, she sought in the *Lives of the Saints*, a book her ladies-in-waiting were accustomed to read to her every evening, a great sinner whom God had pardoned? "She paused at the pathetic history of the 'good Thief,'" which seemed to her the most encouraging example of human confidence and divine mercy, which Jean Kennedy, one of her ladies-in-waiting, read out to her.

"He was a great sinner," she said, "but not so great as I am. I beseech our Lord, in memory of His passion, to have remembrance and mercy of me, as He had of him in the hour of death."

The true and sincere feeling, the contrite humility of the last sublime moments, the perfect intelligence and profound need of pardon, make it impossible to see any stain of the past in her except through tears.

Thus old Étienne Pasquier felt. Having to relate Mary Stuart's death in his *Recherches*, he compares it with the tragic history of the Constable of Saint-Pol, and with that of the Constable of Bourbon, and it left in him a mixture of opposing feelings.

"But the story I am now going to relate," he said, "seems to me to contain only tears, and maybe a man will be found who in reading it would not be ashamed of his tears."

M. Mignet, who was obliged to examine everything as an historian, and could only devote brief passages to sentiment, has capitally set forth and explained the various phases of Mary Stuart's captivity and the forces that were in play at different times. By the aid of Spanish papers from the archives of Simancas, he has thrown a new light on the slow prepara-

tions of the enterprise attempted by Philip II., the fruitless and tardy crusade which was not decided until after Mary Stuart's death, and which ended in the disastrous shipwreck of the invincible Armada. However, on leaving the brilliant and stormy episode of sixteenth century history which has just been so powerfully and judiciously described for us, while yet full of those times of violence, treason, and iniquity, and not confiding enough to believe humanity has finished with them for ever, we are, nevertheless, inclined to congratulate ourselves, and to rejoice that we live in times of a better and milder public morality. With the Sieur de Tavannes at the moment he had just related Mary Stuart's life and death, we cry: "Happy is he who lives under a stable government, where good and evil are rewarded and chastised according to their deserts." Happy is the age and society in which a fixed standard of general morality, human respect for opinion and the penal code, as well as the continual check of publicity, restrain even the boldest from the criminal designs which every human heart, thrown back on itself, is too often tempted to engender!

WILLIAM COWPER.

I.

THE life of this original and at the same time serious and charming poet is a very strange one, outwardly simple, but inwardly abounding in rocks and shoals ; he attained the composition of his moral and attractive works by a very roundabout road, far removed from the common way, a route he would not have advised to any other person. All the information we can desire about him is available. Southey, the poet and critic, published in 1835 a full biography of Cowper as introduction to a volume of his works ; the whole is now reprinted. That edition and Southey's biography, and the further edition published by the Rev. T. S. Grimshawe (1850), furnish material for a complete study, or, to put it better, such a study has already been made by Southey himself: but Cowper's correspondence, which equals his poetical works in merit and thought, and is even more natural and easy, affords reading wherein every man can choose material for reflection, and find some point of attraction. It is astonishing that no one should have thought of translating or extracting matter for a couple of volumes in French ; that would indeed be something novel and refreshing.

William Cowper was born November 26, 1731, of a respectable family, of which some of the members were distinguished. His father was in the church, and at the time of William's birth was Rector of Berkhampstead. His mother, Anne Donne, of good birth, died young in 1737, leaving two sons. William was only six years old, but he preserved a lively and profound recollection of the early period of his childhood and of his mother's tenderness, the more deeply engraven on his heart by the wholly different *régime* to which he was subjected directly after her death ; he perpetuated the recollection at more than fifty years distance, in lines written on receiving his mother's picture from a cousin (1790). They contain not only the affectionate feelings common to the hearts of most sons

at the sight of what recalls happy years, but what in a nature like Cowper's, which needed in a high degree the warmth and shelter of the domestic hearth, was especially tender-hearted, lovingly and sorrowfully *sensitive*.

His mother's death delivered the child into the hands of strangers; his father, an estimable man, did not give his timid and delicate son the care he especially needed. In one of the schools to which Cowper was sent he was a victim to the tyranny of a schoolfellow older than himself, who, finding him timid and sensitive, made a butt of him. A complaint of the eyes interrupted his studies for some time; he was afterwards sent to Westminster School, where he had for friends distinguished fellow-students who afterwards became celebrated; he remained there until he was eighteen. As, in after-life, he always on every occasion inveighed against public school education, especially as it existed at that time, an explanation, which well agrees with his whole manner of feeling and fearing, has been sought in his early years. To see him as he was at first, before the events that clouded his mind, he appears to have had many hours of gaiety, joy, and pleasant sociability; he excelled in the games of his age, particularly in cricket and football. On leaving Westminster he entered an attorney's office, and spent three years there; he says he never worked seriously, and wasted his time in giggling and playing tricks from morning to night with his fellow-clerk, Thurlow, the future Lord Chancellor. He, in the midst of his pranks, did not, doubtless, neglect to prepare himself for the career of actual work in which his talents soon found useful and distinguished employment. Cowper greatly reproached himself for the loss of those decisive years, which he compared in rural phrase to seed-time; only at that price are the sheaves produced later. "The colour of our whole life," he thought, "is generally such as the three or four first years in which we are our own masters make it. Then it is that we may be said to shape our destiny and to treasure up for ourselves a series of future successes or disappointments." Leaving the office of Mr. Chapman—the name of the solicitor—he elected to take up his abode in the Temple, the lawyers' quarter, and there, while living alone, he felt the first touches of the malady which in one form or another reappeared and so cruelly made itself felt in the various periods of his life. It was a state of prostration, despair, and terror, which left him a prey to the gloomiest thoughts and the most lugubrious images. All pleasant study became impossible, and his beloved

reading brought him no relief. The religious idea then awoke in his soul, and he had recourse to God by prayer. Finding himself at Southampton, where the doctors had sent him for change of air and for distraction, there was an hour, a moment, when during a walk he was taking with some friends in the environs on a bright morning, seated on a height whence the view embraced the sea and the wooded hills of the shore, he felt, on a sudden, as if a new sun had arisen in the heavens and lighted up the horizon: "I felt the weight of all misery taken off: my heart became light and joyful in a moment; I could have wept with transport had I been alone." Such premonitory signs, the first bright rays of grace, have often been remarked in conversions which were long accomplishing. Cowper, at that time twenty-two years old, took no heed of what he judged later to have been a call and a warning; he attributed the improvement in his condition to the mere change of air and to the distractions of the place, and returned to London to take up his life again, a life not licentious but gay and largely devoted to the pursuit of pleasure.

He became a briefless barrister, allied himself closely with a few literary men of his own age, and joined the same club as they did; he wrote verses and satirical moral essays which appeared in the journals and reviews of the time. Cowper's early productions have been carefully collected; signs of subtlety, of shrewd observation, and a turn for moralising which he developed later, are to be found in them, but as yet no peculiar stamp of his own, no originality.

Passion does not seem to have deeply agitated him; he fell in love with one of his first cousins, and she returned his affection, but the young lady's father was opposed to the marriage, and Cowper does not appear to have suffered much in consequence. He continued to lead a life without regularity and yet without apparent excess. He was an amateur man of letters, agreeable in society, merry, of ingenious and lively playfulness, seeming to take for motto the poet's saying, *Dilecto volo lascivire sodali*, a most amiable companion, when the great event happened which tore him from society, plunged him into inexpressible anguish, and by painful sufferings gradually brought his mind into a condition of revival and maturity whence sprung the productions of his genius.

He lost his father some years before, and was quietly running through his patrimony, when he felt the necessity of what is called a position. He had recourse to a friend, an influential relative, who had him nominated clerk to the House of Lords.

There were two of the posts vacant, and it was necessary to appear and read in public more in one than in the other. After much perplexity, Cowper decided for the post corresponding to that of secretary to the keeper of the records; it was less lucrative, but he thought he would never have to come forward in person. Opposition, however, arising in the House on the score of his nomination, he found he would have to appear at the bar and undergo a sort of examination as to his fitness and capacity. The mere idea was enough to upset his whole being; he tried in vain to prepare himself and put himself into condition, but he undertook what was beyond his strength. "They," said he, "whose spirits are formed like mine, to whom a public exhibition of themselves on any occasion is mortal poison, may have some idea of the horrors of my situation! others can have none." Months passed in the painful struggle and suspense, which he compared to that of a condemned man who sees the day of his execution approach. In the interval, he tried various forms of suicide, and on the very morning that his friends came to fetch him to take him to Westminster for the examination, it was found that he had attempted on himself a desperate deed of strangulation: it was necessary to place him in a private lunatic asylum. He was then thirty-two years old.

During a residence of more than eighteen months at Dr. Cotton's private asylum at St. Albans (December 1763—June 1765), before arriving at a sort of cure, he went through many crises and moral trials. His faculties returned fairly completely about the eighth month, after a visit from his brother, the Rev. John Cowper, a learned and respectable churchman, who came from Cambridge to pay him a visit in July 1764. He was, however, always under an impression of terror and fright: the overwhelming impression suddenly ceased when one day reading the Scriptures his attention was arrested by a verse of the third Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans. It afforded him such consolation and so full and luminous a view of faith that the doctor feared the sudden transition from despair to joy would, in its turn, lead to a fresh crisis. In one of his best poems Cowper admirably said—

> "Man is a harp, whose chords elude the sight,
> Each yielding harmony, dispos'd aright;
> The screws revers'd (a task, which, if He please,
> God, in a moment, executes with ease;)
> Ten thousand, thousand strings at once go loose;
> Lost, till He tune them, all their pow'r and use."

The convalescence continuing, Cowper determined to change his manner of life entirely, and renouncing for ever London, which he called the scene of his abominations, but which was rather that of his frivolities, he commissioned his brother to find him a country retreat in some small town not far from Cambridge. His brother hired lodgings for him in Huntingdon, and Cowper, accompanied by a servant, repaired there in the month of June 1765. He lived there for some months, almost alone, avoiding visits, shunning intercourse with his neighbours, and "only desiring communion," he said, "with God in Jesus Christ." Poor wounded bird, he sought to crouch unseen in his corner, to recover his strength little by little, to cure himself of his wound in secrecy, and assuage his long and poignant terrors. So solitary a life would doubtless have soon brought about a relapse of melancholy, had he not had the notion, which he regarded as an inspiration from on high, of entering into close friendship with a family whose acquaintance he had made some time before. One morning coming out of church, young Unwin, son of a minister of the place, an amiable young man of one-and-twenty, approached Cowper, who was about to walk melancholy and solitary under the trees; he made advances to him, and engaged himself to drink tea with Cowper in the afternoon. In conversing with this young man, Cowper recognised with inexpressible joy a soul nourished on the most vivid notions of Christianity, such as he himself conceived it; he was soon introduced into the family, and from that time a friendship commenced which determined the poet's whole life, and, it may be said, all his faculties and talents.

The Unwin family consisted of a father, of Mrs. Unwin, seven years older than Cowper, who became almost a mother to him, the son of whom I just spoke, and a daughter. "They are the most agreeable people imaginable," wrote Cowper to one of his friends in the early days of the connection, "quite sociable, and as free from the ceremonious civility of country gentlefolks as any I ever met with. They treat me more like a near relation than a stranger, and their house is always open to me. The old gentleman carries me to Cambridge in his chaise. He is a man of learning and good sense, and as simple as Parson Adams. His wife has a very uncommon understanding, has read much, to excellent purpose, and is more polite than a duchess. Their son, who belongs to Cambridge, is a most amiable young man, and the daughter quite of a piece with the rest of the family. They see but little company, which

suits me exactly; go when I will, I find a house full of peace and cordiality in all its parts, and am sure to hear no scandal, but such discourse, instead of it, as we are all better for." "That woman," he says again of Mrs. Unwin, "is a blessing to me, and I never see her without being the better for her company." Timid and easily frightened as he was, he had, when leaving St. Albans, asked Heaven that it might please Providence to procure him support and assistance of that kind, in short, a mother. "How happy it is to believe with a steadfast assurance that our petitions are heard, even while we are making them," and he saw in this encounter the proof and finishing touch, as it were, that it pleased the Almighty to put to his spiritual cure and conversion. Soon, the intimacy growing closer, and the heart's prompting becoming more pressing, Cowper went to lodge with the Unwins, and from the first day he was less their boarder than a regular member of the family.

In a letter to a relative he described the manner in which his days were ordered in the early period of that union, and how life was led in common almost as in a monastery: breakfast between eight and nine o'clock; afterwards, till eleven, reading of the Scriptures or of some sermon; at eleven, divine service, which was performed twice a day. From noon till three o'clock each went his own way and indulged in his own tastes and amusements; Cowper employed the interval either in reading in his room, in walking, even in riding, or in working in the garden. After dinner, which took place at three o'clock, if the weather allowed it, they went into the garden, where he conversed with Mrs. Unwin and her son on serious and Christian subjects until tea-time. If it rained or if it was too windy for walking, the conversation was carried on indoors, or they sang hymns which Mrs. Unwin accompanied on the harpsichord, and in this little spiritual concert the heart of each did its part as well as possible. After tea they went out for a long walk in good earnest. Mrs. Unwin was an excellent walker, and Cowper and she usually travelled four miles before returning to the house. In the short days the walk took place between noon and dinner-time. As for the evening, it was spent before and after supper as the morning had commenced, in serious conversation, reading, and ended with prayer in common. The semi-monastic life harmonised with an inward joy and real cheerfulness; it was assuredly best able to give what, at that period, Cowper's moral consolidation and recently unsettled sensibility most required.

At the commencement of the second year a misfortune occurred. The head of the family, Mr. Unwin, had a fall from his horse and died. His widow was desirous of changing her residence; she decided in favour of the pretty neighbourhood of Olney, whither she was drawn by the presence of the pastor, Mr. Newton, a man revered by a select congregation. Cowper, whose destiny could not henceforth be separated from that of Mrs. Unwin, went to live with her at Olney in the autumn of 1767. It has been asked if, now that Mrs. Unwin had become a widow, he did not, at some time, entertain the idea of marrying her. It does not seem, however, that such a thought ever presented itself to the mind or heart of either; for her, he was only an elder son and a sick man whose painful weakness she knew, and becoming more solitary, she devoted herself entirely to his service and watchful care; for him, she was only the most tender and intelligent of mothers.

Under a religious form Cowper's malady still persisted, and his friends did all in their power to combat and cure the dread he often felt, but their rigid doctrine of Predestination and Grace was only too well fitted to torment it. "He is always formidable to me," he said of God, "but when I see Him disarmed of his sting, by having sheathed it in the body of Jesus Christ." The terrible images of judgment and punishment even at the moment he believed he had triumphed over them, still pursued him and dominated his thoughts. In the early years of the residence at Olney Mr. Newton tried to employ Cowper's imagination, and turn it aside into a path still religious and already poetical, in engaging him to write in concert with himself some hymns for the little community of the place. Those hymns, not completed and published until 1779, the pieces of Cowper's composition being distinguished only by an initial, began, from 1771, to fill his leisure. Here is one most often quoted; it will be seen that in it he attempted to combat and refute his own dread, to reassure himself against his habitual fears:—

"God moves in a mysterious way,
His wonders to perform;
He plants his footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never-failing skill;
He treasures up his bright designs,
And works his sovereign will.

Ye fearful saints fresh courage take,
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy, and shall break
In blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust him for his grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.

His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding ev'ry hour:
The bud may have a bitter taste,
And sweet will be the flow'r.

Blind unbelief is sure to err,
And scan his work in vain;
God is his own interpreter,
And he will make it plain."

In studying Cowper's religious malady, one thought naturally presents itself, that, between a God so powerful and mysterious even in his mercies, and a creature so prostrate, it would have been desirable that he should have found some points of reassuring support, whether in a visible church possessing authority and power, or in friendly intercessors, as represented to pious souls by the virgin and the saints. But cast, as he was, lonely, on the unfathomable ocean of storms and divine will, a dizziness seized him in spite of himself, and in vain he implored a place of refuge; he, trembling and timid pilot, could not but believe he was destined to inevitable shipwreck.

The cure which seemed at the time of his arrival at Olney to be going on so well was suddenly stayed, and fresh trouble came to agitate profoundly the lively and keen intelligence. The year 1773 was almost as fatal for Cowper as 1763 had been. Mrs. Unwin watched over him, took him as much as possible out of himself, and ministered to him during his long and slow convalescence with her angelic care. In 1774 he was better, but incapable of all reading and of all distractions of society; he had, however, absolute need of busying himself about *something*, but without fatiguing his attention. It was then that, spending the first part of his day in the garden, he formed the idea of taming young hares. A friend had given him one, and as soon as it was known that he took pleasure in them, they came to him from various sources.

"I undertook," he has told us in a pleasantly written account, "the care of three hares which had been brought me, which it is necessary I should here distinguish by the names I gave them—Puss, Tiney, and Bess. Notwithstanding the two feminine appellatives, I must inform you that they were all males. Immediately commencing carpenter, I built them houses to sleep in; each had a separate apartment, so contrived as to ensure perfect cleanliness. . . . In the daytime they had the range of a hall, and at night retired each to his own bed, never intruding into that of another.

"Puss grew presently familiar, would leap into my lap, raise himself upon his hinder feet, and bite the hair from my temples. He would suffer me to take him up and to carry him about in my arms, and has more than once fallen fast asleep upon my knee. He was ill three days, during which time I nursed him, kept him apart from his fellows, that they might not molest him (for, like many other wild animals, they persecute one of their own species that is sick), and by constant care, and trying him with a variety of herbs, restored him to perfect health. No creature could be more grateful than my patient after his recovery; a sentiment which he most significantly expressed by licking my hand, first the back of it, then the palm, then every finger separately, then between all the fingers, as if anxious to leave no part of it unsaluted; a ceremony which he never performed but once again upon a similar occasion. Finding him extremely tractable, I made it my custom to carry him always after breakfast into the garden, where he hid himself generally under the leaves of a cucumber vine, sleeping or chewing the cud till evening; in the leaves also of that vine he found a favourite repast. I had not long habituated him to this taste of liberty before he began to be impatient for the return of the time when he might enjoy it. He would invite me to the garden by drumming upon my knee, and by a look of such expression as it was not possible to misinterpret. If this rhetoric did not immediately succeed, he would take the skirt of my coat between his teeth, and pull it with all his force. Thus Puss might be said to be perfectly tamed, the shyness of his nature was done away, and on the whole it was visible by many symptoms, which I have not room to enumerate, that he was happier in human society than when shut up with his natural companions.

"Not so Tiney; upon him the kindest treatment had not the least effect. He too was sick, and in his sickness had an equal

share of my attention; but if, after his recovery, I took the liberty to stroke him, he would grunt, strike with his fore feet, spring forward and bite. *He* was, however, very entertaining in his way; even his surliness was matter of mirth, and in his play he preserved such an air of gravity, and performed his feats with such a solemnity of manner, that in him too I had an agreeable companion.

"Bess, who died soon after he was full grown, and whose death was occasioned by his being turned into his box, which had been washed, while it was yet damp, was a hare of great humour and drollery. Puss was tamed by gentle usage; Tiney was not to be tamed at all; and Bess had a courage and confidence that made him tame from the beginning. I always admitted them into the parlour after supper, when, the carpet affording their feet a firm hold, they would frisk and bound and play a thousand gambols, in which Bess, being remarkably strong and fearless, was always superior to the rest, and proved himself the Vestris of the party."

Of the three hares, *Puss* is the one that Cowper took most trouble to immortalise. He kept him for nearly twelve years, celebrated him in one of the books of his poem, "The Task," congratulating himself on having gained his *whole* confidence, and destroyed in him all fear. He wrote—

"If I survive thee I will dig thy grave, and when I place thee in it, sighing say, I knew at least one hare that had a friend."

A memorandum book was found among his papers, noting the date and circumstances of the death of poor *Puss*.

"It is not astonishing," he remarks again, "that my intimate acquaintance with these specimens of the species taught me to hold the sport of hunting in horror; he little knows what amiable creatures he persecutes, of what gratitude they are capable, how frolicsome and gay they are, with what happiness they enjoy life; and if, as we see, they are penetrated with so particular a fear of man, it is merely because man has given them only too much cause."

Himself timid and subject to terror, Cowper saw in those animals a natural affinity with himself; he applied to them the merciful and humane saying of the poet, *Non ignara mali*, and he would willingly have said with an eastern poet: "Do not hurt an ant which drags along a grain of corn, for it has a life, and that gentle life is dear to it."

During the six ensuing years (1774-1780) Cowper's mind and scattered faculties were gradually becoming concentrated and

restored; insensibly he came to possess them in all their force and charm, and found for the first time, at the age of fifty (strange phenomenon !), his poetical fruit and flower united in an unexpected brilliance. Little by little, reading and the faculty of composition returned to him ; but for a long time manual occupations had the upper hand. "Rousseau would have been charmed," said Cowper, "to see me so occupied, and would have exclaimed with rapture, that he had found his Emilius !" The chisel and saw were his principal tools, and he manufactured "tables such as they were, and joint-stools such as never were." Jesting later about the various occupations he created for himself at that epoch, when, at any cost, it was necessary for him to avoid the disadvantages and dangers of idleness, he said : "Many arts I have exercised with this view, for which nature never designed me ; though among them were some in which I arrived at considerable proficiency, by mere dint of the most heroic perseverance. There is not a squire in all this country who can boast of having made better squirrel-houses, hutches for rabbits, or bird-cages, than myself; and in the article of cabbage-nets I had no superior. I even had the hardiness to take in hand the pencil, and studied a whole year the art of drawing. Many figures were the fruit of my labours, which had, at least, the merit of being unparalleled by any production either of art or nature. But, before the year was ended, I had occasion to wonder at the progress that may be made, in despite of natural deficiency, by dint alone of practice ; for I actually produced three landscapes, which a lady thought worthy to be framed and glazed. I then judged it high time to exchange this occupation for another, lest, by any subsequent productions of inferior merit, I should forfeit the honour I had so fortunately acquired. But gardening was, of all employments, that in which I succeeded best ; though even in this I did not suddenly attain perfection. I began with lettuces and cauliflowers ; from them I proceeded to cucumbers ; next to melons. I then purchased an orange tree, to which, in due time, I added two or three myrtles. These served me day and night with employment during a whole severe winter. To defend them from the frost, in a situation that exposed them to its severity, cost me much ingenuity and much attendance. I contrived to give them a fire heat ; and have waded night after night through the snow, with the bellows under my arm, just before going to bed, to give the latest possible puff to the embers, lest the frost should seize them before the morning. Very minute beginnings have sometimes important conse-

quences. From nursing two or three little evergreens, I became ambitious of a greenhouse, and accordingly built one; which, verse excepted, afforded me amusement for a longer time than any expedient of all the many to which I have fled for refuge from the misery of having nothing to do."

Poetry began to have a part in his mind; he had recourse to it from time to time, but only when he had something particular and striking to say that would have seemed extravagant in prose: verse was then for him "the only suitable vehicle for the vehemence of expression." He turned his attention to short subjects having relation to the things of the moment, sometimes to politics (for it was the time of the American War, and Cowper was in many respects an Englishman of the old stamp); but more usually in his verse only the events of his garden found a place. He wrote Latin verses not without elegance and several little moral fables in English, for instance, "The Nightingale and the Glow-worm."[1]

At first Cowper only made verses by way of amusement, as he made cages, tended his flowers, or drew the landscape, but always with ardour; he had moods for each of his tastes, and when one held him, the others, for a time, had to yield. He enjoyed nothing moderately. "I have never," he said, "received a *little* pleasure from anything in my life; if I am delighted, it is in the extreme." He also began to write to a few friends graceful, elegant, finished letters, of ingenious wit. His intellect, awakened, and, in some respects, restored by so long a repose, began to assert itself, and he did not know what to do with it. His physical power, however, was not yet strong enough to sustain a lengthened application, and he compared the network of his brain fibres to a cobweb: a single obstinate thought which lodges there, gives way, and threatens the whole contexture. However, genius grew stronger and felt its wings. "Alas!" he cried the day he sent the fable of the "Nightingale and the Glow-worm" to a friend, "what can I do with my wit? I have not enough to do great things with, and these little things are so fugitive, that, while a man catches at the subject, he is only filling his hand with smoke. I must do with it as I do with my linnet: I keep him for the most part in a cage, but now and then set open the door, that he may whisk about the room a little, and then shut him up again. My whisking

[1] The fable of the nightingale and glow-worm may be compared to an epigram of Evenos of Paros, translated by André Chénier, in which a grasshopper is engaged in a dispute with a swallow: it shows the difference between the Greek and Christian sentiment.

wit has produced the following." And it was that fable he sent. The most charming playfulness was visible through the seriousness of all his letters and verses of that period (1780). We are surprised into saying: What a lively, frolicsome disposition, full of charm, eager for and open to every impression only provided it is not gloomy! How spring-time almost intoxicates him! There is something of the squirrel in the gaiety with which it inspires him. But the lofty and serious side of his genius always reappeared. The amiable man had his forcible and impressive side.

II.

When Cowper felt he was better and stronger in mind, he commenced a correspondence with a small number of friends, and continued it without interruption for several years; in it we learn to know him and to penetrate the mysteries of his mind and sensibility. He wrote first to Mr. Unwin, the amiable son of the house, who had become minister in another place; he wrote to Mr. Newton, who, in 1779, left Olney to become rector of the parish of St. Mary Woolnoth in London. From time to time he sent little notes to Joseph Hill, the only one of his youthful friends and schoolfellows he retained, and reminded him of the time when, in their walks, Hill, "lying at full stretch upon the ruins of an old wall, by the sea-side," amused himself by reading the "Jerusalem" and the "Pastor Fido." In the retired life he led, he had little to relate; he spoke of himself, of his reading, which at first was rare, of little events which scarcely served to vary the tranquil interior. The painful and profound moods of his mind were never completely absent; but in his letters he avoided touching on them, and is seen rather on his lively, ingenious, affectionate, and cheerful side. There is a certain letter where he began by saying *he had nothing to say*, and under that pretext set himself to write many charming and sensible things: it contains the whole theory of familiar correspondence between friends: always to write, one word chasing the other, to let the pen run on without thinking much about it, just as the tongue does when we talk, as the foot when we walk.

In the midst of a multitude of charms we find a few peculiarities in his letters. Cowper's taste was as bold and original as it was good. He was a man of refinement, but a man of refinement who felt things so fully and keenly, that when it

was a matter of expressing his own peculiar ways of existing and thinking to the life, his daring was infinite. His metaphors astonish us; he sustains and prolongs strange similes with a slightly punctilious and formal ingenuity. He rejected none which took his fancy: thus, in a letter to Mr. Newton, he compared the state of his mind, while writing to him, to a board under the plane; the first thoughts which came to him, the uppermost thoughts, were shavings, etc. In those places he may appear subtle and far-fetched, but most ordinarily, the unexpectedness of his metaphors only added a charm the more to their correctness. He had the penetrating irony belonging to timid and sorrowful natures, endowed with very delicate organs, which are doubtless shocked by the bluntness and coarseness around. Here is the whole of a playful little letter, worthy, in respect to its style, of the younger Pliny.

"To the Rev. JOHN NEWTON.

"*Olney, April* 16, 1780.

"Since I wrote my last we have had a visit from ——. I did not feel myself vehemently disposed to receive him with that complaisance from which a stranger generally infers that he is welcome. By his manner, which was rather bold than easy, I judged that there was no occasion for it, and that it was a trifle which, if he did not meet with, neither would he feel the want of. He has the air of a travelled man, but not of a travelled gentleman; is quite delivered from that reserve which is so common an ingredient in the English character, yet does not open himself gently and gradually, as men of polite behaviour do, but bursts upon you all at once. He talks very loud, and when our poor little robins hear a great noise they are immediately seized with an ambition to surpass it; the increase of their vociferation occasioned an increase of his, and his in return acted as a stimulus on theirs; neither side entertained a thought of giving up the contest, which became continually more interesting to our ears during the whole visit. The birds, however, survived it, and so did we. They perhaps flatter themselves they gained a complete victory, but I believe Mr. —— could have killed them both in another hour."

Another letter, written some years after (March 1784), may be placed by the side of that charming note, where Cowper relates the visit, or rather the invasion, of a parliamentary candidate, one afternoon, into his peaceful dwelling at Olney, just at the moment when the hare Puss was amusing himself in

the parlour, and where the poet himself, with Mrs. Unwin and another friend knitting or netting, was winding the worsted. Candidates, in England, pay their visits with a great deal of noise, accompanied by friends and with a troop of children and people at their heels: the house was invaded. The tumultuous entrance, the candidate soliciting the vote, the assurance given to Cowper, who disclaimed it as much as he could, that he had influence, great influence, the hope that he would use it in the favour of him who thanked him in advance, the hand-shakes and embraces of the whole household, the servants included; the whole of that little picture forms a most piquant passage, and the one most usually quoted when Cowper's correspondence is mentioned.[1] But the usual matter of his letters was smoother, and turned on the trifling details he took so much pleasure in describing; they would lose by being detached, for part of the charm was in the continuity and effect of the whole. We may read by the side of a playfully-written letter in which he related to Mr. Newton the escape and flight of his favourite hare, who one evening during supper broke through a lattice work, took his course through the town, and was only caught after a whole odyssey of adventures, a serious letter, elevated in tone, written to one of his high-born cousins whom he had not seen for some years; she had been very beautiful, and lofty and grave thoughts were familiar to her. What impression had Time made on her in that long interval? Had he marked her countenance with his hand, or had he, as is sometimes pleasing to him, spared her and drawn in his claws?

"But though an enemy to the person, he is a friend to the mind, and you have found him so. Though even in this respect his treatment of us depends upon what he meets with at our hands. . . . It is well for them who, like you, can stand a tiptoe on the mountain-top of human life, look down with pleasure upon the valley they have passed, and sometimes stretch their wings in joyful hope of a happy flight into eternity."

The charm of Cowper's correspondence lies in the succession of metaphors, thoughts, and shades of expression which display themselves in a varied vivacity, but in an equable and

[1] That letter was quoted by Jeffrey in the article he formerly published in the *Edinburgh Review* (June 1804) on Hayley's *Life of Cowper*. I also found it quoted and translated in the *Bibliothèque Universelle de Genève*, which contains a capital article on Cowper (January and February 1854).

peaceful course. The real sources of his poetry, of true domestic and familiar poetry, are best revealed in his letters: they contain an affectionate playfulness, a familiarity that despises nothing that is interesting because it is too humble and trifling, and by the side of this is to be seen elevation or rather depth. Neither must the irony, the malice, or the delicate and gentle raillery, as shown in the letters I have quoted, be forgotten.

A time arrived, as I have already remarked, when Cowper felt that making cages, greenhouses, and sketches did not suffice him: he had recourse to poetry, and to a poetry which sprung from his life itself and the circumstances surrounding him. There were short pieces, usually fables, where his red-breasts and goldfinches played their parts and pointed a moral that, though puritan, was always human and sensible. He worked with particular care at those amusements of his leisure, and was only content when he had brought them to perfection. "To touch and retouch," he says somewhere, "although there are writers who pride themselves on carelessness, and others who would blush to expose their rough drafts, is the secret of almost all good writing, particularly in verse." "Whatever is short," he says again, "should be nervous, masculine, and compact. Little men are so; and little poems should be so." But evidently he was still seeking his subjects, and the new and strange form of that alert genius did not know to what to apply itself with effect and vigour. There is here a likeness —the only likeness, it is true—between Cowper and La Fontaine: like the latter, Cowper's genius needed to be excited, upheld by affection; he wanted a guide, some one to suggest his subjects, as in nearly every case some beauty, a Bouillon, or a La Sablière, commanded them to La Fontaine. Almost everything Cowper wrote had its determining motive in the wish and desire of persons dear to him: if he took part in the "Olney Hymns," it was at the request of Mr. Newton; if he wrote his first collection of poems, it was with the encouragement and at the entreaties of Mr. Unwin; if he wrote his masterpiece, "The Task" (as the title sufficiently indicated), it was at the command and desire of a new friend, Lady Austen.

The winter of 1780-81 marks the time when Cowper began really to work and became an author. Spring distracted him so much, he could scarcely collect his ideas; he preferred to take advantage of it with the bees and the birds; but the winter evenings, by the side of his intelligent and silent friend, in the quiet domestic comfort he so well described, the urn singing, and the cups full of the beverage "that cheer but

not inebriate" near him, he set to work to treat in verse fairly long subjects, at first serious and almost theological, subjects that by their titles alone demonstrate the depth of his thoughts: "The Progress of Error," "Truth," "Hope," etc. He mingled with and brought into them a few cheerful passages of somewhat amusing irony which he tried to make fit in with the general taste. I have before quoted and analysed[1] "Retirement," the best and most beautiful of Cowper's poems in the first volume; therefore I shall not speak of it here. Those first flowers of poetry are, however, winter blossoms, they savour a little too much of a moral and austere way of thinking, which spreads itself over the whole; but in his second volume, with his great and charming poem, it is no longer the case.

Cowper's first volume was published about the beginning of 1782; it had small sale and a merely complimentary success. A friend sent it to Franklin, then living at Passy; he found in it, he said, "something so new in the manner, so easy, and yet so correct in the language, so clear in the expression, yet concise, and so just in the sentiment," that he read the whole with pleasure (rare praise for poetry, especially on the part of a man who had given up reading it), and he even read some of the pieces more than once. The quality of such a testimony was calculated to console Cowper for the lack of their quantity. In order more surely to inculcate his system of morality and his good counsel on the world, he desired both to please and to be useful; he only partly succeeded; he told himself that another time he might perhaps succeed better. The journals and reviews of the day did not all speak well of him. Samuel Johnson, the dread king and tyrant of criticism, then at the end of his career, kept silence, and Cowper rejoiced. His poetry was too new to be thoroughly understood at first, and there were not as yet sufficient bright places and animated pictures to charm and attract. However, in respect to the opinions of the critics, to which he was only moderately attentive and sensible, there was one the poet had it greatly at heart to obtain, that of the *Monthly Review*, the most celebrated of the literary magazines of the time, and it was slow to give its opinion.

"What will that critical Rhadamanthus say of me," wrote Cowper to a friend (June 12, 1782), "when my shivering genius shall appear before him? Still he keeps me in hot water, and I

[1] Cf. Essay, "On the Poetry of Nature," etc., *Causeries du Lundi*, vol. xi.—(E. L.)

must wait another month for his award. Alas! when I wish for a favourable sentence from that quarter (to confess a weakness that I should not confess to all), I feel myself not a little influenced by a tender regard to my reputation here, even among my neighbours at Olney. Here are watchmakers, who themselves are wits, and who at present, perhaps, think me one. Here is a carpenter and a baker, and not to mention others, here is your idol, Mr. Teedon, whose smile is fame. All these read the *Monthly Review*, and all these will set me down for a dunce if those terrible critics should show them the example. But, oh! wherever else I am accounted dull, dear Mr. Griffiths, let me pass for a genius at Olney."

Periods of joy and sunshine commenced at last to shine for Cowper; a bright ray of light began to throw itself athwart his life. It was no longer winter; summer had come, and he left the chimney-corner for the green arbour with its jasmine and honeysuckle hedge so often described, for the greenhouse with myrtles for blinds, and it was there that he henceforth wrote poetry, still serious, but fresh, animated, and illuminated with unexpected brightness. A charming fairy crossed the gloom and penetrated his life for a moment. One day when he was at a window looking on the street, he saw a lady known both to himself and Mrs. Unwin enter a shop opposite with a stranger, who was no other than her sister, lately arrived in the country; in her mere appearance was something so attractive and enchanting that Cowper, shy as he was, desired to make her acquaintance immediately. It was Lady Austen, the widow of a baronet. Scarcely admitted into the modest home, she was happy in it in the same degree as she gave delight to it; she brought to it what until then it lacked, novelty and imagination. That incomparable lady was endowed with the happiest gifts; she was no longer very young nor in the flower of her beauty, but she possessed what is better, the power of fascination and enchantment that is the result of transparency of mind, and a faculty of gratitude and sensibility that was moved even to tears by every mark of good-will of which she was the object. Everything in her breathed pure, innocent, and tender vivacity. She was a sympathetic creature, and in the present case completely justified Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's saying: "There is in woman a light gaiety which dissipates the sadness of man."

But if, for a moment, Lady Austen eclipsed Mrs. Unwin, she neither effaced her nor impaired her influence. Let us be careful not to overlook her essential qualities: already at that date

(1781) she had been Cowper's friend for sixteen years, and had every day shown him the same care and affection; she had sacrificed her health to watching over him in his dark and gloomy hours: in happier times she advised him in his work with appropriateness and wise guidance. She was solidity and judgment itself. From a literary point of view, her taste was sound and sure. "She is a critic by nature, and not by rule," said Cowper, "and has a perception of what is good or bad in composition that I never knew deceive her; insomuch that when two sorts of expression have pleaded equally for the precedence in my own esteem, and I have referred, as in such cases I always did, the decision of the point to her, I never knew her at a loss for a just one." All the time Cowper was between the two women (for Lady Austen soon became their near neighbour, and the day was spent in common), he had in respect of knowledge, incentive, and criticism, all he could desire for his poetic talent. Southey said very wisely, "Without Mrs. Unwin it is doubtful if he would ever have become an author, and without Lady Austen he would never have become a popular author."

Let us hasten to add, for we are not undertaking to sketch here any biography, we are only desirous of pointing out the chief characteristics of the man and the poet, that as soon as Cowper perceived that, in the long run, Lady Austen's presence might vex Mrs. Unwin, and that the charming fairy brought into their ordinary intercourse a certain lively sensibility and susceptibility that was likely to disturb the unity of their minds, he did not hesitate a moment. Simply, without any serious effort, without coquetry, by an irrevocable letter, he sacrificed the pleasant and charming to the necessary, and tender imagination to unchangeable affection.

But before that there were unique moments, when, in companionship that was both exciting and tranquillising, he enjoyed at that late age an unexpected youth, with the result that his genius as well as his heart expanded. And, moreover, we must not imagine Cowper always wrapped up in the odd sort of night-cap in which he is invariably represented in his portraits. He tells us himself how, although over fifty, he looked less than his age; he had preserved the smart appearance of his youth; he was less grey than bald, but a lock of hair, a judiciously disposed lock, covered the empty space and formed a curl at his ear; in the afternoon, when he was dressed, with his small bag and black ribbon, he looked quite gallant. One day in summer, after it had been raining, the little scene described in the poem called "The Rose"

took place in the garden between himself and those ladies (*Mary* is Mrs. Unwin; *Anna*, Lady Austen). The charming little poem tells all—Cowper's pure joy and emotion in the society of the two women, their fragile and fleeting union, and the rose broken by inadvertence, before one had finished offering it to the other.

In those years (1782-84) Cowper was completely held by the charm of poetry. The composition and publication of his first volume merely served to put him into the mood and spirit; he felt that it was only in writing, and in writing poetry, that he could completely escape his melancholy. "There is," he said about this time, "in the work and labour of poetry a pleasure that only the poet knows; the tricks and turns, the expedients and inventions of every kind to which the mind has recourse for the pursuit of the most fitting terms, but which hide themselves and do not easily allow themselves to be caught; to be able to arrest the fugitive images which fill the mirror of the soul, to retain them, to closely embrace them, to force them to fix themselves until the pen has drawn a faithful likeness of them in all their parts; then to dispose his pictures with such art that each one shall be seen in its most favourable light, and shall shine almost as much by the position given it as by the labour and talent it cost us: those are the occupations of a poet's mind, so dear, so delightful to his thought, and of a kind to distract him skilfully from sad subjects, so that, lost in his own dreams, happy man! he feels the anxieties of life depart and fade away for want of their accustomed nourishment." At that time, when entering on a new vein of composition, he really took possession of his whole genius; as he said, the shoot had become a tree,—*fit surculus arbos*,—and Cowper declared with the pride of an author conscious of his originality, that for thirteen years he had not read an English poet, and that in twenty years he had read but one, and that, therefore, he was naturally safe from any inclination to imitation, which his lively and independent taste held more in horror than anything. "Imitation," he said, "even of the best models, is my aversion; it is servile and mechanical, a trick that has enabled many to usurp the name of author who could not have written at all if they had not written upon the pattern of somebody indeed original." In thus creating for himself a style according to his thoughts, and a form in harmony with their basis, the solitary man, sensitive and sick, ingenious and penetrating, was one of the fathers of the revival of English poetry.

He was to become popular at the time and on the side he least expected. One afternoon when Lady Austen found him

more than usually depressed, and ready to fall back into his gloomy state of mind, she thought to rouse him by telling him a very funny and merry nurse's tale with which she had been familiar since her childhood, "The diverting history of John Gilpin: showing how he went further than he intended and came safe home again." Cowper listened, laughed a great deal, dreamed of it all night, and the next morning had written the little ballad or song—he had a particular genius for ballads—which made the little company at breakfast laugh until the tears came into their eyes. He sent the trifle to his friend, Mr. Unwin, who had it printed in a newspaper; at first the name of the author was not known, and no one paid much attention to it. For two or three years the poem lay dormant. But then, a famous actor, Garrick's heir, who was delivering public recitations to the great world, came into possession of a copy of the newspaper which contained "John Gilpin," and determined to give it as a comic recitation at one of his performances. From that time it became the fashion and the rage; for some time the talk was of nothing but "John Gilpin"; it was reprinted separately, and thousands of copies were sold; caricatures rivalled each other in illustrating his adventures; and, irony of things! Cowper, the moralising and austere poet, who aimed at reforming the world, suddenly found himself, through a sally of wit, which, excepting its innocence and perfect purity, might as well have been a jesting trifle like Désaugiers' "Cadet Buteux," or "M. et Mme. Denis," the fashion, and a drawing-room favourite.

It will be easily understood that when, a few months after the extraordinary success of "John Gilpin," the publication of a pathetic and familiar, natural and elevated poem, "The Task," was announced by the same author, everybody was anxious to read it. The famous "cavalier, in spite of himself," had served as courier to prepare the way for a refined and serious work.

To Lady Austen, also, Cowper owed the first idea and the starting-point of that poem. One day she urged him to write blank verse, verse without rhyme, which admirably suits the genius of the English language; he replied that he only wanted a subject. "Oh!" she said, "you can never be in want of a subject; you can write upon anything; write upon this sofa!" The fairy had spoken, and Cowper began the work, entitling his poem, "The Task." The sofa only occurs in the first book and in the first hundred lines, after which the author passed to the subjects he liked best, the country, nature, religion, and morals. In six books or cantos, he treated of a series of varied

subjects, or views, without any regular plan, but with the same unity of mind and inspiration. Let us look at the first canto of the poem at the beginning. The exordium of which the sofa is the text is nothing more than ingenious and graceful playfulness. The author indicates the origin of the poem, so humble in theme, so proud and august the occasion, "for the Fair commands the song." He recalls the time when the rude sires of the English, the Picts and Britons, reposed on rugged rocks by the side of torrents, their heads resting against the stone. Then invention began, dull and clumsy in the commencement: they had the three-legged joint-stool, the massive slab which served for a seat; immortal Alfred had no other throne, and from it, sceptre in hand, he meted out justice to his infant realms. The poet follows the various steps to perfection, and takes pleasure in describing the tapestry with which the wooden seat of former days is soon covered, tapestry woven close and richly wrought:

> "There might ye see the piony spread wide,
> The full-blown rose, the shepherd and his lass,
> Lap-dog and lambkin with black staring eyes,
> And parrots with twin cherries in their beak."

All these trifles are pleasantly described and relieved by colour, as the Abbé Delille could do it at need, or as a witty Jesuit would not fail to do in Latin verses. I pass rapidly over these trifles, over the progress of the chair that cane from India makes more flexible, to which arms are added, but a perfect and comfortable bend and shape was not at once given to the arms. We have here all the degrees of transition from the chair to the arm-chair, and from the double arm-chair or settee to the couch and sofa, the final throne of luxury and ease. The first hundred lines of the first book are most brilliant, like curious Chinese cabinet work. But the real Cowper only reappears and completely shows himself in the lines which immediately follow. They contain what is not always to be found in Cowper, comprehensiveness of view, gradation, and perspective. Compared with Thomson, Cowper possessed in a higher degree the art of noting particular traits and curious details of things; he was almost minutely exact. It has been observed that, on account of his religious opinions, a small detail seemed to him as important as a large object: everything was equalised by its relation to God who gives forth light, and is revealed as wondrously in the one as in the other. But it further results that Thomson is more widely descriptive and is a painter of a more comprehensive glance; there are *masses* in Thomson. However, in the

perfect description in the lines just referred to, Cowper reconciled the two sorts of qualities, the delicacy and prominence of each detail (I might even, in one or two points, say the brilliancy), and the gradation and aërial flight of perspective. The landscape might be copied with the brush.

I have something more to say; I should like to compare Cowper's melancholy with that of Pascal, to show the resemblance and unlikeness of his nature to that of Rousseau, to speak of the French and their attempts at poetry of the same kind; in short, to return to France.

III.

Once again, I do not want to depreciate the Abbé Delille: all who knew him, loved, liked, and applauded him to such a degree, that he must have possessed great charm and a magic talent. Certainly in the poem of *L'Homme des Champs*, in that of *Imagination* (more than in *Les Jardins*), there are passages which deserve all their success, when, with delicate and lively imagination combined with his presence and elocution, he recited them in the drawing-rooms for which he had written them. Read now, they still please; they show how public taste has changed, how poetry which is called spiritual is less often than formerly asked of poets. Let us leave aside useless comparisons; I take for granted that my readers have a general and sufficient acquaintance with Delille's manner and vein, and shall choose in "The Task" passages which point out in the English poet other sources and inspirations.

Cowper loved the country dearly, he loved it to live in, to dwell in, and did not grow weary of it at any age or at any season. In the first canto, after the walk with Mrs. Unwin and the perfect description of the landscape, he did not stop: as poet his piece is complete, as lover of nature he has still many things to say. So that, the picture finished, he immediately began again. It was no longer in the company of his friend, it was alone, in weather not so fine, when walking would be difficult for a woman, that he made his excursions and went to search out the land. He described it for us, marking his course with a thousand impressions induced by the agricultural accidents of the ground, or by the sounds he hears, to which he is very sensitive, or by the varied colour of the trees which he distinguished and specified in all their shades; in all these descriptions, life,

interest, deep and tender passion are to be perceived; it cannot be said that he is diverted by them, but rather that he takes pleasure in them. In the course of his long excursions, after ascending the heights, he came down the steep slopes, crossed the streams, more or less swollen or dry according to the season, reached a lordly park, and by going through it could perhaps shorten his road; Rousseau would doubtless have avoided having anything to do with it, and would have preferred a long walk in the sun to owing anything to the rich and powerful, but not so Cowper. The owner of the enclosed domain permitted him to pass freely through it, which means that he gave him the key for always. Cowper, leaving the open country, entered the lofty avenues and found there coolness and shade. The lofty avenues, the big elms, and the speck of distance shining in the sun! we have all the variety and contrasts of the picture. An ancient writer would perhaps have finished with the last feature and image, but Cowper did not stop there; he combined with it his idea of the son of Adam engaged in the toil that is a pain and a chastisement, but that has become a means or a promise of redemption. Cowper was profoundly Christian; from the point of view of proportion and taste, he was too much governed by austerity. He had a side almost Hebraic in its severity and terror, and at the same time as he sees from his green grove and summer-house the threshers afar off through the foliage, he sometimes had suddenly a sight, a vision of Sinai.

Further, Cowper is a patriot and a true Englishman, even inclusive of prejudice and bias. In order to read him as he ought to be read, and to understand thoroughly all his chief points, and to account for the great success of his poem as soon as it appeared, it is necessary to recollect the events of those years—the American war, with its humiliating result for England, the stormy debates in Parliament, the triumphs and crimes in India, the first efforts of Wilberforce for the enfranchisement of the negroes, the extravagance and anarchy of the highest society, and the misconduct of the young Prince of Wales. Cowper, in his lucid intervals, and while he was writing "The Task," saw it all from afar, in the mass, as it were, but with much curiosity and ardour. He says somewhere—

> "'Tis pleasant through the loopholes of retreat
> To peep at such a world. To see the stir
> Of the great Babel and not feel the crowd."

But he had too much sensibility and patriotism, too many

human and Christian impulses, to remain an amused spectator; he constantly broke out into transports and effusions, which seem at this distance to touch declamation, but which, when grasped and understood in their source, were eloquently suitable. It is thus that the first canto, which we saw begin with the trifling and almost ingenious archnesses on the sofa, ended with this rural and patriotic tirade—

> "God made the country, and man made the town,
> What wonder then, that health and virtue, gifts
> That can alone make sweet the bitter draught
> That life holds out to all, should most abound
> And least be threatened in the fields and groves?
> Possess ye therefore, ye who borne about
> In chariots and sedans, know no fatigue
> But that of idleness, and taste no scenes
> But such as art contrives,—possess ye still
> Your element; there only ye can shine,
> There only minds like yours can do no harm.
> Our groves were planted to console at noon
> The pensive wanderer in their shades. At eve
> The moonbeam sliding softly in between
> The sleeping leaves, is all the light they wish,
> Birds warbling all the music. We can spare
> The splendour of your lamps, they but eclipse
> Our softer satellite. Your songs confound
> Our more harmonious notes. The thrush departs
> Scared, and the offended nightingale is mute.
> There is a public mischief in your mirth;
> It plagues your country. Folly such as yours
> Graced with a sword, and worthier of a fan,
> Has made, which enemies could ne'er have done,
> Our arch of empire, steadfast but for you,
> A mutilated structure, soon to fall."

Who does not recognise here the sorrow of the Englishman at the moment when North America, that magnificent part of British land, was being separated from his country?

The second canto of the poem was entirely devoted to public misfortunes, or rather to the physical calamities which burst forth then (1781-83) in frightful storms, in earthquakes in Jamaica and the adjacent islands, and later in Sicily and other places. Cowper, with his forcible vein of imagination, saw in them not only Divine warnings and chastisements inflicted on the world, but precursory signs of the end of time and the Last Judgment. He generally named his

cantos after the beginning of the piece, or the principal picture contained in it. thus one of them is called "The Garden"; another, "Winter Evening"; another, "Winter Morning Walk"; another, "Winter Walk at Noon"; but the second canto has for title, "The Timepiece," although there is no question of such a thing; it is a mystic and symbolical title, as if to say "the signs of the times." We do not ask a physician's exactness, or a philosopher's methodical reasoning, of a poet. The beginning of the canto is admirable in animation and tenderness; the poet's accents remind us of David and Jeremiah. He goes on to enumerate all the sorrows and wounds that he as an Englishman, a Christian, and a man feels. The whole book, of a sombre, moral tone, is like a series of mystic, biblical, patriotic, human, and fraternal aspirations: it has the disadvantage of more than once resembling a sermon in verse; but its spirit and ardour suffice to show how far Cowper is raised above the rank of descriptive and picturesque poets, properly so called.

The third canto, entitled "The Garden," takes us back to more familiar and calmer scenes. In the first pages we have a delightful invocation to domestic happiness, which Cowper doubtless only imperfectly enjoyed, but which he appreciated with a pious and chaste delicacy. To justify its title, the canto treats of flowers.

"Who loves a garden, loves a greenhouse too."

He gives special precepts on the art of cultivating pumpkins; the poet speaks from his own experience, as one who had himself put his hand to the spade. A sentiment of happiness flows through the pleasing and learned descriptions, and shows Cowper in his most cheerful mood.

But it is in the "Winter Evening" canto that he painted himself in his favourite surroundings at the happiest moment, and in all the charm of a social, innocent, and perfect refinement. The beginning of the canto is famous: it describes the arrival of the postman or messenger who carries the letters.

"Hark! 'tis the twanging horn! o'er yonder bridge."

In the bag he so negligently drops, the careless messenger brings joy or grief, death or birth, fortune or ruin, and departs whistling. Such pretty finished pictures, executed less surely by Delille, but to which he would have added a spiritual pendant, are not what I like best in Cowper; I prefer him when, having

finished all that has to do with the public and private news heaped pell-mell in the postman's bag, he adds—

> "Now stir the fire, and close the shutters fast,
> Let fall the curtains, wheel the sofa round,
> And while the bubbling and loud hissing urn
> Throws up a steamy column, and the cups
> That cheer but not inebriate, wait on each,
> So let us welcome peaceful evening in."

In the manner of spending the evening, which he describes in its least details, and of which he brings every moment clearly before our eyes, he is not unmindful of Horace. "Oh, evenings and suppers worthy of the gods! O noctes cœnaeque Deum." But he puts his own originality into it, adds his inspiration, a moral and religious sentiment that never abandons him, a gleam of St. Paul and the Apostles, with the appreciation of a comfort and well-being that the Apostles never knew. In the ever-recurring motive and theme of the blessed peacefulness of home he is inexhaustible, and he adds to it a wholly modern and English grace which sometimes makes certain passages resemble the charm and sparkle of a vignette of Westall. Collins has an ode to Evening, full of imagination and lofty fancy: in the passage beginning

> "Come, Evening, once again, season of peace;
> Return, sweet Evening, and continue long!"

Cowper reminds us of Collins, but although Cowper has less lyrical power, and is rather more formal and more familiar, his imagination is not less vivid.

Different orders, different races, so to say, of mind and genius, must be recognised. Although he was neither husband nor father, Cowper was the poet of the family; he was the poet of the home, of a well-ordered, pure, gently animated interior, of the grove we see at the bottom of the garden, or of the chimney-corner. Passionate and bold poets like Byron, lively and worldly temperaments like Thomas Moore and Hazlitt, did not greatly care for him. Byron in a moment of ill-temper called Cowper a *coddled* poet. Thomas Moore put forward as a principle that genius and domestic happiness are two antipathetic elements and exclude each other. Once, when it was asked in Wordsworth's presence if this was necessarily the case, the grave Lake poet replied: "It is not because they are geniuses that they make their homes unhappy, but because they have not enough genius: a loftier order of mind and

heart would make them able to see and feel the beauty of domestic ties."[1]

I regret that Montaigne was not of that opinion, and that he leaned to the side of irregularity: quoting the sonnets of his friend, Étienne de La Boëtie, he declared those made for the mistress were worth more than those composed for the legitimate wife, which already savoured of some indescribable marital coldness: "And I," said he, "am of the same opinion with those who hold that poesy appears nowhere so gay as in a wanton and irregular subject." Montaigne's opinion has been too well remembered in France, and the French have allowed themselves to follow his notion of irregularity.

Some who had the idea of introducing familiar and domestic poetry into France, and to a certain extent succeeded, did not sufficiently possess the practical virtue and habit in their way of life: they soon spoiled the sweet perfume by mingling foreign and adulterate ingredients with it, and only too well deserved what a great bishop (Bossuet) said: "We see men spend their lives in turning a verse, in rounding a period; in a word, in making pleasant not only useless but dangerous things, as singing a feigned or a true love, and *filling the universe with the follies of their misspent youth.*"

Let us return to Cowper, without, however, ignoring that he might not perhaps have expressed the poetry of tranquil situations to which habit for the most part makes us insensible, in so life-like a manner, had he not himself passed through strange inward storms and deep disturbances. The sixth book of "The Task" begins with a famous and truly delightful passage commencing—

"There is in souls a sympathy with sounds."

By an unconscious association, he retraces some moving circumstances of his past; a direct allusion points to the death of his father, and he reproaches himself for not having sufficiently appreciated the affection concealed under a somewhat severe exterior. Then, suddenly, without transition, he began to paint the exquisite and memorable picture which gave the sixth book its title of "Winter Walk at Noon." He

[1] The most ancient and divine of poets, Homer, did not think differently from Wordsworth when he wrote: "There is nothing better or more beautiful than when a man and woman dwell in the house, making one in heart!" It was Ulysses who said that, when addressing vows of marriage to Nausicaa, and thinking the while of his own Penelope.

produced an exquisitely painted picture, and one that was finished, living, and natural.

Cowper lived for fifteen years after the publication of "The Task"; he died April 25, 1800. After that admirable poem, he undertook no other long original work. Early struck with the beauty of Homer, and displeased with Pope's unfaithfulness, at the instance of Lady Austen he set to work again to make a complete and faithful translation of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* in blank verse; it took him many long years. An edition of Milton, with an English translation of the Latin works, occupied him later; but he was little suited for the *rôle* of editor. About two years after the publication of "The Task," he left Olney, which had become less agreeable to him. Lady Hesketh, an amiable cousin, a comrade of his childhood whom he had joyfully come across again, and whose fortune was considerable, arranged a comfortable home for him and Mrs. Unwin in the environs of Olney, at Weston, one of the prettiest villages in England. Lady Hesketh herself spent some months of each year there. In 1787 an attack of the same malady which, as it were, caused his cheerfulness again to lie dormant, seized him; he recovered, but from 1793 depression and melancholy became his habitual and constant condition. The greatest misfortune that could have assailed him occurred: Mrs. Unwin, his domestic angel, struck with paralysis, outlived her faculties, and preceded him by four years to the tomb. The end of Cowper's life is sad, humiliating for the human mind, and well calculated to make any one who is inclined to be proud commune with himself. In other respects, he had, until the end, friends, affectionate relatives, who gathered round him and disputed the honour of tending and alleviating his agonies and protracted sufferings.

From time to time the light of poetry and genius did not cease to shine through the darkness and gloom. When some one regretted he had given up his special business, he replied: "The mind of man is not a fountain, but a cistern; and mine, God knows, is a broken cistern." But there were still periods of brief and vivid inspiration and of expansion of the emotions. Every one in England knows his poem to Mrs. Unwin, sick and infirm, entitled, "To Mary," a tender and inimitable lament written with tears. In the first lines Cowper alludes to his great relapse into melancholy in 1773, the first after he lived with Mrs. Unwin.[1]

[1] In reading these lines, "To Mary," which unconsciously turn into a pious litany, we cannot help thinking of that other Mary-in-chief,

The most important poem, a poem of an imagination as strong as it was elevated, that he wrote in his last years was entitled "Yardley Oak." It was inspired by an old oak he saw in his walks round Weston, which was reputed a contemporary of the Norman Conquest. The poem bears the impress of his most vigorous manner with its good qualities and its defects; although the style is unequal and the thought complicated, the poem is nevertheless great, and reveals in Cowper, who passes only for a poet of middle rank, a powerful disciple of Milton.

Cowper's moral malady, which I mentioned without defining it, was of a nature apart, and of an extreme singularity. He believed himself for ever rejected and reprobate, and he believed it with a continuance, a persistence, and an obstinacy which constituted a mania. His malady does not resemble Pascal's: the latter, who at certain times may have had visions and hallucinations, usually mastered his nervous condition by his intellect. It is said that in his last years he believed he saw a bottomless pit open at his side; if that is true, it was a purely physical sensation of which he was not the dupe, and he checked it. Cowper did not see a gaping abyss at his side, he saw and felt himself morally fallen to the bottom of the pit, without hope, without refuge. It seemed to him that in the midst of his meditations and spiritual soliloquies he always heard a loud, deep voice crying to him: "It's all up with you; you are lost! Actum est de te, periisti!" On this point nothing could comfort him, nothing undeceive him. In his good moments and happier times the voice went away or spoke more softly, but he never succeeded in completely stifling it, and in periods of crisis it became threatening and incessant. He imagined the Virgin, her of whom Beatrice, in Dante's "Divine Comedy," says—

> "In high heaven a blessed dame
> Besides, who mourns with such effectual grief
> That hindrance, which I send thee to remove,
> That God's stern judgment to her will inclines."

It is confidence in that Mary, with her Son all-merciful and powerful, that Cowper lacked. Had his heart been able to admit it, the further devotion would have supported and perhaps preserved him. In a fine passage in the "Paradise" Dante said—

> "So mighty art thou, Lady! and so great,
> That he who grace desireth, and comes not
> To thee for aidance, fain would have desire
> Fly without wings."

he had committed a sin, I do not know which, the only unpardonable one, that caused his soul to be abandoned of God. To all Mr. Newton's observations, and to the examples quoted of cases more or less like his own, which had been restored and cured, he replied : "That is not exactly my disease; I am an exception." In such total despair about himself, seeing his name definitely erased from the book of life, it is easy to imagine his anguish and mortal depression, religious and a Christian as he was. In addition, so deep was his distress and despair that he considered himself incapable and unworthy of praying. His soul was as if dead. It was from the depths of his inward desolate cast of thought that, in order to escape from himself, he eagerly took to the literary and poetical occupations in which he found pleasure and described so many vivid images of happiness. Never did man combat with more constancy and perseverance so present and persistent a mania, "one of the most furious storms," he said, "that had ever been let loose on a human soul, which had upset the navigation of a Christian sailor." One of his last poems, entitled "The Castaway," was the description of a sailor who had fallen overboard into the open sea during Admiral Anson's voyage, and forces himself to follow the course of the vessel, whence his mates vainly throw him ropes which the storm carries away; in it Cowper mournfully saw the reflection of his own fate.

It is rather with the tinge of mania and madness deep-seated in Rousseau's mind during his last years, that Cowper's malady, so compatible with admirable proofs of talent, might be compared. Just as Rousseau imagined himself the object of an universal conspiracy, Cowper thought himself vowed to irrevocable reprobation. Moreover, Cowper, who, like Rousseau, developed late, spoke of him more than once, and with thorough knowledge of the subject. He read him, at least in his early great works, and when he was living at Huntingdon near the Unwins, he wrote to his friend Joseph Hill: "You remember Rousseau's picture of an English morning; such are those I spend here with these honest people." I do not know what English morning is referred to if it is not the pretty dream in "Emile" of "the white house with its green shutters," and of the life led in it; Cowper and Hill reading it at first together had perhaps named it thus. There is another place where Cowper, without perhaps saying so, appears to me to have been evidently thinking of Rousseau : it is in the fifth canto of "The Task," when he is speaking of combating the argument of the hardened epicurean who openly

abandons himself to his natural appetites, to the demands of the flesh—

> "Haste now, philosopher, and set him free!
> . . . . . Make him hear
> Of rectitude and fitness; moral truth
> How lovely, and the moral sense how sure,
> . . . . . .
> Spare not in such a cause. Spend all the powers
> Of rant and rhapsody in virtue's praise.
> . . . . . .
> And with poetic trappings grace thy prose
> Till it out-mantle all the pride of verse.—
> . . . . . .
> The still, small voice is wanted. He must speak
> Whose word leaps forth at once to its effect,
> Who calls for things that are not, and they come."

It seems to me that Cowper was here thinking of "The Savoyard Vicar's profession of faith," and that he touches in that passage the weak and defective spot in Rousseau and all his followers: the *still, small voice* which changes hearts is lacking.

Rousseau was undoubtedly the first writer in France in the eighteenth century to feel and propagate with enthusiasm the love of country and of nature so tenderly shared by Cowper: in that respect the French have little to envy their neighbours. Again, when I expressed regret that France at that time had not a poetry similar and comparable to that of England, I was thinking less of the actual description of nature considered in itself, description of which the best French prose affords many beautiful and magnificent examples, than of the union of domestic and familiar poetry with that of nature. It is that union which is essentially wanting in Rousseau, and for all sorts of reasons that give pain to his admirers. The painter, full and vigorous in his colouring, lived and dwelt in a sullied interior. He had also a natural or acquired want of delicacy which often violated the chief protective domestic virtue—chastity. There are profound moral differences between Rousseau and Cowper; while the one aspired to do without his fellows, affected to isolate himself and go to war with or divorce himself from the human race, the other, on the contrary, liked to be beholden to others, to those he loved, and to feel himself their debtor. While cursing London, as Rousseau does Paris, Cowper was sociable, and showed sociable doctrines even through

his ardent anathemas. Except for a few rare touches of misanthropy, he wanted his dwelling to be not too far out of the way or reach of the resources and benefits of society. Once in his walks round Olney he discovered on a somewhat steep hill a little hut hidden in a group of trees. He called it "the peasant's nest," and dreamed of establishing himself there, of living there as a hermit, enjoying his poet's imagination and perfect peace. But it was not long before he found that the site was inconvenient, that it lacked everything, that it was hard to be alone: all considered, he preferred his summer parlour and greenhouse with its simple and charming comfort, and said to the wild and picturesque cottage: "Continue to be a pleasant sight to my eyes: be the goal of my walk, but my dwelling, never!"

In France, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre frequently combined vivid pictures of life with domestic happiness; but we do not know why poetry in verse has remained behindhand. In our time attempts have been made in the intimate, familiar style relieved by art, which needs careful and finished detail. Those attempts, of which none has had the excellence or popularity of "The Task," demand a closer examination and a longer chapter. I shall content myself with observing that in England private life is more shut in, more sheltered, better framed in its whole, more consistent with the spirit and general manners of the race and nation; thus adorned and preserved, half enveloped in mystery like a cottage among roses, or a nest in foliage, it gives rise in a higher degree to the tender, poetic fervour it inspires, and of which so many perfect examples have just been pointed out. That is all I wanted to say here, without denying that with differences out of which genius could form an original style, the French also might, by a well-directed mental effort, succeed in writing the same sort of poetry.

TAINE'S "HISTORY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE."

I HAVE let time slip by before speaking of this important book. In spite of my desire to do it full justice, I felt my incapability to criticise it pertinently, with a thorough knowledge of the subject, to penetrate and comprehend it rightly in all its various parts. However, after frequent and repeated soundings, I shall state what of certainty or probability I have gathered from it. It is, all said and done, a great book; had it attained only a fourth part of its purpose it would have advanced the subject, and would not have left it as it was before. The attempt is the boldest yet made in that particular style of literary history, and it is not astonishing that in prejudiced minds, accustomed to the older ways of thought, it should have raised so much opposition and resistance. Old habits and old methods are not changed in a day. The author might perhaps have diminished the number of his opponents if he had given the book its true title: "History of the English Race and Civilisation through its Literature." Then impartial readers would have had only to approve, and for the most part to admire, the force and skill of the demonstration. M. Taine, in fact, finds literature a more delicate and sensitive apparatus than any other for measuring the degrees and variations of civilisation, for comprehending the characteristics, qualities, and shades of a nation's soul. But in thus approaching directly and from the front the history of literary works and their authors, M. Taine employed the scientific method without restraint, and thus terrified the timid and made them tremble. Rhetoricians in confusion took refuge behind real or pretended philosophers, themselves drawn up for greater safety under the canon of orthodoxy; they saw in the author's method some sort of menace to morals, free will, human responsibility, and they loudly exclaimed.

There is, however, no doubt that whatever man desires to do, to think, or, since it is here a question of literature, to write, depends in a more or less intimate manner on the *race* from which he springs, whence he derives his natural attributes: not

less does it depend on the kind of society and civilisation in which he was educated and also on the time, and incidental circumstances and events which occur daily in the course of life. This fact is so evident, that in our hours of philosophy and reason, or through common sense alone, the confession involuntarily escapes us all. Lamennais, impetuous, subjective, obstinate, who thought the individual will sufficed for everything, could not help writing once: "The further I go, the more I marvel to what degree our most deeply-rooted opinions depend on the time in which we live, the society into which we are born, and on a number of circumstances equally transitory. Just imagine what our opinions would have been if we had come into the world ten centuries sooner, or in the same century at Teheran, Benares, or Tahiti." It is so evident that it would be absurd to contradict it. Hippocrates, in his immortal *Treatise on Air, Water, and Places*, was the first to write in a vivid manner of the influence of surroundings and climate on the characters of men and nations. Montesquieu imitated and followed him, but in too cavalier a fashion, and like a philosopher who is neither sufficiently master of his trade nor enough of a naturalist. M. Taine attempted to study methodically the profound differences that race, surroundings, and epochs bring to the composition of minds, to the forming and directing of talent. But it will be objected that he has not sufficiently succeeded. In vain has he described to perfection the general characteristics and fundamental lines of race; in vain has he, in his vigorous pictures, characterised and brought into relief the revolutions of the times and the moral atmosphere which obtains at certain historical periods; in vain has he skilfully explained the complication of events, and the particular circumstances in which the life of an individual is involved and cogged, as it were; something more is wanting: I mean the living soul of the man, the reason why among twenty or a hundred or a thousand men apparently subjected to the same intrinsic or outward conditions, no two should be alike,[1] and why one alone of all of them should excel in originality. Thus he has not

[1] It seems that Theophrastus, the author of the *Characters*, may have anticipated the objection when he said at the commencement of his book: "I have always been perplexed when I have endeavoured to account for the fact, that, among a people, who, like the Greeks, inhabit the same climate, and are reared under the same system of education, there should prevail so great a diversity of manners." It is this difference between man and man in the same nation, and even in the same family, that is the particular point of the difficulty.

recognised the essential importance of the spark of genius, nor does he show it in his analysis; he only put before us and deduced, blade by blade, fibre by fibre, cellule by cellule, the material, the organism, the parenchyma, if we may so call it, in which the soul, life, spark, once within, displays itself, is freely or almost freely diversified, and triumphs. Have I not well stated the objection, and do you recognise in it the argument of his most learned opponents? Well, what does it prove? That the problem is difficult, that in its entirety it cannot perhaps be solved. But in my turn I ask, is it nothing to state the problem as the author has done, to embrace it so closely, to surround all its parts, to reduce it to its simplest final expression, to cause all its data to be better weighed and considered? After making every allowance for general or particular elements and for circumstances, there still remains room and space enough round men of talent for freedom of movement and change of place. Besides, however circumscribed the line round each, every man of talent and genius, because in some degree an enchanter and a magician, possesses a secret, which is his alone, for producing marvels in that space, and for bringing wonders to light. I do not see that M. Taine, if he seems to neglect it, combats and absolutely denies that power: he limits it, and in limiting it, assists us in many cases to define it better than has hitherto been done. Indeed, whatever those who were content with the old vague conditions may say, M. Taine has done much to advance literary analysis; those who now study a great foreign writer will no longer set to work in the old way nor so lightly as before the publication of M. Taine's book.

I.

I wish that, in order to explain him to my readers and set him before them in the best possible way, I could apply his own method to himself.

Taine was born at Vouziers, in the Ardennes, in 1828. And chiefly I wish I was an artist and landscape painter like him in order to describe the Ardennes, and what must have been the lasting and deep impressions of his childhood in that great forest landscape. Did the Ardennes, powerful and vast, the great surviving fragment of ancient primeval forests, the wooded hills and valleys incessantly recurring, hills which we only descend to mount again as if lost in the uniformity of their folds, with their gloomy, sombre aspect, yet full of a majestic vigour, help

from his earliest days to fill and enrich the imagination of the young and serious child? He certainly gives us some strong masses, some compact and continuous passages, but their brilliance and magnificence do not prevent fatigue. We admire the luxuriant vegetation, the verdant, inexhaustible, mellow sap of a generous soil; but at times we should welcome more open spaces and clearings in his Ardennes. His family surroundings were simple, moral, affectionate, and of a modest and sound culture. His grandfather was *sous-préfet* at Rocroi in 1814-15 under the first Restoration; his father, by profession a lawyer, preferred study; he was his son's first master, and taught him Latin; an uncle who had been in America taught him English, while he was still only a child. He lost his father at the age of forty-one, when he himself was only twelve. His mother, his father's cousin, is a very amiable person, and the one love of her son; his two sisters are married. His vigorous mind, impregnated with so firm and severe a doctrine, does not hinder him from being the most gentle and affectionate of men in the domestic circle.

Coming to Paris with his mother about 1842, he carried on his studies as a day scholar in the third class at the Collége Bourbon. In the competition he gained the first prize for rhetoric, and the two second prizes for philosophy. He entered the Normal School in 1848, the first in promotion; M. Edmond About was of the same year. M. Prevost-Paradol was of the following promotion, and M. Weiss had been of the former. Thus in the three years' course of study that was the rule of the school, for a short space of time those names stood close together and met. A great deal of liberty in the order and detail of the exercises was just then enjoyed in the school, to such a degree that M. Taine did the work of five or six weeks in one, and could thus devote the remaining four or five to personal work, to reading. He read all there was to read in philosophy from Thales to Schelling; in theology and patrology from Hermas to St. Augustine. Such an absorbing, voracious *régime* produced its natural effect on young and strong brains; they lived in the midst of perpetual excitement and eager discussion. In order that no sort of contrast and antagonism might be wanting there were several fervent Catholic students, who afterwards entered the Oratory; every day there were struggles, fierce disputes, a great political, æsthetic, and philosophical confusion. The broad-minded or indulgent masters put no restrictions on those emulous and rival intellects, and placed no obstacle or veto on the questions at issue. With M. Dubois (of the Loire-

Inférieure), director-in-chief and administrator of the school, was M. Vacherot, more particularly director of the course of study; M. Havet, M. Jules Simon, M. Géruzez, M. Berger were the lecturers (*maîtres de conférences*). Those gentlemen, true to their title, gave very few lectures in the proper sense of the word, but they made the students give them, and afterwards corrected them, and thus actually *conferred*. The master assisted at the pupil's lecture as a kind of arbiter or judge. A professor of our acquaintance, with his half-shut eyes and subtle smile, a half-primitive Gallic man of taste,[1] found means to be gracefully idle, and yet at the same time to urge his pupils to work. What we have been told by one of those pupils, since become famous, gives an idea of the piquancy and animation of those veritable jousts. Imagine M. Edmond About giving a lecture on Bossuet's policy in the presence of sincere Catholics, who, irritated by it, revenged themselves in their turn by speaking at the next conference. Among other things M. Taine had to give a lecture on Bossuet's mysticism. The professor, having listened to all the speeches, got off by summing up the debate in the same way as the president at the Palais.

It may easily be believed that the summing up decided nothing; the variety of opinion still held; in those learned young heads, intoxicated with their own ideas and fortified with words, there was inevitably an excessive intolerance and presumption; they abused but did not hate each other. A remedy was supplied by their recreations. Feeling a need of movement, and to get rid of their physical exuberance, sometimes of an evening they danced together, while one of them played the violoncello and another the flute.

Taken altogether they were useful and invaluable years, and we conceive that all who shared in them preserved, with the effect on the mind, gratitude in the heart. The advantages of such a learned palestra, of such an intellectual seminary, are beyond words, and it is in that spirit that they should be criticised by those who were deprived of the highly privileged culture afforded by such inimitable athletics, and who, ordinary warriors, went forth into the fight unnourished by the marrow of lions and undipped in the Styx. By the side of what is good and excellent several disadvantages may be discovered: no man is brought up with impunity amid the shouts of the school; as Boileau said, he acquires a taste for hyperbole. From the life I have described there necessarily resulted a

[1] M. Géruzez may be recognised.

certain amount of violence and intellectual arrogance, too much trust in books and in what is written down, too much reliance on the pen and on what comes from it. If the ancients were well known, too much was attributed to some modern authors, whose influence, seen from a distance and through bars, was exaggerated. Works which combined intelligence and talent, much pretension, and many small charlatanisms, were taken too seriously and literally; good faith, seriousness, and depth was lent them; and now, after many years, something of it is retained even in the most matured criticism.

Unimportant disadvantages! the advantages greatly predominated, and it is well known what a powerful and brilliant set of men that fertile, tempestuous, and thoroughly French education produced. None, while himself emancipated, remained truer to it than M. Taine, and did more honour to the rigour of his early teaching. When he left the school in 1851, great changes, which had become necessary, took place; but as is usually the case, things went from one extreme to the other, and a strong reaction set in. An honourable director of the school, M. Michelle, busied himself with suppressing and extinguishing by his own coolness, whatever fire of intellect and soul had, by contact with ideas from without, been concentrated within. After too much urging on and letting alone they entered on a course of severe discipline.[1] A dispersion of the young and brilliant generation immediately took place. Edmond About prudently went off to Greece and made there a prolonged sojourn, animated and extensive, amusing as well as instructive. Some went into the provinces; others sent in their resignation. M. Taine, for all favours and after numberless intercessions, was sent first to Nevers as assistant-lecturer in philosophy. He stayed there four months, and afterwards went to Poitiers, as assistant-lecturer in rhetoric; there he remained another four months. We may pass over the tediousness, annoyance, and petty worries. On his return to Paris, reckoning on a third form in the provinces, surely no very excessive ambition, he was nominated deputy professor of a sixth form at Besançon. He did not go, and demanded to be put on the unattached list. Is it worth while, we might ask, to manufac-

[1] At first the success was incomplete, and more than one fortunate exception, more than one distinguished pupil who, by the bent and strength of his mind, was able to counteract the depressing *régime* of those lifeless years, might be mentioned,—the Israelite Bréal, the clever mythologist of Renan's school; the Protestant Georges Perrot, a learned archæologist and traveller; the witty Voltairean Goumy, and many others.

ture and feed young giants at great expense to employ them afterwards not in felling oaks but in cutting faggots? M. Taine preferred to remain a student at Paris; but what a student! He began mathematics and science, particularly physiology. During his residence at Nevers he conceived an entirely new psychology, an exact and exhaustive description of the faculties of man, and the forms of the mind. He soon saw that it was not possible to be a real psychological philosopher without on the one hand a knowledge of the language of mathematics, and on the other of natural history—a twofold source of knowledge, which all the sciolists of the eclectic school otherwise so distinguished, lack. For three years he studied mathematical analysis thoroughly, but less, however, than he wished, and industriously attended the lectures at the School of Medicine, and also those at the Museum.[1] In that rough way he became what he really is at bottom, a learned man, a man of a general idea, of an exact, categorical, fettered system, which he applied to everything, and which rules him even in his most extended literary excursions. Everything comes from a first idea, and attaches itself to it; nothing is offered by chance, from fancy, nor, as with us who are frivolous, on account of mere pleasantness.

His essay on La Fontaine (1853) was very much remarked; its form and groundwork, everything about it, was original and even strange; he has since touched it up and much improved it, showing thereby how amenable he is to criticism, at least to criticism which concerns form and does not too nearly touch the basis and essence of the thought. About the same time he prepared his work on Livy for the French Academy; it was crowned in 1855. Suffering from over-work, he went travelling in the Pyrenees, and that was the occasion of the "Voyage," written by him and illustrated by Doré, where he proved himself a landscape painter of the first rank. He has since, as with his essay on La Fontaine, entirely re-written and reconstructed the "Voyage." The man whom, when we read him, we think so absolute, is the most gentle, amiable, and tolerant spirit in all the relations of life, even of literary life; of all writers, he best

[1] M. Taine wrote to me that I had made him too learned in mathematics: "I scarcely touched mathematics: I merely skimmed the analysis: I understand the idea and method of proceeding, that is all." His studies were almost entirely concentrated on psychology, and that is why he chiefly applied himself to human and comparative physiology.

takes direct contradiction even when it is carried to extremity, I mean, of course, contradiction that is loyal and not hypocritical.

From that time he wrote for the reviews and newspapers: he signalised his *début* in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* by an article on Jean Reynaud's philosophy, "Ciel et Terre"; in the *Revue de l'Instruction Publique* he commenced with an article on La Bruyère; in the *Journal des Débats* with three articles on Saint-Simon.

His position everywhere was made. He never changed his method according to place and surroundings; it was almost a matter of indifference to him whether he wrote here or there; his articles were invariably fragments of the same whole, different applications and different aspects of the same thought.

He criticises himself admirably, and with charming modesty, and I almost sum up his thoughts as well as my own in saying: Belonging to a generation formed by solitude, books, and science, he did not, like our weaker but more mongrel and composite selves, receive successive tradition. They had everything to discover, to commence everything anew on their own lines. They lacked the unconscious habit of comparison, of conciliatory combinations, of the broad views gained by frequenting society; shades and correctives did not enter into their early manner; they were dogmatic and crude. One day, thought, fully armed, sprang, like Minerva at the stroke of the axe, from their brain. From M. Guizot, however, whom he had the advantage of meeting early, and also from M. Dubois, M. Taine learned something of that contemporary knowledge which improves and renders concise; but it was neither frequent nor constant enough. He is of a generation which did not spend enough time in going into society, in wandering here and there and listening. If he asked questions, and he liked to do so, it was in a hurried manner, with the purpose of replying to a thought he already possessed. He talked, discussed with friends of his own age, artists, doctors; in long *tête-à-tête* conversations he exchanged endless views on the origin of things, on the problems which attract and occupy young and lofty intellects: he did not come into close enough contact with men of different generations, schools, and contrary *régimes*, and above all took no account of the relation of books and ideas to living persons and the greatest authors, or of their distance from them. That is not accomplished in a day, nor in a few meetings, but gradually, almost by chance; often the decisive word which shows us a man's nature, and criticises and defines it, escapes only at the tenth or twentieth encounter. In com-

pensation, science, the country, and solitary nature acted powerfully on him, and to them he owes very opposite and vivid sensations. Leaving the intellectual furnace of the Normal School, and returning in the autumn to his Ardennes, what a sudden, profound, and refreshing impression he received! What a plunge into the open air and the salubrity of wild nature! He more than once expressed the soul and genius of such scenery with the colours and flavour of a vivifying asperity. Judging by experience and from the widest moral point of view what it was that those meritorious and austere lives especially seemed to lack, and what by its absence somewhat spoiled the balance, was that pleasantest of all society, which makes us waste time so agreeably, the society of women. It is a kind of more or less romantic ideal which we amorously caress, and which is returned to us in a multitude of inappreciable pleasures: those laborious, eloquent, and eager devourers of books were unable while young to cultivate the art of pleasing and of making themselves liked, an art which teaches more than one useful lesson in the practice and philosophy of life. The gain of such abstinence was that they were not like so many others, enervated and broken in their youth. Like men of a former generation, they did not spend a large amount of time in barren regrets, in vague desire of expectation, in the melancholy and languor resulting from pleasure. Their active brain power remained uninjured. At the first they had a great weight to lift; they applied themselves to it wholly and succeeded; the weight lifted, they might well think themselves old in heart and feel worn out; the bloom of youth had already taken wing; the path, one of rigour and austere virility, was chosen: it cost some sacrifice. When, after reading M. Taine, you are fortunate enough to make his personal acquaintance, you will recognise in him a special charm of his own, which marks him out among those young stoics of study and thought: he combines with his precocious maturity a true openness of heart and a sound moral innocence. He offers the contrary picture to that described by the poet, "a fruit already ripe on a stalk still young and tender;" he presents a fresh and delicate flower on a slightly rugged stem.

II.

I must however revert to his method, and say a word about it; I only aim here at making him better known as regards the whole of him, and at discussing him from all points of view. It

once pleased him—for talent takes every tone—to paint a portrait of infinite delicacy, that of a woman, Madame de la Fayette, or rather the Princess of Cleves, the heroine of the most polite romance of the seventeenth century: in it he surpassed himself, and while employing his usual method, toned it down. His general idea, and he is quite right, was that such a romance could only be created and flourish in the seventeenth century, in the midst of that select society, the only society capable of enjoying its nobility, refinement, and modesty of feeling and style; nothing like it can ever again be produced.

Usually when I read M. Taine I am so entirely at one with him in the basis and essential part that I am really at a loss to note the exact place where my doubt and dissent begin. I ask therefore to be permitted in this particular case to act in the way I like best, and to fix my limit with precision; for a long time I have been thinking it out for myself and merely for my own pleasure. Later we shall come to the great work that is to occupy us here; but if I succeed in showing what I fully concede to M. Taine, and also what more I desire of him, and ask him to grant, I shall have given in a condensed form the conclusion to be drawn, which would be the same in every case, varied only more or less, according to the examples.

After demonstrating with great art and skill how perfectly refined the language of the "Princess of Cleves" is, and how very little it resembles that which has been greeted in the most enlightened poets and novelists of our time with like praise; after recognising the concord and harmony of the sentiments and emotions with the manner of their expression, and giving more than one example of the scruples and exquisite generosity of the heroine even under the influence of passion, M. Taine adds—

"The style and sentiment are so far removed from ours that we can scarcely understand them. They resemble a too delicate perfume: we smell it no longer; so much delicacy seems to us cold and insipid. Society transformed has transformed the soul. Man, like every living thing, changes with the air that nourishes him. So it is from one end of history to the other; every age produces its own sentiments and beauty out of its own circumstances; and in proportion as the human race progresses, it leaves behind it forms of society and kinds of perfection it will never see again. No age has the right of imposing its beauty on succeeding ages; it is the duty of no age to borrow its beauty from preceding ages. Invention and understanding are needed, not disparagement and imitation. History should be

respectful and art original. We should admire what we have and what we lack; we should act differently from our ancestors, and yet praise what our ancestors have done."

And after some forcible examples drawn from the art of the middle ages and the Renaissance, each original and clearly designed in its own style, he comes to the literary and spiritual art of the seventeenth century, and continues in these terms—

"Now open a volume of Racine or of this 'Princess of Cleves' and you will recognise the nobility, the proportion, the charming refinement, the simplicity and perfection of the style which is the possession of a new-born literature alone, and that only the life of the drawing-room, the manners of the court, and aristocratic sentiments can produce. Neither the ecstasy of the middle ages nor the ardent paganism of the sixteenth century, nor the refinement and the language of the court of Louis XIV., can be again. The human mind flows with events like a river. With every hundred miles the landscape changes: here, rugged mountains and the poetry of wild nature; further, long rows of vigorous trees, which thrust their roots into the water; lower still, vast even plains and lovely distant views placed as if to give pleasure to the eye; now, the buzzing hive of a crowded town with the beauty of profitable work and useful arts. The traveller floating down that changeful flood is wrong to regret or despise the sights he leaves behind him, and should expect to see those passing before his eyes disappear in a few hours for ever."

Admirable and charming passage! but something is wanting. I say to the author, pardon me, your conclusion is extravagant, or at least it does not say everything; as a critic you are right in those eulogies so ably deduced and motived, drawn from the general condition of society at different times; but in my opinion you are wrong in seeing in the refinement you admire and seem so greatly to enjoy but one absolute result and product of those conditions. There have been, and always will be, let us hope, refined minds; and, favoured or not by their surroundings, they will seek their ideal world, their chosen forms of expression. And if they received the gift at their birth, and are endowed with the talent of imagination, they will create beings in their own image.

It is understood that I speak in the supposition, which is the true one, that the framework of civilisation will never be wholly changed, that tradition will never be entirely destroyed, and that even in totally different societies there will be place for the same essential forms of intellect.

If you transport us in imagination into entirely different

régimes, I can only say that, once acquired, I believe in the permanence of a certain refinement in the human soul, in the minds of men and women.

Critic, in the mere passing from one century to another, you should not so hotly espouse the side of loss of refinement.

Thus speaking of the "Princess of Cleves," you mention a novel of Balzac, *Le Lys dans la Vallée*, and you declare it is considered "coarse and medical" by the side of the former. But give me leave to tell you that you are too ready to imagine that the modern novels, and the passages of dialogue you quote, were accepted at their birth, or are accepted now, as types of actual refinement. I confess that in my youth I lived with persons whom they shocked, although they rendered justice to other parts of the author's talents. I can assure you that those passages which only seem unrefined to you in comparison with the "Princess of Cleves" were in my time considered by most readers exceedingly unrefined in themselves. Our scale of refinement, even in this nineteenth century, differing as it does so vastly from the others, is less coarse than you imagine. It is true that honest, sincere, and truthful criticism was and is perhaps only to be found in conversation: praises alone are written down. That tends to lessen the value of writings, and when we say and repeat that literature is the outward expression of society, we must not believe it without many precautions and reservations.

You say that "the human mind flows with events like a river." I reply *yes* and *no*. But since the human mind is not like a river, composed of a number of *similar* drops, I boldly say *no*. In a word, there was only one mind in the seventeenth century capable of producing a "Princess of Cleves": otherwise many would have been forthcoming.

As a general rule there is only one soul, one particular form of mind to produce any masterpiece. In a matter of historical testimony I understand equivalents: in the matter of taste I know none. Imagine a great genius the less, imagine the mould, or better the magic mirror of one true poet broken at his birth, no other exactly like it will ever be encountered, nor any that can take its place. There is only one exemplar of each true poet.

I take another example of that unique speciality of talent. *Paul and Virginia* certainly bears traces of its epoch; but if *Paul and Virginia* had not been written, we might uphold by all sorts of specious and plausible arguments that it was impossible for a book of that virginal quality to have been produced amid the corruption of the eighteenth century.

Bernardin de Saint-Pierre was the only man able to do it. I repeat there is nothing more incomprehensible than genius: if it was not incomprehensible, if it was not unique among many, unique among all, it would not be genius.

I do not know if I explain myself clearly, but that is the vital point which, whatever his skill in employing it, M. Taine's manner and method does not touch. So far he remains always outside, letting the thing called individuality of talent, of genius, escape through the meshes of the net, however finely woven. The learned critic attacks and invests it like an engineer: he beleaguers it, blockades it, and narrowly shuts it in under pretext of surrounding all the important outward conditions: those conditions, in fact, serve individuality and personal originality, provoke it and excite it, make it without creating it, more or less able to act and react. That spark which Horace calls divine "divinæ particulam auræ," and which in the primitive and natural sense it certainly is, has not yet yielded to science, and rests unexplained. That is no reason for science to lay down its arms and renounce its courageous enterprise. The siege of Troy lasted ten years; this is one of the problems that will last perhaps as long as the human race itself.

Let all of us who are partisans of the naturalist method in literature, each applying it according to our limits in different degrees,[1] all of us who are labourers and servants of the same science that we seek to make as exact as possible, continue, without bribing ourselves with vague notions and vain words, to observe, to study, and to examine the conditions of works remarkable for different reasons, and the infinite variety of forms of genius; let us compel them to give us up the truth and tell us how and why they are of one fashion rather than of another, even if, in spite of all our efforts, we are unable to explain everything, and if one last point, like a last invincible citadel, should still resist our attacks.

III.

The *History of English Literature* is a book possessing unity from beginning to end: it was conceived, constructed, and executed at one time; the first and the last chapters corre-

[1] In speaking thus I am reminded of the clever book full of facts just published by M. Emile Deschanel under the title of *Physiologie des Ecrivains et des Artistes ou Essai de Critique naturelle* (Hachette); it deserves special examination.

spond. Barbarism and Saxon semi-civilisation, crossed with Norman skill and refinement, the whole confined, rammed down in its island, wrought, finely ground, kneaded, and matured through the ages, is, as the author well demonstrates, to be seen again in the conclusion, in the condition of the most vigorous, solid, sensible, esteemed, well-balanced, positive and poetic of free nations. All the great literary monuments, all the significant works which testify to the various stages and the progress of that civilisation from the minstrel Cædmon, the earliest barbaric singer, already biblical, to Lord Byron, are examined and described.

Until after the period of the Norman Conquest and of the formation of the new language, only slight and fragmentary evidence exists. The conquest of England by the Normans is the last in date of the great territorial invasions that everywhere preceded the middle ages. When it took place, mediæval times had already commenced in other countries; the English language, and consequently the literature that was to be written in it, was behind other continental literatures, especially the French: it was inspired and impregnated by French forms, and only acquired with time its real temperament, its own quality. Chaucer, the earliest of English poets and story-tellers, was a disciple of the Troubadours and of the authors of the fabliaux; in his best work he added something which is his and his alone; he already possessed a thing that was to be called *humour*, and a great natural vivacious descriptive power: he has been happily compared to a bright, cheerful morning of early spring. What is chiefly to be remarked in the oldest productions of English literature is how the Saxon character kept its ground, and yielded in language and literature no more than in politics; under brilliant superficial coatings it preserved its taste, traditions, accent, and vocabulary. Comparing the ballads of Robin Hood with the French fabliaux, and in contrasting them with what is of French origin, M. Taine clearly hits on the difference of the two minds, of the two races, a difference that the Norman conquest in no way destroyed.

"What occupies the mind of the French people? The fabliaux, the naughty tricks of Renard, the art of deceiving Master Ysengrin, of stealing his wife, of cheating him out of his dinner, of getting him beaten by a third party without danger to one's self; in short, the triumph of poverty and cleverness over power united to folly. The popular hero is already the artful plebeian, chaffing, light-hearted, who, later on, will ripen into Panurge and Figaro."

Instead, then, of the students' tricks, which go very far back, instead of the rogueries of Villon and Patelin, which made the French peasant and populace laugh so heartily, what amused and delighted the English in everything, even in the sermon? It was the merry rebel forester and the king of poachers, Robin Hood, the valiant comrade, never merrier nor in better humour for wielding sword or cudgel than when the wood is full of sunshine and the grass is tall.

"In fact, he is the national hero. Saxon in the first place, and waging war against the men of law, against bishops and archbishops; . . . generous, moreover, giving to a poor ruined knight clothes, horse, and money to buy back the land he had pledged to a rapacious abbot; compassionate, too, and kind to the poor, enjoining his men not to injure yeomen and labourers; but before all rash, bold, proud, who would go and draw his bow under the sheriff's eyes and to his face; ready with blows, whether to receive or to return them."

A feeling for what is robust, solid, spirited, gay, succulent, loyal, and honest in the English character, even as far as violence and excess of strength, breathes through M. Taine's book. By the side of England's jovial fellows, tingling with life, full of brilliant sallies and high spirits, from Robin Hood to Lord Chatham and Junius, even amid the elegance and polite manners of eighteenth century *salons* when the French and English rivalled each other in conversation and piquant sayings, the famous French wits, the Nivernais and Boufflers seemed to the English thin, blunted, jaded, and colourless: ask that impartial critic, Horace Walpole, who knew both societies well.

Pope, for whom, as I do not study him solely from the racial point of view, I have more admiration than M. Taine has, distinguishes the different epochs of English poetry by four names, four brightly burning beacons: Chaucer, Spenser, Milton, and Dryden. Between Spenser and Milton, Shakespeare, chief of his powerful dramatic constellation, must be placed. Pope himself deserves to give a name to a sixth epoch, and in a seventh, the modern epoch, Byron, by his brilliance and the scope of his imagination, stands first among so many others. But it is no longer the custom to write the history of poetry and literature with names and persons; the brilliant man of genius is only the standard-bearer and speaking-trumpet, the collector of a number of sentiments and thoughts which float and circulate vaguely around him. I do not say with one of the most original poets of our time: "What is a great poet? He is a

corridor through which the wind blows." No, the poet is nothing so simple, he is not a resultant, or even a mere reflecting focus; he possesses his own mirror, his unique individual *monad.* All that passes through his node and organ is transformed, and when it goes forth again, it is combined and created; for the poet only creates with what he receives. On that point I wholly agree with M. Taine.

From its arrangement his book possesses the advantage of bringing into relief the most difficult and arduous parts, the great early epochs of English literature. The Renaissance is admirably treated. It did not work in England as in France; it did not put a sudden end to the middle ages; it did not produce *topsy-turvydom* or a destructive inundation in art, poetry, and the drama; it found a rich, solid basis resisting as always; it covered it in some places and mingled with it in others. By the enthusiasm and ardour of his writing, M. Taine makes us understand and almost love the chief actors and heroes of the English literary Renaissance: in prose, Sir Philip Sidney, a d'Urfé anterior to the French; in poetry Spenser, the lover of fairyland, whom he admires more than all the rest. When describing and painting him, he seems to swim in the open lake, to float in his element like a swan. He likes strength even in grace, and does object to extravagance and excess. He might astonish the English themselves by that animated impression which absolutely depends on his own way of reading. M. Taine has the courage of his opinions. He evades nothing, he cares for nothing but his purpose. He approaches the author he is reading directly and with all his vigour of mind; he receives a clear impression at first hand and first sight *facie ad faciem;* his conclusion springs naturally from the source, bubbles up, and overflows. In some cases this leads him to go beyond received opinions, to shatter those that are established, and to introduce new ones even at the risk of surprising and wounding. Little matters it to him! He goes straight on his way and takes no heed. He underrates or overrates just as he is impressed: he despises Butler for his much-praised *Hudibras,* and extols the fanatic Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress.* When I say he praises him I exaggerate: he describes the man and his work, but with such art that his words conjure up a picture that produces a life-like impression.

The concise, compressed style, taking its way by series, lines, and sequences, by frequent and repeated strokes, by phrases and as it were small, deep-cut hatchings, of his picturesque descriptions and analyses, made a critic of the old school

say that he seemed to hear the rough, sharp hail falling and jumping on the roofs—

"Tam multa in tectis crepitans salit horrida grando."

In the long run the style produces a fixed, inevitable impression on the mind, which occasionally acts on the nerves. It is there that the man of science and the man of vigour must be careful not to weary the man of taste.

I know that at the present time the doctrine of too much, of so-called legitimate exaggeration, even of monstrosity is regarded as a mark of genius, but I ask to go as far as that only with many reservations. I prefer to dwell on this side, and have retained of my old literary habits the necessity of not fatiguing myself, and the desire of taking pleasure in what I admire.

Force and majesty suit M. Taine, and he holds to them with visible delight. He surpasses himself in describing the tumultuous medley of the English drama of the sixteenth century, the stage and audience made for each other, the constellation of powerful dramatists, including Marlowe, Massinger, Ford, Webster, and others, of whom Shakespeare was only the greatest. They have of late, with praiseworthy rivalry, been studied[1] in France, but no one has so forcibly interpreted and described them as M. Taine: he puts them before us as if they were living and moving. The translations embodied in the text are the very essence of the originals, the flesh and blood of the English drama.

I leave to Shakespearian scholars M. Taine's particular interpretation of the poet's genius and ruling faculty, "imagination and pure passion." I confess that in my view the method of interpreting a great genius as an absolute type and symbol for the future seems necessarily conjectural: he is not exactly overrated, but too much generalised, and, as it were, raised in imagination above his work, no matter how strong and great it may already be in itself. It is an eternal problem remaining for competition. From time to time we like to try our strength: each in turn breaks a lance for it. It is, nevertheless, right that every critic who assiduously applies himself to one of the master geniuses, and aspires to understand him, should frankly state his opinion, should while criticising be himself criticised, and that all interpretations should be given forth

[1] Cf. the *Prédecesseurs et Contemporains de Shakespeare*, by M. A. Mezières (Charpentier, 1863); and also the *Contemporains de Shakespeare*, commencing with Ben Jonson, translated by M. Ernest Lafond (Hetzel, 1863).

and should be spread abroad. To speak the truth, they are less interpretations than experiments: and it thus makes an everlasting combat over master spirits the noblest and most generous dispute for future races.

The prose-writers of the Renaissance, of whom Bacon is the greatest, although many besides have since regained favour and reaped a rich aftermath of fame, rightly find a place in M. Taine's book. Robert Burton, author of the *Anatomy of Melancholy*, Thomas Browne, a learned and somewhat eccentric man, an encyclopædic and poetical seeker after knowledge, are described in a never-to-be-forgotten way. Browne, at the same time as he is modern and optimist in certain of his views, meditates on the wrecks of the past with a beautiful sadness and profound scepticism :—

"But the iniquity of oblivion blindly scattereth her poppy, and deals with the memory of men without distinction to merit of perpetuity. Who can but pity the founder of the pyramids? Herostratus lives that burnt the temple of Diana; he is almost lost that built it. Time hath spared the epitaph of Adrian's horse, confounded that of himself. . . . All was vanity, feeding the wind, and folly. The Egyptian mummies, which Cambyses or time hath spared, avarice now consumeth. Mummy is become merchandise, Mizraim cures wounds, and Pharaoh is sold for balsams. . . . The greater part must be content to be as though they had not been, to be found in the register of God, not in the record of man. Twenty-seven names make up the first story before the flood, and the recorded names ever since contain not one living century."

That is a passage which must be remembered and repeated even in the presence of the legitimate pride of science reconquering the past by fragments, but only by fragments. Yes, even after reading only the other day M. de Rougé's interesting and lucid report about Egyptian antiquities, and the few further names rescued from oblivion, I could not help repeating the passage. What gaps there are, gaps out of all proportion to what we know and ever shall know! what enormous, irreparable blanks! Chance, chance, if we wish to be true, your part will never be recognised as great as it deserves, nor shall we ever pierce deep enough into the philosophy of history.

IV.

Milton, England's most splendid and most complex poetical genius, is appreciated and expounded by M. Taine in a

fashion, as far as my knowledge goes, never before accomplished. He appears just at the right moment, after a characteristic picture of the Christian Renaissance, of which he is the gentle and tender blossom, the sublime, although slightly fantastical crown. His moral complexity, his unity, the contradictions he combines and arranges in himself, his stability of mind and genius, is all described, analysed, reproduced in more than a hundred pages, as beautiful in thought as in expression, and quite on a level with the subject; I quote a few striking passages:—

"Vast knowledge, close logic, and grand passion: these were his marks. His mind was lucid, his imagination limited. He was incapable of disturbed emotion or of transformation. He conceived the loftiest of ideal beauties, but he conceived only one. He was not born for the drama but for the ode. He does not create souls, but constructs arguments and experiences emotions. Emotions and arguments, all the forces and actions of his soul, assemble, and are arranged beneath a unique sentiment, that of the sublime; and the broad river of lyric poetry streams from him, impetuous, with even flow, splendid as a cloth of gold. . . .

"He was nourished by reading Spenser, Drayton, Shakespeare, Beaumont, all the most sparkling poets; and the golden flow of the preceding age, though impoverished all around him and slackened in himself, has become enlarged like a lake through being dammed up in his heart. . . .

"When still quite young, on his quitting Cambridge, he inclined to the magnificent and grand; he wanted a great rolling verse, an ample and sounding strophe, vast periods of fourteen and four-and-twenty lines. He did not face objects on a level, as a mortal, but from on high, like archangels. . . . It was not *life* that he felt, like the masters of the Renaissance, but *greatness*, like Æschylus and the Hebrew seers, manly and lyric spirits like his own, who, nourished like him in religious emotions and continuous enthusiasm, like him displayed sacerdotal pomp and majesty. To express such a sentiment, images, and poetry addressed only to the eyes, were not enough; sounds also were requisite, and that more introspective poetry which, purged from corporeal shows, could reach the soul: Milton was a musician; his hymns rolled with the slowness of a measured song and the gravity of a declamation. . . .

"He makes us understand the saying of his master Plato, that virtuous melodies teach virtue. . . ."

And again this phrase—"Milton's landscapes are a school of virtue."

Milton's virtue adapted itself to Cromwell. It is asked how? I shall attempt to answer the question. Cromwell was never first nor last the man whom the French, with Bossuet for a guide, are accustomed to see, nor was he the man he seemed to be according to French notions of monarchical reactions, notions they keep for others when they have rid themselves of them. For a long time Cromwell was the bulwark of all that was strong, virtuous, religious, upright, radically English in the nation.

Milton from a distance seems isolated, but he was not the only poet of his party who celebrated Cromwell, and on looking more closely, it will be found that, if in consequence of the troublous times Milton was not like Shakespeare, the centre of a constellation, there were, however, other powerful poets, his emulators and rivals.

There is an ode by Andrew Marvell which belongs to the same movement of the Christian and patriotic renaissance. It is in the form and almost in the rhythm of the ode in which Horace sings the return of Augustus from some victory: its theme is Cromwell's return from his Irish expedition in the memorable year of 1649, England's '93; it foretells the events of the following year, and shows Cromwell anxious to accomplish his destiny although still obedient to law. The fire of enthusiasm for public affairs, the majesty and terror that these great revolutionary saviours, men of the dagger and sword, inspire, has never called forth truer or more thrilling accents issuing in fast flowing waves from a sincere heart:

"'Tis madness to resist or blame
The force of angry heaven's flame;
And if we would speak true,
Much to the man is due,
Who from his private gardens, where
He lived reserved and austere,
As if his highest plot
To plant the bergamot,
Could by industrious valour climb
To ruin the great work of Time,
And cast the kingdoms old,
Into another mould."

We feel here that English reality and freedom of tone are ill contained under classical imitation; they pierce and burst, as it were, their Horatian wrappings.

The poet compares Cromwell, still modest, according to him,

eager only to obey the Republic and the Commons, to a generous bird of prey, docile to the hunter, who only stains the air with blood for his sake:

> "So when the falcon high
> Falls heavy from the sky,
> She, having killed, no more doth search,
> But on the next green bough to perch;
> Where, where he first does lure,
> The falconer has her sure."

Thus is the republic sure of its Cromwell.

Compare this ode with the noble and fervent sonnet Milton addressed to Cromwell about the same time:

> "Cromwell, our chief of men, who through a cloud
> Not of war only, but detractions rude,
> Guided by faith and matchless fortitude,
> To peace and truth thy glorious way hast plough'd.
> . . . . . .
> new foes arise
> Threatening to bind our souls with secular chains:
> Help us to save free conscience from the paw
> Of hireling wolves, whose gospel is their maw."

He expresses the same sentiment as Marvell, more heroic and martial with him, more purely Christian with Milton. In fact, Cromwell, I repeat, was the bulwark and buckler of all men of free conscience and faith. Such a man is not to be judged incidentally; he is one of the most complex and perfect, perhaps the most perfect and thoroughly sound of his kind there has ever been. Chateaubriand said of him: "That he partook of the priest, the tyrant, and the great man;" he adds: "that he destroyed the institutions he encountered, in the same fashion as Michael Angelo destroyed the marble with his chisel." Cromwell did not destroy the character of the nation; he moulded, cemented, and consolidated it. Something better than a legislative code is due to him; he founded a policy. He paved the way for a glorious and decisive revolution (1688); he alone made possible in their right season the bloodless triumph of the patriots of that epoch. The *Lord Protector* helped, more than any English king, to make the proud character of the nation pass into its foreign policy, to make her what she has for so long gloried in being, the arbiter and governor of storms, the ruler of the seas, "Celsa sedet Æolus arce." He defied the world not only as a regicide but as an Englishman. His sombre temperament, gloomy

or clumsily cheerful, the tinge of the fanatic and visionary with which he was endowed, which covered up and concealed to superficial judgment his sound and well-balanced common-sense, separated him from the heroic figures that naturally attract French genius. He is only the more thoroughly in harmony with his race; he is its vigorous incarnation. No one is more thickly incrusted with English greatness. Enough and more than enough has now been said of him, but Milton, who was his poet, is my excuse.

After Milton, the variable, fertile, flexible, unequal Dryden, man of change and uncertainty, in point of date the first classical author, though at the same time broad-minded and powerful, does not give M. Taine much cause for complaint. The critic sets clearly before us the versatile, needy life, and the genius which like life goes somewhat by chance, yet is broad, abundant, imaginative, vivified by a vigorous sap, and nourished and watered by a copious vein of poetry.

It is rather the great poet of the following age, the classical writer in his perfection and concise elegance, it is Pope whom M. Taine does *not* praise; and since, for fear of monotony, it is well to vary praise by a little blame, I disagree with him on that point.

It cannot be the elegance and politeness in Pope's genius and person that displeases M. Taine; for no one better appreciates Addison, the earliest type of English urbanity in so far as there is urbanity. He criticises Addison and his temperate, discreet, moral, and decorous style capitally, the *quod decet* he was the first to teach his fellow-countrymen: he gives due justice to the characters of an entirely English physiognomy so exquisitely sketched in the *Spectator*. But in regard to Pope, M. Taine does not make the effort, necessary to every literary historian, of putting at need restraint on himself and against himself, and consequently his picture of the poet, long regarded as the most perfect of his nation, and so greeted by Byron, is full of marked disfavour and displeasure.

Nothing is easier than to caricature Pope; but nothing is more unjust than to gauge fine minds by their defects and the listlessnesses and weaknesses of their nature alone. Ought we in fairness to see in Pope only "a dwarf, four feet high, contorted, hunchbacked, thin, valetudinarian, appearing, when he arrived at maturity, no longer capable of existing"? Is it right to set his bodily infirmities over against his delightful wit, and to say "he could not get up himself, a woman dressed him; he wore three pairs of stockings, drawn on one over the other, so

slender were his legs; when he rose he was invested in bodice made of stiff canvas, being scarce able to hold himself erect till it was laced, and he then put on a flannel waistcoat"? It is not for me to blame a critic for pointing out, even in close detail, his author's physiology and the degree of his good or bad health, which must undoubtedly influence his conduct and genius. The truth is that Pope wrote not with his muscles but with his pure intellect. In the description quoted above, I take exception only to the choice of words, to the rough, disagreeable fashion in which the poet is treated, a fashion which tends to make him ridiculous in the reader's mind. Let us leave that style to those who write merely to amuse, or to abandon themselves without restraint to their antipathies. Had we known Horace, I think it would have been possible to make a like caricature of him; he was very small in stature, and towards the end of his life corpulent to excess. Once again, let us return to truth and to the true literature which never forgets humanity, and which includes a sort of sympathy for all that is worthy of it; if we are just to the ex-tinker Bunyan, who in his fanatical vision gave proof of strength and imagination, do not let us on the other hand crush Pope, the delicate and spiritual being, the quintessence of soul, the drop of living wit reared with such great care. Do not let us use him roughly, and in taking his hand to place him in our medical, almost anatomical chair, let us be careful (as if he was still alive) not to hurt him. I should like in literature always to adapt our method to our subject, and to surround those who call for and demand it with particular care.

Pope's natural history is very simple. It is said that the delicate are unfortunate, and he was doubly delicate, delicate in mind, delicate and feeble in body; he was doubly irritable. But what charm, grace, readiness to feel, justice and perfection of expression!

True, he was precocious; is that a crime? As a child he was endowed with a gentle expression, and so sweet a voice that he was called "the little nightingale." His first teachers were of little account; he educated himself; at twelve years of age he learnt Latin and Greek concurrently and almost without a master. At fifteen he resolved to go to London to learn French and Italian in order to be able to read the literatures of France and Italy. His family was Roman Catholic and had retired from trade. At that time they lived on an estate in Windsor Forest. They regarded his wish as an eccentric caprice, for his health scarcely ever permitted him to change his dwelling. He persisted and accomplished his purpose; thus he learned almost

everything by himself, following his inclination in his reading, working at grammar quite alone, and delighting to translate into verse the finest passages of the Greek and Latin poets. At the age of sixteen he said his taste was as fully formed as it was later.

In all that I see nothing ridiculous, nothing that does not do honour to the young and fertile mind. If such a thing as the literary temperament exists, it has never been more characteristically shown and more clearly defined than in Pope. A man is usually classical by discipline and education: Pope, so to say, was classical by inclination and a natural originality. Side by side with the poets, he read the best of the critics, and prepared to have his say after them. He early imbibed a taste for Homer, and read him in the original. Among the Latins, next to Virgil, he liked Statius best. At that period he liked Tasso better than Ariosto, a preference he always retained.

Because he was a papist, he did not go to either university, and did not follow the common way and ordinary methods.

From his youth his precocity as an author brought him into contact with poets and celebrated men. Dryden he only just saw: he died in May 1701, when Pope was going on for twelve years old. But from reading him, the marvellous child had formed so high and loving an idea of his personality that he prevailed on friends to take him to the coffee-house Dryden frequented, and returned perfectly happy at having seen him. Like Ovid, he could say, "Virgilium vidi tantum." He never spoke of his illustrious predecessor without entire reverence, casting aside all idea of rivalry. "I learnt," he said, "the whole art of verse in one reading of Dryden's works, and he himself would doubtless have brought the art to its highest perfection had he been less hampered by necessity." Pope possessed the distinguishing mark of literary natures, the faithful worship of genius.

If he hated stupid writers and poetasters too much, he only admired good and great ones the more. Malherbe and Boileau were joined together in him, a bold importation, and a fresh transplantation in the open ground.

Exposed in childhood to many perils, and more than once in danger of death from accident or in consequence of his frail constitution and nature, many touching proofs of his tender and lasting gratitude to those who took interest in him and helped to save him are preserved. Whatever may be said of his irritability of criticism and the much-to-be-regretted extravagances into which it led him, he possessed a human soul intended for affection. After his death an attempt was made to bring forward certain facts to blacken his character: they

have since been satisfactorily explained; his work speaks for him.

Advised early by a friend, the poet Walsh, whose acquaintance he made when he was about fifteen, he felt that after all that had been done in poetry, only one way of excelling was left. "We have had several great poets," he said, "but we have never had one great poet that was correct; and he advised me to make that my study and my aim." Pope took the advice and devoted the whole of his life, which lasted fifty-six years, to that study and to the noble aim he was able to reach and fulfil.

Is he then to be reproached for the pains he took to render himself, with his feeble health, fit for the difficult immortal task? He was attentive to everything even in conversation; when a thought, a happy, refined, or animated expression was uttered in his presence or flashed into his own mind, he was eager to gather it: always desiring what was good and excellent, he amassed it little by little, and never willingly cast the smallest fraction of it aside. He wore himself out; if necessary he got up in the night, and as he was unable to wait on himself, he made his servants rise in order that he might write down a thought he feared to lose, which he would have forgotten by the morning; for many of our best thoughts, like the Egyptians in the Red Sea, are drowned and engulfed for ever between two sleeps. I am quite willing that we should smile at the extravagant care, the feverish and eager curiosity, but let us smile indulgently, as becomes minds attempered to literature, minds which have themselves felt the gentle mania. Let us not have two standards of weight and measure.

You admire Balzac; you frequently quote him and like to introduce him among the English authors, even where he is not wanted: therefore I take him as an example familiar to you. I remember some interesting revelations I mean some day to make about his strange preoccupation in his work, and his author's egoism. How many times Balzac, in the middle of the night, went to the bedside of Jules Sandeau, sound asleep, who was then living under the same roof! Balzac woke him without ceremony suddenly, merely to show and read to him hurriedly what he had just composed, while it was all hot and smoking; for he lived in his work as in a cave of Vulcan, where he forged, and hit the anvil with repeated blows, and during that time the outer world did not exist for him. You might speak to him of your mother, sister, or mistress; "Yes, that's all very well," he would say, "but let us return to facts. . . . What shall we do with Nucingen, with the Duchess of

Langeais?" He had gone back to actual life; for him reality was a dream. Once Balzac, meeting Jules Sandeau, who had returned from his native place, where he had suffered a cruel affliction, the death of a sister, after some preliminary questions about his family, suddenly remembering himself, said: "Enough of that sort of talk, let us return to serious things." It was a question of setting to work again, I think, on *Père Goriot.*

In regard to inspiration and animation, that may perhaps be deemed fine; it is certainly original, and we must admire in it a faculty of singular and powerful transposition. Well! in leaving the sphere of creation, a creation somewhat blind and nebulous, and in deigning to enter the serene and temperate sphere of moral ideas, of wise and lucid thoughts, of lofty and refined reflections, things that are the true aim, and, as Montaigne would put it, the quarry of philosophers and wise men, let us not scoff too much at the strange and amiable Pope for listening so carefully to the voice of his particular demon and genius, for lending his ear to the purely abstract and spiritual inspirations raised in the solitude of the closet, or in a *tête-à-tête* conversation during a walk in some grove of Tibur or Tusculum when the mind, though calm, is excited by the emulation or the gentle contradiction of a friend. Let us not be scandalised if Pope in his own person, initiating us with a kind of artlessness into his constant literary preoccupation, makes some such confidence as this—

"When Swift and I were once in the country for some time together, I happened one day to be saying, 'that if a man was to take notice of the reflections that came into his mind on a sudden as he was walking in the fields, or sauntering in his study, there might be several of them perhaps as good as his most deliberate thoughts.' On this hint we both agreed to write down all the volunteer reflections that should thus come into our heads all the time we stayed there. We did so: and this was what afterwards furnished out the maxims published in our miscellanies. Those at the end of one volume are mine; and those in the other Dr. Swift's."

Such are the ingenious sports and pastimes of intelligent men of letters; we are undoubtedly far from Shakespeare and even from Milton; but I see nothing that calls for ridicule. In a history of literature I think that the literary part properly so called, even in what it has to offer of the premeditated and the artificial, should, of right, find place and favour. It is thus that Tacitus and the younger Pliny, being together for some time in the villa by Lake Como or in the house

at Laurentinum, which has been so excellently described, would for a few weeks have vied and wagered about philosophy and ethics. The great epoch of inspiration had passed away: the period of calmness and decay left room for many beauties, and even, as proved by Tacitus and Swift, for eloquence.

I have still many things, and useful things, I think, to say about Pope. The name which represents didactic poetry, correct and polished verse in all its finish and charm of diction, affords me a favourable pretext and opportunity for upholding a side which, after having everything granted it formerly, is, at the present time, too much menaced and despised. The historical spirit has invaded literature: it governs all study and pervades all reading. I do not on that account differ from the opinions expressed in M. Taine's book: I demand a supplement and certain corrections in the future. This book of bold and original criticism is like a tree whose branches are all nourished by Anglo-Saxon sap. From that point of view it is certain that Pope's poetry would seem an abortive branch; his is the least Anglo-Saxon of all English poetry. But that is no reason for sacrificing it.

And, in general, I say, let us combine our efforts and oppose and destroy nothing. By reason of your talents, you invite us, you oblige us, to advance with you towards what is great, strong, and difficult, to what without your help we should not have so nearly approached; but do not take from us the pleasant sights to which we are accustomed, our Windsor landscapes and Twickenham gardens. Let us extend our dominion over the deep valleys and high hills, but at the same time let us keep our pretty meadow-lands.

In a word, let us not agree with the pessimist who lately said to me: "The age is not favourable to Pope, and it begins to be bad for Horace."

V.

It must be well understood that while designedly and by way of example insisting on Pope's merits, I only indirectly find fault with M. Taine's work. He, in fact, recognises the merits and distinctive traits of Pope's splendid genius, and we might even borrow his phrases for defining them. But he does not treat him like the other great poets, and does not care to put him in his fitting place; on the whole, he rather disparages and lowers him, and when obliged to recognise a fine quality, only does so grudgingly.

I attach importance to this because at the present time there is danger of the sacrifice of what I may call dispassionate men of letters and poets. For a long while they had the upper hand and all honour; we pleaded for Shakespeare, Milton, and Dante, even for Homer; there was no need to plead for Virgil, Horace, Boileau, Racine, Voltaire, Pope, and Tasso; they were looked up to and recognised by all. Now the former have gained a complete victory, and things are entirely changed: the greatest and most primitive minds rule and triumph; those who have less invention, but are still naïve and original in thought and expression, the Regniers and Lucretiuses, are replaced in their proper sphere, and the tendency is to subordinate the dispassionate, cultivated, polished poets, the classical authors of a former age, and, if we are not careful, to treat them a little too cavalierly; relatively speaking, a sort of disdain and contempt is very near overtaking them. It seems to me there is room to uphold all, and that none need be cast aside, that in rendering homage and reverence to the great human forces that like the powers of nature burst forth with some strangeness and roughness, we need not cease to honour the more restrained forces that, less explosive in expression, are clothed in elegance and gentleness.

When a critic shall appear who, like M. Taine, possesses the profound historic and vital sentiment of literature, and, like him, drives his roots deep down at the same time as he spreads his green branches above, but who, in addition, will suppress nothing, and will continue to respect and drink in the temperate bloom and the delicate perfume of the Popes, Boileaus, and Fontanes, then will the perfect critic be found: the reconciliation of the two schools will be brought about. But I am asking the impossible: it is indeed but a dream.

However, Pope was a true poet, and, notwithstanding his physical defects, he was, properly speaking, one of the most delicate and beautiful literary organisations ever seen. At the present time it is, I know, difficult to approach him except with objections. And more, he translated Homer: it is said he travestied him, and so he is crushed and compared to La Motte; taking the original text in two or three places, an easy victory may be gained. Note firstly that such a victory is sure to be obtained without distinction over every translator of Homer, whoever he may be. To be just, we must admit that Pope perfectly felt the charm of and admired Homer; his preface was for that time an excellent piece of criticism, and is good also to read now; he admirably understood the greatness, invention, and fertility of the original, the vast primitive univer-

sality whence all styles afterwards flowed. His method of translation in rhymed lines, and the supremely elegant manner in which he carried it out, is in itself an infidelity. Rhyme led him into contrarieties, to frequent antitheses in the turns of the circumscribed phrases which is Pope's chief excellence, but quite contrary to the broad Homeric manner and the natural open river which flows along quickly, sonorously, without stopping. It seems also that William Cowper, in blank verse savouring of Milton's somewhat forced manner, was not more successful in rendering not the continuity but the swiftness of the Homeric river.[1] We must admit that Homer cannot be translated in verse. It is easily understood that Bentley on reading Pope's Homer said: "A pretty poem, Mr. Pope, but you must not call it Homer." None the less is Pope's work in itself a marvellous accomplishment, and on that account alone its author would deserve respect and praise. In translating Homer, Pope was artificial, but in reading him he was not artificial. He once said to a friend: "I have always been particularly struck with the passage in which Homer represents Priam transported with grief for the death of Hector about to burst into reproaches and invectives against the slaves who surround him, and against his sons. It would always be an impossibility to me to read without tears that passage about the misfortunes of the poor old monarch." And then he took the book and attempted to read the passage aloud: "What make ye here? officious crowds . . ." But he was interrupted by his tears.

No example could better prove that the gentle, refined, critical faculty is an active faculty. When nothing is to be rendered, nothing is felt or perceived. Taste and easily awakened sensibility suppose much imagination behind. It is related of Shelley that the first time he heard the poem of "Christabel" read, at a specially magnificent and terrible passage he grew suddenly afraid and swooned. In that swoon was already the poem of "Alastor." Pope, equally sensitive in his way, could not get to the end of that passage in the *Iliad* without bursting into tears. When a man is a critic to that degree, he is a poet.[2]

[1] I take these opinions from one of the keenest and most exact of English critics. Cf. *Three Lectures delivered at Oxford on the style of translating Homer*, by Matthew Arnold. There will be found the last word of taste on Pope's translation.

[2] Cf. an interesting dissertation I have just received from Dublin, *Considerations on the Critical Spirit in Literature*, by Edward Dowden.

He proved this in his "Essay on Criticism," written when he was twenty-one, although it was not published until several years after. To my thinking it is as valuable as the "Epistle to the Pisos," known as Horace's "Ars Poetica," and also that of Boileau. But speaking of Boileau, how can I accept the curious criticism and strange verdict of an intelligent man that "In Boileau there are, as a rule, two kinds of verses, most of which seem to be those of a sharp schoolboy in the third class, the rest those of a good schoolboy in the upper division." By quoting it, M. Taine in some sort makes that opinion his own, and endorses it. M. Guillaume Guizot, who speaks thus, does not recognise Boileau as a poet, and I shall go further and state that he would not recognise any poet considered as a poet. I conceive that all poetry may not be included in the craft; but I do not understand that when it is a question of an art, the art itself should not be taken into account, and that perfect workmen who excel in it should be so greatly depreciated. It would be more expeditious to suppress all poetry in verse at once; otherwise those who possess the secret must be treated with respect. Boileau and Pope were of the small number of them. As I read, what sensible and keen observations, everlastingly true, I gather, and in how brief, concise, and elegant a form are they expressed once and for ever! I quote some—

> "In poets as true genius is but rare,
> True taste as seldom is the critic's share;
> Both must alike from Heaven derive their light,
> These born to judge, as well as those to write."
>
> . . . . . .
>
> "Some have at first for wits, then poets passed,
> Turned critics next, and proved plain fools at last."

That is a reply in advance to those haughty and arrogant artists, impatient, as we have known them, of all observation, and who, distinguishing nothing, can only give one definition of a critic: "What is a critic? A feeble creature, an artist who has failed." Every would-be artist had too deep an interest in that definition of a critic: for years the consequence of it has been the full licence, almost an orgy of talents.

Speaking of Homer and his relation to Virgil, Pope points out the true line and the true method of classical talent, which obtains according to tradition—

"Be Homer's works your study and delight,
. . . . . .
Still with itself compared, his text peruse;
And let your comment be the Mantuan Muse.
When first young Maro in his boundless mind
A work t' outlast immortal Rome designed,
Perhaps he seemed above the critic's law,
And but from Nature's fountains scorned to draw:
But when t' examine every part he came,
Nature and Homer were, he found, the same."

Truly poetry of the second order of ages, of polished and gentle ages, has never been better described. The poet-critic attributes almost too much to Homer, when remembering a saying of Horace by which to disprove such an accusation, he says—

"Those oft are stratagems which error seem,
Nor is it Homer nods, but we that dream."

In many noble and animated passages Pope defined and marked out the splendid part of a true critic—

"A perfect judge will read each work of wit
With the same spirit that its author writ:
Survey the whole, nor seek slight faults to find
Where nature moves, and rapture warms the mind;
Nor lose, for that malignant dull delight,
The generous pleasure to be charmed with wit."

And the fine portrait, the ideal of the race, which every professional critic ought to have framed and hung up in his study—

"But where's the man, who counsel can bestow,
Still pleased to teach, and yet not proud to know?
Unbiassed, or by favour, or by spite;
Not dully prepossessed, nor blindly right;
Though learned, well-bred; and though well-bred, sincere,
Modestly bold, and humanly severe:
Who to a friend his faults can freely show,
And gladly praise the merit of a foe?
Blest with a taste exact, yet unconfined;
A knowledge both of books and human kind:
Generous converse; a soul exempt from pride;
And love to praise, with reason on his side?"

Pope well knew that to be a true and perfect critic it was not alone sufficient to cultivate and enlarge the intelligence, it was continually necessary to purge the mind of evil passions

and equivocal feelings; the soul must be kept in a healthy and loyal condition.

No man feels beauty to such a degree of vivacity and refinement without being terribly shocked by evil and ugliness. He must pay for such exquisite enjoyment. When the mind is open and sensible to beauty, even to weeping like Pope, it is equally sensible of blemishes even to the degree of becoming angry and irritable. He who takes most delight in the perfume of the rose is the first to be offended by an unpleasant odour. Perhaps no one ever felt in so great a degree as Pope the consciousness and pain of stupid literature. What is to be done with the stupid writers? In our time we dare not call them fools; indeed they are for the most part so impregnated with everybody's spirit, that they are only *semi-fools*. Pope, who, like most moralists, did not follow his own teaching, gives us excellent maxims on this subject in his *Essay;* he tells us it is often best to restrain our censure and let the fool be dull at his pleasure—

> "Your silence there is better than your spite,
> For who can rail so long as they can write?"

We who are impatient and irritable should remember that counsel when we are attacking one of the insipid, infatuated, inexhaustible writers whom we do not even wish to name!

Pope sums up his theory, that of Virgil, Racine, and Raphael, of all who as regards art are for pure truth, for candour at any cost, even if it is crude! for strength at any cost, even if it is violent!

> "True wit is Nature to advantage dressed,
> What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed;
> Something, whose truth convinced at sight we find,
> That gives us back the image of our mind."

He is in favour of selection, he dislikes excess, even of wit and talent—

> "For works may have more wit than does them good,
> As bodies perish thro' excess of blood."[1]

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[1] It is curious while considering Pope to notice what we have become through opposition to his poetics. Great geniuses have not hesitated to make a virtue of exaggeration (cf. Victor Hugo's *Shakespeare*,

Those exquisite truths are rendered by Pope in elegant verse, and as concisely as possible; for it may be said of him as of Malherbe, that "he taught the value of a word in its right place." But he has the advantage over Malherbe, as over Boileau, of writing in a language rich in monosyllables; by employing short words he is thoroughly English in style, and I may say, without exaggeration, that, although his vocabulary contains more abstract terms than that of other poets, it is of good and pure native source. Besides, he was aware that the attempt at regularity and exact codification of taste was a new, untried, and unheard-of thing in his country.

> "But critic-learning flourished most in France:
> The rules a nation, born to serve, obeys;
> And Boileau still in right of Horace sways.
> But we, brave Britons,[1] foreign laws despised,
> And kept unconquered and uncivilised;
> Fierce for the liberties of wit, and bold,
> We still defied the Romans, as of old."

A little earlier, before Dryden, that was certainly true. Pope ends modestly, saying that his Muse will be

> "Content, if hence the unlearned their wants may view,
> The learned reflect on what before they knew."

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pp. 122-124, the very doctrine of *extravagant geniuses*). It is, moreover, Balzac's avowed theory: he would not allow that Pascal had a right to demand of great men's minds the balance and *mean* of two extremes and opposite virtues or qualities. Lately an enthusiastic disciple of Balzac attacked Vauvenargues for saying that it was not enough to possess faculties, *economy* was also necessary: take note that by *economy* he only means *order, distribution, wise use*, and not *frugality*. But men no longer look so closely into the matter, each pleads openly for the excellence or defects, or for the temperament of his patron saint. I shall be told that Pope, Horace, and Joubert do nothing else in their style; but it must be allowed that they pay more regard to wit.

[1] André Chénier, when in one of his Epistles he spoke of his composite art, and of the Corinthian metal to which he compared his style: "All that the rude and splendid muse of the Britons,—all that the proud and sweet voice of the Tuscans . . . offered me of gold and silk passed into my verse," was probably thinking of these lines of Pope.

The same thing has been said since in a single line of Latin verse almost worthy of Horace—

"Indocti discant, et ament meminisse periti."

In this Essay on critical and poetic art I have not mentioned the charming models of versification and of imitative poetry, which the author has so cleverly combined with his lessons, that the precept carries the example with it. Among others there is a celebrated passage, perhaps the most perfect of its kind in existence among modern writers; Addison quoted it with praise in the *Spectator*, No. 253—

"'Tis not enough no harshness gives offence,
The sound must seem an echo to the sense:
Soft is the strain when Zephyr gently blows,
And the smooth stream in smoother numbers flows;
But when loud surges lash the sounding shore,
The hoarse, rough verse should like the torrent roar:
When Ajax strives some rock's vast weight to throw
The line too labours, and the words move slow;
Not so, when swift Camilla scours the plain,
Flies o'er th' unbending corn, and skims along the main."

Such pieces cannot be translated: Delille's skilful imitation of the passage in the fourth book of *l'Homme des Champs*,

"Peignez en vers legers l'amant leger de Flore;
Qu'un doux ruisseau murmure en vers plus doux encore," . . .

lacks Pope's precision and moderation; he says simply *Zephyr* and not *Amant de Flore*. Pope must no more be confounded with Delille than Gresset with Dorat. It is as with wine: there are bouquets and bouquets; in itself the bouquet is unimportant, but to the palate it is everything.

VI.

I do not intend to consider Pope's chief works. What I wish to make clear (after Campbell) is, that if he is not an universal poet in the sense most striking at the present time, although he is less stormy, passionate, and brilliant, he is not less truly a poet. His manner is ornate, exact, and pure. He is vastly superior to Boileau in the extent of his ideas

and in his taste for the picturesque; but many of the same reproaches have been made to him, as we ourselves, in the impertinences of the early beginnings of our career, addressed to Boileau. A poet who thought he ought to publish an edition of Pope, or who at least wrote a preface for it, the Rev. Mr. Bowles, one of the precursors of the English romantic movement, found much fault with his author, and reproached him for many inferiorities. "A great poet," said Bowles, "must have an eye attentive to and familiar with every change of season, every variation of light and shade, every rock, every tree, every leaf, in her solitary places. He who has not an eye to observe these, and who cannot with a glance distinguish every diversity of every hue in her variety of beauties, must so far be deficient in one of the essential qualities of a poet."

Pope is certainly not wanting in picturesqueness: he had a feeling for nature, he loved it, and described it in his "Windsor Forest." Condemned by his health to a sedentary life, and unable to see for himself beautiful places and scenes, he liked rural nature, such as he had pleasant and fresh around him. He drew and painted landscapes, he took lessons for a year and a half from his friend Jervas. When he was asked one day, "Which of the two arts gives you most pleasure, poetry or painting?" "I do not exactly know what to say," he replied, "both have so great a charm." It is certain, however, that he was far from fulfilling the detailed programme Bowles laid down for him, and the conditions of the picturesque he exacted; Wordsworth alone possessed them. Bowles himself wrote delightful sonnets of an infinite refinement in that style, and he has erected his own taste and individual talent into a law and general theory; as often happens, he takes himself as a type.

We must not confuse styles with natures, and ask of one organisation what is the produce of another. We should apply to Pope his own precept—

> "In every work regard the writer's end,
> Since none can compass more than they intend."

A friend of Bolingbroke and Swift, Pope does not follow them entirely in their philosophy and audacity. While putting Bolingbroke's ideas into verse and combining them with those of Leibnitz, he does not go beyond a benevolent and intelligent deism. The "Essay on Man," such as it came from his thought and pen, in its creditable though incomplete proportion,

in its ornate seriousness, was acquired by French literature through Fontanes's translation and fine preface. How many true definitions and familiar sayings come from it! But it is not what I like best in Pope; where he excelled through originality, without leaving the field of observation so truly his own, was in the moral epistle, and M. Taine wisely mentions among others the one in which he treats of the *characters* and *ruling passions* of men. Pope, like La Bruyère, with the difficulty and charm of rhyme to boot, invariably confined "the most thought in the least space:" it is the principle of his style.

By a series of examples and cleverly selected observations, the epistle demonstrates that he who would know a man, an individual, thoroughly, finds that everything is deceptive and liable to scorn; appearance, custom, opinions, language, even actions often proceed from contrary motives; there is only one thing that does not deceive, to find (if we can) the secret spring of each man's motive, his dominant and ruling passion. Then we have the clue to everything. In a series of examples he shows us how each man in old age clings more to that secret spring which outlives everything and is unmasked with the years, which is the latest extinguished, and puts, as it were, its seal on our last sigh—

> "Time, that on all things lays his lenient hand,
> Yet tames not this; it sticks to our last sand.
> Consistent in our follies and our sins,
> Here honest nature ends as she begins."

Pope was cold and indifferent to politics, but exceedingly conventional and very literary. Mixing with party men, with Tories as with Whigs, and extremely intimate with the former, he did not violently espouse either side; he expressed his views in the famous lines—

> "For forms of government let fools contest;
> Whate'er is best administered is best."

Later, the sceptic Hume, applying Claudius's lines, said—

> ". . . Nunquam libertas gratior exstat
> Quam sub rege pio." . . .

(The best republic is a good prince.) Pope spoke of Cromwell as an illustrious criminal condemned to immortality. The sphere of ideas in which he lived pleasantly in his grotto on

the hill is very different from the luminous and stirring region where Milton dwelt solitary like a prophet on the heights. But the literary historian, an indefatigable traveller, always ready for all sorts of hospitality, takes the great and distinguished men of the past as he comes upon them, each in his own abode; he knows there is more than one clime and one dwelling-place for great and fine minds.

Pope was in fact the poet of his epoch, of a brilliant and calm period, of a memorable age when English society, without forswearing itself as under Charles II., entered into regular communication with the Continent, and as regards forms and ideas approved of a useful and noble exchange. Pope is what is called an enlightened spirit. He was made for select friendships, and they never failed him. The care and elegance he gave his various epistolary communications may be seen; he adapted the style and tone of his letters to his correspondents. It does not seem to me that his correspondence has yet been collected and published as it deserves. If he was a man of noble friendships, he was nothing of a public character; he said somewhere, applying to himself a saying of Seneca about timid men: "Tam umbratiles sunt, ut putent in turbido esse quidquid in luce est." (There are men who so love a life in the shade, that they believe to be in the light is the same thing as to be in the crowd.) "Some men," he adds, "like some pictures, are made to stay in a corner rather than to show themselves in the full light of day." Pope reckoned himself of that number; charming in familiar conversation, he would no more have attempted speaking in public than would Nicole or La Rochefoucauld. He declared himself incapable of reciting before a dozen persons the thing he would have rendered perfectly to the same people taken indifferently by threes. Summoned once as witness in a famous law-suit, he could not pronounce the ten words he had to say without recommencing two or three times. But with friends he was charm and accuracy itself. His criticisms of authors, his remarks on all topics, particularly on literary topics, are exquisitely true. He speaks delightfully of Chaucer, Spenser, Cowley, Milton, even of Shakespeare, and touches the vital point of each genius with taste and impartiality. To appreciate the Pope of conversation and familiarity, Spence's anecdotes should be read.

I have merely tried to prove that it is possible to speak of Pope with affection and sympathy; but before taking leave of M. Taine, I want to add a few observations.

VII.

His third volume demands and makes us wish for a fourth and last;[1] modern English literature of the nineteenth century does not altogether occupy the place in the book it has a right to exact. Some parts of the eighteenth century also might be more fully developed. Perfectly just in what he says of the chief poets he comes across, the critic, filled with the unity of his plan, seems in too great a hurry to reach the end and to conclude. Too little prominence is given to the melancholy, refined, original Gray; there is no more likeness between Gray and Lamartine than between a pearl and a lake. Collins is mixed up with a dozen others: he is worthy of a place to himself. Goldsmith, as poet, deserves, for the sake of his village of Auburn, a brief visit in his own home. If the Scotch Robert Burns is clearly understood and worthily classified, William Cowper is not allowed, it seems to me, a sufficiently proportionate part in the renaissance of natural taste and of true poetic expression. Again, the Lake poets are not allotted space enough. Sir Walter Scott is harshly treated, and not in accordance with our memories. M. Taine does not give him the rank to which as a novelist he has a right. Speaking generally, the conclusion is wanting in proportion. The philosophical critic brought all his force to bear on the different parts and on the high tablelands; he descended the pleasant slopes, rich, however, in charming undulations and windings, too hastily; he disdains to stop, forgetting that they would be the most accessible for French readers, and would form an interesting series of halting-places on account of their likeness to French points of view. If the author pleases, that defect can be easily remedied. In any case, M. Taine's work, as presented to us in the unity and completeness of this first form, will remain one of the most original productions of our time.

[1] That volume was published later.

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