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# ART AND LIFE

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

POETRY

THE VINEDRESSER AND OTHER POEMS, 1899

APHRODITE AGAINST ARTEMIS, 1901

ABSALOM, 1903

DANAË, 1903

THE LITTLE SCHOOL, 1905

POEMS, 1906

PROSE

THE CENTAUR AND THE BACCHANT, 1899

*From the French by Maurice de Guérin*

ALTDORFER, 1900

DURER, 1904

CORREGGIO, 1906







GUSTAVE FLAUBERT

# ART AND LIFE

BY

T. STURGE MOORE

WITH EIGHT ILLUSTRATIONS

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*First Published in 1910*

*Goethe . . . behauptete . . . alle Philosophie müsse geliebt und gelebt werden.*

**Goethe . . . maintained . . . that all philosophies must be loved and lived.**

**GOETHE AUS NÄHERM PERSÖNLICHEN UMGANGE DARGESTELLT.**

**Ein nach gelassenes Werk von Johannes Falk, p. 79**



## INTRODUCTION

MAN but doubtfully forecasts his own perfection and only defines its character in so far as he achieves it: therefore success is the true criterion. It follows that the number of suffrages is indifferent, their quality all-important; so that he who first arrives may alone be able to recognise that fact.

“Be natural” will then convey two opposite meanings: “Complete your development,” or “Rest content as you were.” So soon as simplicity and ease have been acquired it is time, by attacking new difficulties, to become laboured and artificial once more; for only new can preserve us from the tyranny of dead habits, only riper inherit the generosity of raw passions. Every capacity has been unnatural and singular once; perhaps virtues remain so, since progress is always unwelcome to those who hope things need not change. The

methods of a master must be factitious and experimental, his purposes unaccommodating.

This book seeks to trace the above general conception through art's relations with science and morals: it contends both against those who believe that poetry arises "naturally out of life, as tree, flower and fruit spring from the soil," and those who hold that art, like instruction, should be addressed to the improvement of persons.

Within the writer's horizon Flaubert and Blake seemed the most strongly characterised instances of men conceiving of art as an ideal life: he therefore uses them as illustrations; and, since the French writer is ill-known amongst us as an individual, an author, and as a theme of controversy, sets out with a brief review of his life, his work, and the criticism to which both have been subjected.



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GUSTAVE FLAUBERT

*The youngest [readers] say that l'Education sentimentale has saddened them. They do not recognise themselves in it; they have not yet lived, but hug illusions and say: "Why does this man, so good, so gay, so simple, so sympathetic, wish to discourage us in regard to life?"*

*They reason badly in saying this; but since the thought is instinctive perhaps it should be considered.*

GEORGE SAND TO GUSTAVE FLAUBERT, January 9, 1870

## GUSTAVE FLAUBERT

A BIG man, he had been a beautiful child. An Apollo, for years as welcome as the sunlight, in consternation at terrible nervous seizures he collected himself; then grew bald and heavy stooping over a large round table, always blotting what he had written because he saw how to better it, prompt to believe that something he did not know would improve an inspiration, never shrinking from any effort which could give his love of rhythmic speech confidence that it was justly used. In him the social delicacy of introspective and affectionate natures, the enthusiastic timidity of a recluse, inherited boisterous frankness and the love of expansion.

Nobody was more unworldly, more hearty, or more easily irritated. His senses were extremely refined, his appetites disordinate, his life sober and monotonous, and his home a seventeenth-century mansion with an ungainly Empire façade; the

heavy and dark furniture had slowly accumulated ; but the woodwork was painted white, and Flaubert loved large and semi-Oriental chintz patterns for his curtains.

Summer-through the ample dressing-gown in which he worked was boldly figured with gay flowers on a light ground, but in winter brown, like a Franciscan habit.

Every night he soared into the realm of vision and nice adjustments. From time to time he made excursions into the world, like some grand moth offended by the garish day, but full of rapid energy and determination to find what he sought.

His father, eminent in his profession, was surgeon-in-chief at the hospital of Rouen. Gustave, nine years younger than his brother, three years older than his sister, was dreamy, and so trustful that an old servant could bid him "Go into the kitchen and see if I am there." Coming to the cook, the child of six would say, "Pierre sent me to see if he is here," and would stare at the laugh he provoked, as though half-divining some mystery.

Subdued and suffering forms could be seen pacing to and fro from the garden where he and his sister played. Sometimes the children would clamber up to the laboratory window and watch the dissectors, while flies disturbed from feasting on



a corpse buzzed round their flaxen polls. Presently their father would raise his head and bid them be off.

Where is the use of learning your letters when opposite the hospital gates lives an old gentleman who is ever willing to read to his little friend? But when at nine years old Gustave realised that '*père Mignot*' could not go to school with him, the art was rapidly mastered. His correspondence began forthwith, being from the outset concerned with acting and authorship. A billiard-table formed the stage on which the children and their friends performed little pieces written or adapted by themselves.

Gustave hated school-life regulated by beat of drum, and could never feel like one of a herd.

To vanquish the fear of darkness he roamed stealthily about at night; and many half-holidays were spent walking round the coping-stones of a church tower until no vestige of dizziness remained. He had several chums, but Alfred Le Poittevin, slightly his senior, alone knew his whole mind. Precocious adepts in the romantic literature of the period, they went on to brave the summits and abysses of speculative thought. They read much and well: Alfred was strong at metaphysics, Gustave in history. Measured by this first friend, Flaubert later found the most intelligent men of the epoch wanting, and considered whatever he

was worth mainly due to this inspiring influence. They were, besides, the centre of a group of insatiable laughers ; jests lived for years, especially "*le garçon*," a character which any one might assume to ridicule the world as the Philistine sees it, with certainty of Homeric success.

When fifteen, by the seaside at Trouville, Gustave fell hopelessly in love with the wife of a gallant musical publisher who, unsuspecting as the lady herself, confided to his young friend his many successes with sirens of less distinction. This experience led him to meditate suicide—a then fashionable study.

Out of bravado he next allowed a housemaid to make (as the phrase will have it) a man of him ; in his own words, to fill him with disgust and bitterness. Possibly at this period a habit of surpassing the vicious in immodesty of language was formed—cynicism which occasionally may have passed into action in order to astonish them. Voltaire had been read, the human race despaired of, and, in imitation of Byron and Rabelais, a determination formed to injure it by laughing in its face. At nineteen, having written *les Memoires d'un fou*, he started for Paris to waste time studying law, a profession chosen for him by his father. The first holiday was spent in Corsica ; at Marseilles, on the way out, a lady from Lima made him very

happy. After this his letters refer to such absorption over the development of imagination as left him for three years unconscious of being a male. Plucked at the examination, after returning home he had the first of those terrible seizures so much debated on by doctors.

The sufferer himself attributed them to intemperate exertion of his visionary faculty, resulting in its passing beyond control ; and thought that by bringing physical relief to the inward fermentation of emotional and sensuous illusions which he had provoked, they left his head cooler and did him good. By the time he was somewhat recovered his sister married, and the whole family accompanied her on the honeymoon as far as Genoa, where, before a Flemish picture, *la Tentation de saint Antoine* was first thought of. The bride and bridegroom sailed for Naples ; he with his parents returned to their new country home at Croisset. Before seven months were run his father died ; before the full year his sister, with whom he had maintained intimacy, followed, leaving a baby-girl. A few weeks later Alfred Le Poittevin took a wife, and within a couple of years he too was dead, as it seemed to Gustave for a second time. While plunged in desolation just after his friend's marriage, he had met a poetess, renowned for beauty, lauded by literary Paris. She, turning from the

endearments of a celebrated philosopher, mistook Flaubert for the coming lion, and, resolute as Cleopatra, netted her Cæsar. The first blaze of exultation subsiding, his probity accepted the responsibilities of an adventuress's paramour. Happily Mme. Louise Colet lacked the fortitude to outlast his self-imposed noviciate, and ere the time his first book appeared had shattered their stormy communion. The de Goncourts were surprised to find Flaubert speak of her without bitterness; while to Félix Frank he said, "What a strange woman! She was always charging me with infidelity, whereas it was she who was unfaithful."

Equally unfortunate was his choice of a friend to replace Alfred Le Poittevin. Maxime Du Camp,<sup>1</sup> like the lady, enchanted Flaubert by a prodigal facility of emotional energy; but, like the lady, deplored the steadfastness with which he neglected to make way in the world.

The fits became more frequent. Swimming and canoeing, Gustave's two favourite pastimes, had to be renounced in deference to maternal anxiety, and a promise given not to venture far by himself. With Maxime he made a tour through Brittany, and the account of it, over which they collaborated, was the first work Flaubert wrote with difficulty. Rather later he was ordered south; but before start-

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix I. p. 265.

ing a first version of *la Tentation de saint Antoine* was read to Du Camp\* and Bouilhet—a young medical student with poetical ambition and financial difficulties. Mme. Flaubert, listening outside the door in the early hours of the morning, overheard the discouragement loyally accorded to her son by his two friends, and never forgave them. From Bouilhet's advice on this occasion sprang the design of *Madame Bovary*.

During eighteen months the two friends voyaged in a "cange" up the Nile, and on camel-back under the desert sun; they bathed in the Red Sea, explored Palestine, Lebanon, and Rhodes, coursed over crisp snow on the Asian shore of the Bosphorus, battled with rain and sleet when lost at night on Cythaeron, visited excavated Pompeii and the museums of Rome in the dancing spring. Gustave bid farewell to his nervous disorder, and to all illusion about a companion whose enthusiasms needed galvanising by hopes of worldly success, while Maxime found his friend over-persistent in jest and earnest.

Apollo's looks and tresses gone, but with health refound, mature in thought and habit, Flaubert buried himself in the country, to comfort his mother, teach his little niece, make a brother of Bouilhet, renew correspondence with Louise Colet, and write *Madame Bovary*. Working far into the night, he never failed on his way bedward

to bend over a pillow which the "Bonsoir, mon Gustave," murmured in response to his filial kiss, did not disturb but composed to deeper sleep. He rose late ; before his bell sounded, the household crept on tiptoe. After breakfast he taught the child geography and history, but above all how to give consequence to attention and memory. His gaiety yearned for that of those near him, whom in his free hours he delighted in amusing.

Sudden fame resulted from the publication and prosecution of his novel. Henceforth the winter months were spent at Paris, Flaubert and his mother taking separate apartments in the same house. New friends were won—Jules Duplan, Charles d'Osmoy, and Ernest Feydeau. Besides, his correspondence is enriched with letters to literary ladies, a nucleus of *les dames de la désillusion*, that "seraglio of a more or less religious, moral, and æsthetic character" which, as Goethe said, "tends to collect round a man of any importance."

Once his notes for *Salammbô* had been collected, he spent a month exploring the site of Carthage ; five years later its publication matured his prestige. Soon after he joined the fortnightly dinners at Magny's, which brought together Sainte-Beuve, Gautier, the de Goncourts, Renan, Taine, &c., and

frequented the salon of *la princesse Mathilde*, Napoleon III.'s blue-stocking sister, round whom a similar group centred. George Sand now becomes his correspondent ; for her was sketched one of his huge jests, the life of the reverend father *Cruchard des Barnabites, directeur des dames de la désillusion*. This caricature of Flaubert's relations to distinguished ladies flourished till her death, though in the hour of need it was rather she who played the part of ghostly counsellor, but then it was he whom bereavements and loss of fortune overcharged in a period of public calamities.

Caroline Homard, who had found more than a father in her uncle, in 1864 married the young master of some steam sawmills, M. Commanville.

*L'Education sentimentale* appeared on the eve of the Franco-Prussian War. Before hostilities commenced the deaths of Sainte-Beuve, Jules de Goncourt, Jules Duplan, and Louis Bouilhet followed one another. Lieutenant in the Garde Nationale, Flaubert took command of a patrol, while his medical studies enabled him to serve as wound-dresser at the hospital round which he had played as a child, and where his brother had succeeded their father.

The cultivated enemy billeted at Croisset respected his home and library, but the spectacle of "men who understood Sanscrit" riding about

giving "orders stupid through sheer brutality" revolted him; and oh! the smell of their boots!

The invasion was followed by the still more humiliating Commune. Immediately after this Flaubert had to fight in the theatres for the fair treatment of dramas left by Bouilhet, and against the municipality of Rouen over a fountain memorial of him.

*La Tentation de saint Antoine*, entirely re-written after *Madame Bovary*, but put aside for fear of provoking a second prosecution, had, amid his discouragements, been once more taken up by the harassed and overwrought master. In spite of renewed seizures of his malady this beautiful poem was finished in 1872, a few months after the death of his mother had left him lonely at Croisset. Courage to publish failed him, and, though he yielded to the persuasions of Tourgueneff, a new and dear friend, his comedy, "*le Candidat*," had been written, played, and withdrawn before the book appeared.

His health grew worse. *Bouvard et Pécuchet* demanded more buoyancy than he could muster. Mme. Commanville's husband failed in business, and her uncle gave up the major part of his fortune to pull him through. George Sand, he owned, restored his desolation to self-respect in those dark days.



In Brittany, at Concarneau, Hôtel Sergent, to be near his friend G. Pouchet, the naturalist, he commenced *les Trois contes* by way of recreation. Alas! *un Cœur simple*, designed especially to please George Sand, was not finished before she died.

While often weeping for her, Bouilhet, and Gautier, friends never to be matched again, Flaubert could still draw abundant amusement from an invention of long standing. On the quays he had once come across an old engraving of the bewildered St. Polycarp holding both hands to heaven, and inscribed, "My God, my God, on what times hast Thou cast my life!" He pretended to see in it his own effigy and a proof of pre-existence. Though indignation against the "imbeciles in present power" and the widespread stupidity which maintained their incompetence was abundantly justified, he thoroughly appreciated the wild and delightfully ludicrous gestures it aroused in his tumultuous physique. The feast of St. Polycarp was kept by some ladies and gentlemen of Rouen whom he frequented. Anticipation prevented steady work for a fortnight before it came round, and of the "gay and original inventions," toasts, &c., with which it was celebrated he kept a *dossier* labelled "the remedy for indignation."

Dread of losing both Croisset and independence

long weighed on his spirits ; promises of State aid were made and broken. Two years before the end, however, he received a sinecure worth £120 per annum—money which he arranged to have repaid after his death. The 8th of May, 1880, having just come from his morning bath, he was found on the vast divan of his work-room, unable to articulate, and never spoke again.

An attack of epilepsy was bruited by certain friends, but the doctor who had been called expressly declared that there were no such symptoms, and attributed death to apoplexy. Flaubert had been in exceptionally good health, and for seven years free from nervous seizures. He was dead, but silly notions about him lived on, and, sanctioned by those who should and might have known better, are repeated even to-day. Described as incapable of enjoyment, because he could regretfully reflect that there had been more elements claiming appreciation in any given happy moment than he had actually been conscious of, this soul of exceptional response both to pleasure and pain has been pitied by mediocrities.

Perfect and adored as a son, as a brother, as an uncle, as a friend, as a master, he had cherished piety ; in hard winters his gate was thronged by the poor—eighty were fed at one time on the eve of the war. Every Watch-night he marched at the

head of his household to the midnight Mass. His freedom of thought felt no need to trouble those who could not share it. Both simple and cultured were delighted by his extravagances in dress, gesture, and speech, and won by his childlike wholeheartedness. Ingrainedly he answered to the nickname given him by fellow-students at Paris, and was "*le vieux seigneur.*"

Cordial friendship, both for the lady whom he had loved at fifteen and her husband, began at Trouville, matured at Paris, and did not die away when, after 1850, they settled in Germany, while his letters prove that he would gladly have shared with her children and grandchildren the care of her decline when she became a widow. Nor was this an exception: all friends from whom life had separated him were as sure of welcome as those with whom habitual commerce had strengthened affection. His hatreds were no less persistent—for the journalist who, to debase the present, neglects past and future, for the professor who makes much of mediocrities and belittles the great, for the conservative who preserves nothing, for the radical who respects nothing, for the *bourgeois* whose home and immediate interests distort or banish ideals, while they overload and abuse the civic state. Peculiar hideousness suffuses these lives. He preferred even wastrel initiative and passion to that sordid

prudence ; the vulgarities of adventurers in thought and art seemed venial compared with such sedulous warming of purblind meanness. The blaze of his indignation once and again frightened a few worldlings into performing some obvious duty which they had decided to neglect, but as a rule he explained his aloofness by shouting—

“ Honours dishonour,  
“ Titles degrade,  
“ A function deadens.”

Retired life alone made work regardless of expense in effort possible; his avowed ambition was “to live like the middle classes but to think like a demi-god.”

This exuberant vitality had once more been at full power, when, by an accident, in a moment, it was ended. Five large windows opened from that room which such splendid visions had filled, where such heroic discontent with what was good had so often created perfection. Maytime leaf and flower framed the vast landscape: on the left a shrub-clad cliff which rose behind the house, then the many steeples of Rouen, and, facing them across the river, the chimneys of its factories; in front, meadows dotted with red and white cattle; while to the right a forest on a long sweep of hill closed the horizon. The calm, wide Seine, full of islands

tufted with trees, curved across the broad valley, coming close so that the sails of hidden boats, like white clouds, drifted behind the great tulip-tree in the garden which, Flaubert loved to think, had been paced both by Pascal and the Abbé Prévost, their eyes soothed by so much that his own treasured.



# CRITICS, MAN, AND WORK

*In La Harpe's day the grammarian judged, in Sainte-Beuve's and Taine's the historian. When will it be the artist, nothing but the artist, the thorough artist? Where is there a critic who is intensely preoccupied by the work as such? They analyse very delicately the circumstances in which it was produced and the causes which led up to it; but the unconscious æsthetic, whence it is drawn? the composition? the style? the author's point of view? Never.*

*Great imagination would be needed for such criticism, and great goodness, I mean a faculty for enthusiasm always alert; and then taste, a rare quality, even among the best endowed, so much so that it is no longer spoken of.*

*What rouses my indignation every day is to see a masterpiece and a turpitude ranked side by side. Little talents are cried up, great talents disparaged; nothing could be more stupid, nor more immoral.*

CORRESPONDANCE DE G. FLAUBERT, Série iii. p. 386



## THE CRITICS AND THE MAN

MEN disagree about the gods. There is often something unaccountable, mysterious, out of reach, connected with subjects on which the intelligent contradict one another. French critics unanimously allow Flaubert's work, or at least part of it, to be all but perfect. Yet few such simple questions have so divided them as : Was he intelligent? Was he warm-hearted?† The Creator of the universe stands in the like case. Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe—how passionately the value of their thought has been denied; again, how absolutely forgotten behind lifeless praise! I will confess that the controversy over his books has been so drastic as to clench for me a foregone surmise that Flaubert participated in the nature of divine men and insoluble problems. Those who claim to have found some quality are more easily credited than

† See Appendices II. and III. pp. 266-273.

those who assert it not to exist where it should presumably have been. The excellence of *Madame Bovary*, recognised by those who deny this author intelligence, creates such a presumption, and in 1903 M. René Dumesnil wrote—

“The fashion even was to pretend that he was incapable of metaphysical speculation. We have, on the other hand, shown the inanity of such a supposition—above all damaging to those who dared to formulate it, for it is easier to deny that a writer has any philosophy, than to refute that philosophy.”<sup>1</sup>

Alas! he was too hopeful, for in 1905 M. Émile Lauvrière produced the blackest Flaubert yet sketched: the “tainted” “victim” of a “maniac hatred” and a “murderous passion”; while, if he avoided the word “unintelligent,” he left us a “poor used-up writer whose noble but narrow ambition never believed in anything save the virtue of phrases.”<sup>2</sup>

Flaubert himself had recognised the difficulties he was creating.

“People have a ready-made opinion about me which nothing will root up (it is true, I take no trouble to undeceive them), namely: that I possess no kind of feeling, that I make a joke of everything, that I am a

<sup>1</sup> René Dumesnil, *Flaubert*, p. 297.

<sup>2</sup> Émile Lauvrière, *Salammbô*, Oxford Higher French Series, pp. xlii, xxxvii.

loose liver (a kind of romantic Paul de Kock), something between *the Bohemian* and *the Pedant*. There are even some who pretend I look like a drunkard, &c., &c.

"Nevertheless, I believe myself neither a hypocrite nor a poser. No matter, folk always get hold of wrong notions about me. Whose fault is it? Mine, no doubt."<sup>1</sup>

This half-baked legend waxed and flourished for twenty years after those lines were written. The publication of Flaubert's correspondence checked but failed to dissipate it.

As Barbey d'Aurevilly had said, "It seemed repugnant to man's nature" for an author neither to relieve his feelings, expound his philosophy, demonstrate a psychology, promote political or class interests, nor even artlessly to betray unusual sensibility, refinement, wit, brilliancy, distinction while narrating. True, the best stories had not been so serviceable.

A survival of this heartburning plagues a few even to-day. Yet M. Hennequin could draw from comparatively limited information a more generous conception:—

"Towards the end, Flaubert's pessimism was penetrated with sweetness. . . . The writer appears to pity

<sup>1</sup> *Lettre à Mlle. Amélie Bosquet*, cited by Félix Frank, without date, but between 1859 and 1869.

the ills he reveals, and perhaps we ought to believe that on the eve of old age Flaubert felt that it was not fitting to separate the cause of great men from that of the herd, who, victims as surely as they are torturers, doubtless bear their part in the sufferings which they help to embitter." <sup>1</sup>

Fine intuition though that reveals, there is to-day something strange in so delicate a critic's finding the author of *Madame Bovary* inconsiderate of humble lives. The homage paid to them in Elizabeth Leroux had several times been underlined even then; but not only when he can sympathise is Flaubert just. Had he not far more respect even for the pilloried chemist than his critics have shared with him? Homais embodies a vice which cankers all mankind, but he is rich in the very quality which Flaubert considered his own work deficient in—easy fellowship (*bonhomie*).

"I divine in Flaubert a kind of speculative affection for those beings who represent everybody, who are barely responsible, who, with a great deal of egoism, have some kindness, who work and are tasked like ourselves . . .," says M. Jules Lemaître, who had enjoyed personal contact with Flaubert; and later on he cries, "Ah! what great pity can live by all that is implied in renouncing expression of particular pities!" <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Émile Hennequin, *Quelques écrivains français*, pp. 31, 32, 1890.

<sup>2</sup> Jules Lemaître, *Les Contemporains*, Série vi. pp. 246, 248, 1896.

Though driven by the amusingly low estimate which he had formed of Flaubert's intelligence to suppose *Madame Bovary* literally a miracle produced without the aid of secondary causes, like wisdom out of the mouths of babes and sucklings, even M. France had seen enough of Flaubert to affirm that he was good and incapable of lying, and adds—

“At the bottom I believe that Flaubert was not so unhappy as it strikes us he was. At least he was a pessimist full of enthusiasm for a part of human and natural things. Shakespeare and the East threw him into ecstasy. Far from pitying him, I pronounce him happy: his was the good part in the things of this world; he knew how to admire.”<sup>1</sup>

One who, reading Flaubert's books, had been deluded in the common way, confesses:

“As soon as you became intimate with him you made the most *surprising*, the most touching of discoveries. . . . You found a heart of gold with a good man's thrills of generosity and the caressing tenderness of a young girl. This worn sceptic had the adorable candour of a child, and he who had been thought of as an indifferent egoist revealed himself in daily life as capable of the noblest self-sacrifice, the most amiable

<sup>1</sup> Anatole France, *La Vie littéraire*, Série ii. pp. 22, 23, 1887.

virtues . . . under the most startling audacities [of language] a timid soul was divined."<sup>1</sup>

Ready enough to acclaim genius when it appears theatrically, men will try hard to justify their neglect when honours have been avoided and the judgment of those who obviously cannot know contemned. In explanation of the reluctance shown in admitting Flaubert's mental reach let me adapt Browning's image : a little water, as a sphere of glass is turned, can visit the whole inner surface, yet air fills the vessel and holds thrice that weight of water resolved in itself. So discursive intelligences run over ideas with which a finer mind is in constant relation, the first watched by all, the second rarely noticed.

Those who have never been there will hardly believe that the July sun tells equally on lofty snow-fields and in the dust of the valley road ; similar was the reluctance to credit an author, whose work had been kept so pure, so bright, so keen, so high above the world, with experience of such stress as that which compels the humblest cry of affection.

<sup>1</sup> Auguste Sabatier, *Journal de Genève*, Mai 16, 1880.

## II

### THE CRITICS AND THE WORK

FLAUBERT'S *Œuvres Complètes* runs to eight volumes ; in each of them save the last some reputable critic has found the masterpiece. The name of those for whom *Madame Bovary* (vol. i.) occupies this position is legion. *Salammbô* (vol. ii.) is so acclaimed by George Sand and H. M. Stanley the explorer ; *l'Education sentimentale* (vols. iii. and iv.) by Zola and Pierre Gauthiez ; *la Tentation de saint Antoine* (vol. v.) by Émile Hennequin, R. L. Stevenson, and Professor Saintsbury ; *les Trois contes* (vol. vi.) by Renan and Maupassant ; *Bouvard et Pécuchet* (vol. vii.) by Remy de Gourmont and J. C. Tarver (author of *Gustave Flaubert as seen in his Work and Correspondence*, 1895).

Several prize equally highly two or three of these works ; for some *la Tentation* and *Bouvard et Pécuchet* are complementary parts of one masterpiece. I have known ardent admirers who preferred his *Correspondance* to any of his books, and

M. Auguste Sabatier<sup>1</sup> would seem to lend them his countenance. Such great diversity of opinion about an artist's best is a very rare distinction. Evidently the nature of his subjects divides his admirers, for they are unanimous on the quality of his workmanship. Listen to the chorus.

"Care for precision, love of colour, hunger for light, are everywhere felt in his work. That is something, it is much. Take care, press me but a little and I shall say, it is everything."<sup>2</sup>

"One of the greatest European artists in the second half of the century, and perhaps the most accomplished writer of French prose in our whole literature."<sup>3</sup>

"It is his . . . to have written the most beautiful prose works extant in French."<sup>4</sup>

"The perfect writer."<sup>5</sup>

"He sought immortal workmanship, while others only seek one that will wear. They are honest folk; he was a saint."<sup>6</sup>

"The greatest, purest, most complete of our literary artists."<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix X. p. 297.

<sup>2</sup> Edmund Scherer, *Études sur la littérature contemporaine*, Série iv. p. 301, 1870.

<sup>3</sup> Maurice Spronck, *Les Artistes littéraires*, p. 297, 1889.

<sup>4</sup> Émile Hennequin, *Quelques écrivains français*, p. 68, 1890.

<sup>5</sup> Anatole France, *Hérodias: Compositions de G. Rochegrosse*. Préface par A. F., p. xxvii, 1892.

<sup>6</sup> Antoine Albalat, *l'Art d'écrire: Ouvriers et procédés*, p. 248, 1896.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Bourget, *Taylorian Lecture at Oxford*, 1897.



“Flaubert, in all his works and on every page of his works, may be considered as a model of style.”<sup>1</sup>

It is amusing to watch the æsthetic anarchy of to-day, especially at a distance. From one country it is quite clear that the critics of another hardly ever try to see the work they judge for its own sake, but mainly as it may be used to illustrate principles to which they adhere or against which they animadvert. So eager are some to further “the party behind which they throw their weight,” or hinder that “against which the forces of the future must tell,” that they very rarely do see what their eyes so passionately devour.

Readers who refer to the Appendices will find that I have tried to give the date of each pronouncement. For, though since his death Flaubert's work has steadily risen in the esteem of all who love beauty, a reaction came to its head in the early nineties, being caused by the extravagances of some who passed for his followers. Can any one doubt, besides, that the author of masterpieces like *l'Histoire comique*, *le Mannequin d'osier*, and *les Opinions de M. Jérôme Coignard* would reprove some expressions and assertions made in *la Vie littéraire*? Perhaps he would not allow that Flaubert's reputation is outstripping even that of

<sup>1</sup> Émile Faguet, *Flaubert*, p. 149, 1889.

Renan, yet were he now thirty years younger he might even do that : in any case he must agree that the distance between that master's work and even the best produced by men like de Goncourt, Zola, Daudet, and Maupassant, has yawned into a gulf, consisting, as it does, in breadth and maturity of significance, as well as in perfection of execution.

While we smile to distinguish the different points made in this Battle of Books, we may certainly admire the equipment and dash of many of the combatants.

### MADAME BOVARY

The hazards of adultery have as pre-eminent attraction for French readers as equally high stakes on raw virginity's elections have for English. Not only had Madame Bovary lovers, but Napoleon the Third's Government advertised her intrigues by a prosecution which it lost. For once a work of art inherited the glamour and stir of a scandal : it has been the better studied, but judgments on it are the more open to suspicion. On the other hand, this book was written while Flaubert was still young, and several incidents in *la Tentation* which date from the same period are well-nigh as universally admired. There is a seduction about Shakespeare's and Milton's earlier work which even their grandest

creations may be felt to lack. Had Keats gone on to produce greater things, they would probably have grown poorer in just those qualities which most intoxicate his devotees. Adultery being for French novels as stale a theme as the idyll of impulse is in English fiction, the interest needed a new import.

"Have you noticed how that book is one of those which mark a date not only in a literature, but in the moral history of a nation, because they put an end to certain influences which have long been paramount, and in ending them change the optical and hygienic conditions of the public standpoint? For the false ideal brought into fashion by the romantic school and for the dangerous sentimentality which resulted from it, *Madame Bovary* was very really what *Don Quixote* had been for the chivalrous mania when it, in Spain, had lasted too long, or again what Molière's *les Précieuses ridicules* and *les Femmes savantes* had been for the influence of the Hôtel Rambouillet. . . . Just as Cervantes gave its death-blow to the chivalrous mania with the very weapons of chivalry, so with the very methods of the romantic school Gustave Flaubert ruined the false ideal which it had brought into being; drawing on resources created by the imagination, he painted the vices and errors of imagination."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix IV. p. 274.

Émile Montégut, *Le Roman en 1876*, "Dramaturges et romanciers," p. 262.

All later critics have either acknowledged or betrayed their indebtedness to that.

Yet to Arnold,<sup>1</sup> as to Sainte-Beuve, it seemed unheard of that a novelist should trust you to pity one whose helplessness, folly, and ruin he had shown, instead of specially pleading for his chosen sinner. It never occurred to them how much finer a thing it is to recognise events in their true proportions at sight than only after the school-master's pointer has traced them over.

George Sand justly exclaimed, "They say his [the author's] indignation is not felt. What matter, if he rouses yours?" Arnold thought Flaubert had not seen what he showed, had not felt what he inspired: or would he imply that Emma's vices should have been veiled in order to set off her unhappy fate? But it is not only the virtuous who, naked, suffer and fail, the vicious also are crucified on either hand. We are too apt to see only one cross where there are three, and thus brush its divine bloom from that humanity which gives them significance.

Baudelaire must have felt the beauty of Flaubert's book, but his review is indolent and ironical.<sup>2</sup> He teases Flaubert about his pet theory, and, bowing to intellectual ladies who are complacently sure of having taken the highest places, suggests that they

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix V. p. 275.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix V. p. 276.

may be called on to make room for others. Perhaps he sincerely regarded Emma as too fine to be true, since she owns not only her creator's visionary habit, but "imagination," "sudden energy in action, rapidity of decision," and "the inordinate love of winning others over and dominating them" which he shared with all great men. And thinking of her soul's native complexion we might well agree: but inborn qualities must succeed before they are fully possessed, and Emma is ruined partly by inclement circumstances, chiefly through inability to study what lay immediately under her nose. She had none of Flaubert's aptitude for taking boundless pains and thereby correcting and directing ambition.

Common judgments depend on narrow associations. An item of police news attracts many as offal will flies: in other minds it becomes a nucleus for pharisaical prejudice, and can only so cloaked be thought of and remembered. Interests take fresh import when felt in relation to new preoccupations. For the first time Flaubert raised this French interest in adultery to the realm of contemplation, and produced its "unalterable beauty." Elevation and refinement distinguish the book; to lay stress on its realism is like dwelling on the theology of *Paradise Lost*. The sciences, the Russian steppes, spice islands, old wars, mummied kings, and Scythian idols provide images: nor in this

expectation of a highly-cultured reader have we its only affinity to that great poem. With what success Flaubert laboured to give his prose a rhythm as lovely and vital as that of poetry is known. Yet another bond between Milton and this French novelist is the lack of a general sense of easy fellowship, by which both are less happy than Shakespeare and La Fontaine. Their work bears such an impress of strain perhaps because they could expect, and indeed found, little immediate comprehension. If *Madame Bovary* shaped history, as M. Montégut thought, or could appal Stevenson<sup>1</sup> by raising ghosts of Calvinistic moods; these effects of its rare integrity occasioned by the needs of others are of little moment to us; for in the harmony of its proportions and the unfailing music of its periods lives "the splendour of truth, beauty."<sup>2</sup> Yes, beauty, "resignation with the world as it is," and "an immense compassion, that which is born from science applied to life, silently disengage themselves from Flaubert's novel,"<sup>3</sup> mused on and re-read.

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix V. p. 275.

<sup>2</sup> Plato, cited in *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série iii. p. 80.

<sup>3</sup> Jules Lemaître, *Les Contemporains*, Série vi. p. 287.

## SALAMMBO

We have been told on excellent authority that ancient Carthage is, and can be, nothing to us, and that Flaubert chose it wisely since we are not prepossessed in respect to it: that his novel instructs too much to amuse,<sup>1</sup> and that it does not instruct at all, for—

“Wishing to paint Punic civilisation, he painted anything but that; we have the right to say then that his novel, having missed its mark, loses all interest.”<sup>2</sup>

These egregious sentiments possibly proceed from a mind better prepared to treat problems of archæology than of art. It may be that Flaubert, reconstructing Carthage, was misled both by what he knew and did not know; for knowledge can hardly be said to extend beyond an extremely meagre list of monuments and texts of difficult interpretation, and his intention was to produce a vivid epic picture. He says that he consciously invented details,<sup>3</sup> and admitted chronological improbabilities.<sup>4</sup> His picture was to be typical and to correspond to a vague idea<sup>5</sup> that existed in men's minds, and this

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix VI. pp. 277-281.

<sup>2</sup> M. Pézard, *Mercur de France*, Février 16, 1908.

<sup>3</sup> <sup>4</sup> <sup>5</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série iii. pp. 212, 251, 248, 249, and 153.

he wished to transform as hachisch enhances recollections.<sup>1</sup> From the unnoted marriage of facts in the outskirts of attention, that idea had been born: he traced it to its sources, and developed them by logic and imagination, so as to arrest his contemporaries by revealing the implication of their "henid"<sup>2</sup> perceptions in a magnificent picture. He who silenced the archæologists of his own day might make short work of M. Pézard, even though recently acquired knowledge may tend to discountenance some of his suppositions.

When the nineteenth century dreamed of the past, portions appeared as ineffable idylls, others as reaping the harvest of universal aspirations, but not a few like nightmares. To-day thought tends to reduce these peculiarities. The embryo of Flaubert's vision existed in other minds, as that of the Inferno among the Florentines. M. Pézard asks, "Have not the greatest masterpieces sprung from observation of actual life?" *Salammbô* as

<sup>1</sup> *Journal des Goncourt*, tome i. p. 307.

<sup>2</sup> *Sex and Character*, by Otto Weininger, p. 99. "I propose for psychical data at this earliest stage of their existence the word Henid from the Greek *ἥνιδ*, because in them it is impossible to distinguish perception and sensation. . . . A common example . . . may . . . illustrate what a 'henid' is. I may have a definite wish to say something in particular, and then something distracts me, and the 'it' I wanted to say is gone. Later on . . . the 'it' is quite suddenly reproduced, and I know at once that it was what was on my tongue, but [I know it], so to speak, in a more perfect stage of development."



certainly did as Michael Angelo's *Last Judgment* or as Goethe's *Faust*; but in them observation of life is transformed and organised by an intense creative imagination.

"*Salammbô*, like the *Iliad*, is only a continual carnage full of descriptive repetitions . . . Sainte-Beuve did not understand that Homer, despoiled of the translator's modifications, has in the original the same violence, the same brutality, as Flaubert. . . . M. Taine, who is both critic and artist, showed more perspicacity when he wrote in his *Voyage en Italie*:<sup>1</sup> 'Homer forgets pain, danger, and dramatic effect, he is so taken up with colour and form. Flaubert and Gautier, who are considered singular innovators, write to-day exactly similar descriptions.' And M. Taine adds profoundly, 'The ancients need artists for commentators. Till now they have only had closet-scholars.'"<sup>2</sup>

While, according to M. Anatole France, Flaubert unphilosophically preferred barbarous antiquity to his own day, M. Paul Bourget deems that he held both periods in equal contempt.<sup>3</sup>

A taste for rich colour and generous profusion is good ground for the preference of stupidity in caftan and balloon trousers to stupidity in a health-officer's frock-coat. M. France must have lived in a great many ages to be so sure that vulgarity was

<sup>1</sup> Tome 1<sup>er</sup>, p. 132.

<sup>2</sup> Antoine Albalat, *Le Mal d'Ecrire*, p. 134, 1895.

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix VI. p. 281.

as oppressive in Athens 430 B.C. as it is in London to-day. But Flaubert agrees, and calls "the times of Pericles and of Shakespeare atrocious epochs in which beautiful things were made,"<sup>1</sup> indicating the nature of his preference. Two equally offensive civilisations may yet yield very dissimilar harvests for the eye of an artist ; in the one his sense might be full fed, in the other starved. The Parthenon may be superior to the Orleans railway station, even though the men who condemned Socrates were no better than those who condemned Dreyfus. So when they choose a beautiful background for their dreams, the wise often seek far into the past. Swinburne found in a drawing by Michael Angelo "such a mystic marriage as that painted in the loveliest passage of *Salammbô*, between the maiden body and the scaly coils of the serpent."<sup>2</sup> Experiences differ ; M. Faguet cannot believe a reader to be honest who pretends that he has "read *Salammbô* without quitting it several times for a pretty long rest ;"<sup>3</sup> whereas some years back, frequently suffering from toothache, I found it the only book which could hold my attention in spite of the pain ; while Professor Saintsbury well-nigh bridges this gulf :—

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série iv. p. 75.

<sup>2</sup> A. C. Swinburne, *Notes on Designs of the Old Masters at Florence*, 1864. *Essays and Studies*, p. 321, 1875.

<sup>3</sup> Émile Faguet, *Flaubert*, p. 46, 1899.

"I have mentioned my own impression in first reading *Salammbô*—how I wondered at the lack of interest (as it then seemed to me) which distinguished it, although at the same time I found it impossible to drop or skip it, and how years afterwards I read it again, and then it no longer seemed to me to lack interest, and I was no longer in doubt as to what had made me read it through at first almost against my will." <sup>1</sup>

George Sand wrote : Flaubert's literary form

"is as beautiful, as striking, as concise, as grandiose" in *Salammbô* "as in no matter what verse in any language on earth. His imagination is as fecund, his pictures are as terrible as Dante's : his inward anger is as intentionally cold : in order not to fard the horror of his vision, he no more spares the onlooker's delicacy."<sup>2</sup>

M. Louis Bertrand, who to-day knows the north of Africa well, claims that this book, while owning

"the purely ideal life of great works of art, is also animated by the wholly actual and almost contemporary life which the novel of to-day strives to arrest. . . . The old Semitic spirit of Carthage, always live in spite of revolutions, has once again triumphed—and that with the same characteristics of guile, cupidity, cruelty, fanaticism, and, at times, furious madness. The mercenary barbarians troop thither, more numerous than ever, from all the Mediterranean countries, with

<sup>1</sup> G. E. B. Saintsbury, *Essays on French Novelists*, p. 374, 1891.

<sup>2</sup> *Questions d'art et de littérature*, p. 308, 1863.

the same lust of lucre and domination as in the days of the inexpiable War." <sup>1</sup>

Foreign and antique life repel many, attract but few. Only the adventurous seek Beauty so far, or those who count her worthy any toil—who forget pain like Homer, lifted above it by delight in colour and form. Yet who can say that either he or Flaubert really forgot others' anguish, save when the sufferers themselves forget in the heat of battle?

"I would give the demi-ream of notes which I have written in these last five months, and the ninety-eight volumes which I have read, to be for the space of three seconds *really* moved by the passion of my heroes." "Since literature exists never was such a mad enterprise undertaken! . . . Shape folk speech out of a language in which they did not think! Nothing is known of Carthage. . . . No matter, it must correspond to a certain vague idea which there is about it. If I croak under the task, that will be *a death* at least. And I am convinced good books are not made in this fashion. This will not be a good book. No matter!—If through it great things are dreamed about." <sup>2</sup>

After it was finished he confessed that the pedestal was too big for the statue; *Salammbô* should have been personally as engrossing as *Madame Bovary*.

<sup>1</sup> *Revue de Paris*, Avril 1<sup>er</sup>, 1900, pp. 617, 623.

<sup>2</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série iii. pp. 103, 153.

Esmeralda, Quasimodo, Claude Frolo, Phœbus ;  
Salammbô, Mâtho, Schahabarim, Nar Harvas.

Though little resemblance obtains between these individuals, are not the interrelations between either set akin? Victor Hugo's genius was not merely "verbal," and Flaubert owed more to him than seems to be recognised. He believed human relations to be most beautiful when they were both general and intense, pushed to an extreme and simple. Such his master had evoked. And if the pattern he had well-nigh worshipped was here shadowed, he was no doubt as unconscious of the fact as his critics have proved since. The note of Gringoire chimes in the one harmony somewhat as that of Spendius does in the other, and the muttering bass of crowds and vagabonds tells similarly to that of mercenaries and nomad peoples. Flaubert retained from Hugo, whom he sifted as searchingly as he admired him loyally, the large sense of harmonies woven from interplay of things base and hideous, but as beautiful and even more rare than the choicest single profile, bird, flower, shell, or play of light.

### L'EDUCATION SENTIMENTALE

M. Hennequin speaks of "the high and difficult import" of Flaubert's books; no wonder, then, if the

careless reading of other critics has created enigmas in *l'Education sentimentale*, and its hero's love been described as saved by renunciation and wasted by incompetence.<sup>1</sup>

In the scene referred to, the transference of Frédéric, the hero's ideal of himself, to Mme. Arnoux, the heroine, is finally completed; and he feels how further familiarity must murder in her what had been slowly done to death in himself. Flaubert is exquisitely just. Mme. Arnoux and Dussardier take away that ideal of himself which Frédéric had conceived but never realised, and they alone had provided the climate which his soul needed, they alone had sacrificed their immediate interest to their more generous conceptions. He bids farewell to himself and her with open eyes, knowing hers to be sealed. His repression of a momentary return of "raging lust" is made easier by his dislike of "embarrassments" and "dread of being tired of her later on." Her gratitude is doubled by the refusal of what it had felt bound to offer, and makes the hero of his sometime dream her abiding possession; this sense of what he seems to her softens resignation with what he is, his last flicker of abnegation being thus rewarded, while her whole life's effort inherits what he might have been. The crown of virtue is always better than recognition of

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix VII. p. 284.

an isolated fact. A complementary foil to experience, the vision of what might have been and may in other cases be, counterbalances the actual failure, and in simple hearts often altogether supplants perception of it.

M. Lemaître has excellently cleared up what to several had seemed enigmatic in Frédéric and Deslaurier's agreement that the boyish glamour of their bootless visit to "La Turquie"

"'is perhaps the best we have known of life'; best because only the dream of it was theirs, and that dream was the first. A recollection so melancholy, that it ceases to be impure; a judgment so big, in its wilful baseness, with unexpressed considerations, that its cynicism is no longer felt, but only its terrible sadness."<sup>1</sup>

They first sought love in advantage taken of others' vice, and all their after plans have the same defect. Parasites, they think to profit by the ambient corruption rather than by their own merit. Not that Flaubert shows worldly success justly allotted; undeservers obtain it and it proves trash in their hands, nor is it true that the two friends are "abject"<sup>2</sup> and ignoble.<sup>3</sup> Frédéric is unusually friendly, generous, open-minded, and amiable:

<sup>1</sup> Jules Lemaître, *Les Contemporains*, Série vi. p. 253, 1896.

<sup>2</sup> Henry James, *Critical Introduction to "Madame Bovary,"* p. xx, 1901.

<sup>3</sup> F. Brunetière, *Le Roman naturaliste*, p. 192, 1880.

Deslauriers has a rare energy and perseverance; that one is limp and the other blunt and indelicate does not prevent those qualities being real. Youth gives them beauty for a time, and we feel their loneliness in a crowd made up of themselves, of which they truly represent the pick. Better educated, better surrounded, they would have shown creditably. Carefully avoiding "the really furnished, the finely civilised consciousness"<sup>1</sup> because it is exceptional, dependent on peculiar gift and therefore inexplicable, a subject for speculation and admiration only, Flaubert chose characters ill-furnished and half civilised, which being general may be portrayed with universally recognised impulses and motives. Art of a lyrical and excessive nature, like Æschylean and Shakespearean tragedy or the farce of Aristophanes and Rabelais, can employ extremes which are inconvenient elsewhere, and above all not typical of the modern world he had set himself to describe. Sentimental writers conveniently isolate chosen characters, but these are shown mingled in the woof of history, the personal incidents glinting amid numbers of others as rare and pregnant.

"For not only is *l'Education sentimentale* the story of two youths very particularised as individuals, and very

<sup>1</sup> Henry James. See Appendix VII. p. 283.



general as types, since they represent, one the romantic and the other the positivist young man, and that at the precise moment when the period of positivism was with us about to succeed to the period of romanticism ; and not only is this story combined with a study of ideas and of manners in the last years of Louis Philippe's reign : *l'Education sentimentale* is something more : a history of the picturesque, moral, social, and political aspects of the revolution of 1848 ; it profoundly portrays the barricades and the clubs, the streets and the drawing-rooms : it shows us that extraordinary spectacle, the bewildered middle class set face to face with the Revolution, that Revolution which their fathers effected sixty years before, and which they believe has ended, since it has enriched them ; which they are indignant to see begin again, or which rather they no longer recognise when it menaces them in their turn, and which they then repudiate with horror and anger. There perhaps is as considerable a theme as the campaign in Russia." <sup>1</sup>

"I know and I admire the richness, superabundant, and almost equal to life itself, which belongs to that tangled thicket novel, *War and Peace*. But have we none of those novels fashioned on the complexity of things . . . ? Give attention, and you will find one in *les Misérables*, perhaps even more will you find one in *l'Education sentimentale*. I say it after reflection and with confidence." <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Jules Lemaître, *Les Contemporains*, Serie vi. p. 250.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 249.

But so far we have only discussed Flaubert's subject, which, as Zola well said,

"is one of the most original conceptions, one of the most audacious, one of the most difficult to succeed in, that French literature has ever attempted, though our literature be not in general lacking in boldness."<sup>1</sup>

Then, turning aside from the theme, he says what could never be said of *les Misérables* or of *War and Peace*, that it was brought to completion "with that masterly unity and concentration on executive detail" in which Flaubert's strength lies.

"It is a magnificent marble temple raised to human weakness and incapacity. Of all Gustave Flaubert's works, it is certainly the most personal, the most vastly conceived, that which gave him most trouble, and which will long be least understood."<sup>2</sup>

Like the Parthenon, this "marble temple" has quite another moral, quite another æsthetic value than that which it was built to enshrine, for it too represents human virtue, human insight, at their highest, as they can only adequately be represented by their action, in their creations.<sup>3</sup> "Lofty equity,"

<sup>1</sup> Émile Zola, *Les Romanciers naturalistes*, p. 147.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*; see also Appendix VII. p. 282.

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix III. p. 271.

"immense compassion,"<sup>1</sup> an example of suffering with and for others, of insistence on integrity as the touchstone of life's value, by these is Flaubert Milton's peer. Their presence makes *l'Education sentimentale* grand. The central harmonies have been denied because they, like granite walls, are coated with so fine a mosaic of precious cubes. Goethe, in his *Wilhelm Meister*, gave the suggestion that such architecture might be possible: but his mobile and widely enterprising nature could not command the arduous consecutive application needed, and his book is most admired for accidental accretions, like the incident of Mignon or the criticism of Hamlet, which form no part of what should have been its design.

### LA TENTATION DE SAINT ANTOINE<sup>2</sup>

*La Revue de Paris* has published the earlier versions of *La Tentation*, and, in a footnote, a vision written for the final work, but rejected. At a great distance a modern city appears; there St. Antony sees Jesus fall under the weight of His cross and watches Him mobbed by those who execrate in Him the cause of wars, persecutions, public and private hatreds, all Christian history; and others who hold that He has duped them into vain renunciations and

<sup>1</sup> See above, p. 34.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix VIII. pp. 285-289.

mortifications. He is left a shapeless mass in which His heart, visibly shining, flickers out like a dip in a lantern. Why did Flaubert delete this vision? Perhaps his chief reason was that it seemed to draw a conclusion that no one has any right to draw. It was a prophecy; a future event was represented, which may be in course but which is certainly not complete.<sup>1</sup>

What, then, is the significance of Christ's final apparition in the sun? First, the historical fact is, that Antony, though tempted, died a saint. The terrors of darkness did not efface for him the beatific vision. Still, this termination may, I think, have borne for the writer further import.

"I happen on Flaubert, just as he is starting to Rouen; under his arm, fastened with three locks, the cabinet minister's portfolio, in which his *Tentation de saint Antoine* is enclosed. In the cab, he talks to me about his book, of all the trials which he makes the hermit of the *Thébaïde* undergo, and from which *he issues victorious*. Then just as we are parting, at la rue Amsterdam, he confides to me that *the final defeat of the saint* is due to the cell, the scientific cell. The curious thing is that he seems astonished at my astonishment."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *La Première tentation de saint Antoine* has since appeared in book form (Charpentier, 1908), and in a footnote the statement that Flaubert's niece holds this vision to have been deleted from fear of wounding pious consciences. This is only one aspect of the reason I suggest, and we know that where he thought facts fully bore him out Flaubert was not restrained by such scruples.

<sup>2</sup> *Journal des Goncourt*, tome iv. p. 352, 18 Octobre, 1871.

It will be remembered that Antony sees the most rudimentary forms of life, cells moved by cilia; deliriously cries out, "I have seen life born, movement begin," and ends by desiring to become matter. Then the sun rises. In its disc he beholds Jesus Christ, and, crossing himself, returns to his prayers. The idea that life is not the expression of an idea or a purpose, but itself its own ultimate explanation, makes him for a last time lose self-control; though, almost immediately, daylight brings him repentance.

Writing books and saying prayers are perhaps equally futile effects of aspiration and application. This very present possibility often spoils Flaubert's joy in his own work. The end is out of sight, and may be in no sort related to our efforts, utterly disparate and disappointing. Vital energy must needs prosecute its daily task, replying to all optimists as Candide and Martin do to Pangloss: "Well said, but we must work at our garden," or "Let us work without reasoning; it is the only way to make life bearable." Inwardly thus admonished, Flaubert went on writing, and Antony resumed his prayers.

"How he resigned himself, and consented to turn the mill of life without illusions, is well known. But it is less known . . . that, like his well-beloved saint, he

often sought consolation and a strange delectation in mentally caressing temptations, even after he had judged them deceptive and blameworthy. Casuists and theologians have given this mania the name of *delectatio morosa*. Delight taken in the insistent and vain evocation of illusory pleasures, is intellectual sin in all its insidiousness." <sup>1</sup>

Is it ? and if so, did Flaubert indulge ?

"This great consoler of life, imagination, has a special privilege, which makes her, when all is reckoned, the most precious of gifts ; it consists in this, that her sufferings are delectable. With her, all is profit. She is the foundation of the soul's health, the essential condition of gaiety. She enables us to enjoy the madness of the mad and the wisdom of the wise." <sup>2</sup>

Renan is undoubtedly right. Imagination is good, like thought, like health, like affection, like humour ; most men do not get enough of any of these ; they starve. Evil exists : imagination removes it to a safe distance, makes it an object of contemplation. Her enchantment bathes remote and intangible things. Our prejudices and greeds are out of place there ; put to silence, like vulgar

<sup>1</sup> *La Première tentation de saint Antoine : Préface par Louis Bertrand*, p. xxi, 1908.

<sup>2</sup> E. Renan, *Lettre à M. Gustave Flaubert sur la "Tentation de saint Antoine,"* 1874 : *Feuilles détachées*, p. 347.

people, they drop behind ashamed. Never is any mind so free from self-interest as in contemplation.

"That the procession of humanity's dreams at times resembles a masquerade, is no reason to forbid the representation of it."<sup>1</sup>

"Among us, a book is expected to instruct, edify or amuse. . . . The prime amusement and philosophic exercise, contemplation of reality, spectroscopy of the universe, is little understood."<sup>2</sup>

"He has opened a brilliant dream before the imagination. That is enough; neither archæologist, nor moralist, nor historian, nor politician, has anything to say. Nothing is bad in the way of art, save that which has no style and no shapeliness."<sup>3</sup>

Here the supercilious accent may be heavy, but the sense is sound. In plain language, what does Renan call "dunghills"?<sup>4</sup> Why, all mankind's faded speculations, sear religions, dead gods, the left-off wear of ancient kings, hopes shed by mighty peoples, stranger than our strangest dreams. Flaubert has marshalled them all before "that inward eye which is the bliss of solitude." With Saint Antony we wonder, are delighted, laugh to ourselves, indignation rouses or terror stirs, but the

<sup>1</sup> E. Renan, *Lettre à M. Gustave Flaubert sur la "Tentation de saint Antoine,"* 1874: *Feuilles détachées*, p. 349.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 346.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 345.

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix VIII. p. 287.

enchantment is never broken ; these objects keep their distance, they touch us only as we are moved by tales—

“Of woful ages long ago betid.”

The moral effect may well enable us to resume our tasks, feeling that to work is to pray, while Christ's gaze fills Apollo's sphere; for this vision was created by self-annihilating work, and bears the impress of the greatest human dignity in its precision, equity, elevation.

### LES TROIS CONTES

Very few voices have been raised against *les Trois contes*. Brunetière, having allowed one masterpiece to an author whom he had hastily classed with the *Naturalistes*, did not fail to bark like the good watch-dog he believed himself to be. However, M. Auguste Sabatier, as early as 1877, called them

“three statues which have lived and under whose white envelope a human heart has beaten. Cry ‘A miracle !’ if you like ; discern therein a personal foible, I agree : but I confess I took interest in *Hérodiad*, I was touched to the quick by *Félicité*, I wept while reading the last pages of *Saint Julien*.”



Readers to-day probably stare at the implication that others did not find *un Cœur simple* poignant, *Saint Julien* moving. Renan pronounced this last perfect, and M. Paul Adam cries :—

“He (Saint Julien) liberates himself from cruelty, from murder, from blood, from wealth and power, as the ascetic (Saint Antony) had stripped himself of pagan illusions which invited him to believe himself master of certainty. . . . He becomes a ferryman, and welcomes a leper beneath his thatched hovel. To warm him he stretches his body, his health and his life against the innumerable ulcers of the poor wretch. Then the leper is transfigured, he arises Christ, he becomes the light that, in manifesting itself, recompenses.” Soaring aloft, “his triumphant divinity carries up the man who had sacrificed himself to ease another’s misery. Nothing is certain except the beauty of Christian sacrifice. . . .”<sup>1</sup>

As much might be said of the legend as given by Saint Antoninus.<sup>2</sup> Such praise is like the blame bestowed on *l'Education* or *Salammbô* as commonplace or embroiled in blood; an appreciation of its theme is mistaken for criticism of the work of art. A little child recognises objects as good, nasty, big or little even in a picture: we are rightly thankful

<sup>1</sup> Paul Adam, *Le Mystère des Foules*, Préface, p. xxiv, 1895.

<sup>2</sup> *La Légende de saint Julien l'Hospitalier: Compositions par L. O. Merson. Préface par Marcel Schwob.*

when a critic can do as much without mistake. Flaubert admired and portrayed the lovely creations of the Christian spirit, but their beauty was only the occasion for that of his tale, as the inadequacy of the middle classes had been for the beauty of his longest novel. In like manner, Iago, as an admirable part of Othello's tragedy, is distinct from the cynical humanity of such a man. *Hérodias* for many has the qualities of *Salammbô* and *la Tentation* without the length of the first or the oversimple mechanism of the second. In his introduction to it, M. Anatole France well says of Flaubert : \*

“ This strong man sought out difficulty. His athletic nature urged him to wrestle with his work. This time too he came forth victor from the struggle with the angel.”

And again :—

“ This powerful evocator has known how to restore colour and form to the vague ghosts of history, and his tale is a wonderful poem.”

The accumulative effect of so many extreme pronouncements has by now perhaps inclined most of those who have perused the Appendices to accord Guy de Maupassant his point, when he indignantly replied to carpers :—

\* *Hérodias* : *Compositions de G. Rochegrosse. Préface par Anatole France*, pp. xxviii, xxvi, 1892.

“If the man who has left such books as *l'Education sentimentale* and *Madame Bovary*, *Salammbô*, and *la Tentation*, without counting that prodigious masterpiece entitled *Saint Julien l'Hospitalier*,—if this man is not a genius, I am totally ignorant of what genius is.”<sup>1</sup>

## BOUVARD ET PÉCUCHET

It is as common a judgment to consider *Bouvard et Pécuchet* an absolute failure as to see in *Madame Bovary* Flaubert's greatest success. The subject of the one appeals as little to the vulgar as that of the other greatly fascinates them. Such widespread contempt needs no illustration. What will interest in this case are the rare appreciations. They are sampled in the Appendix ;<sup>2</sup> here I will merely quote an account of the book by a personal friend of Flaubert's last years :—

“A witness of the long elaboration of *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, and knowing, I believe, better than any one the parent idea from which it sprang, and which I have discussed with the author above a score of times, I simply wish to show that he has not written an insignificant or worthless book. . . . ‘Quite true,’ he used to say, ‘my two heroes are not interesting ; but I needed them as they are : my arrangement resembles a chest of which the chapters are the drawers, and

<sup>1</sup> *Le Gaulois*, 25 Octobre, 1881 ; see also *Œuvres complètes de G. Flaubert*, vol. vii. p. xlv.

<sup>2</sup> See pp. 290–292.

there are too many drawers ; but this defect belongs to my subject ; I have tried to disguise but not to suppress it, for that would mean suppressing the work itself. Perhaps there is no name in any language for what I have done ; but as I cannot prevent its being taken for a novel, I should like folk to see in it a philosophical novel. It is my testament, the summing up of my experience and my judgment on man and his works. . . .

“ ‘ I am not writing a popular novel. If three hundred people in Europe read my work and get a glimpse of its import, I shall be satisfied. The second volume of notes which will follow the novel will set them on the track.’ ”<sup>1</sup>

M. Sabatier goes on to show how the crazes of Bouvard and Pécuchet shadow the movements of middle-class society from the close of Louis Philippe's reign to the end of Napoleon the Third's.

“ Take care ; when we pity and laugh at them, our laughter and compassion return on ourselves. They fail miserably. But have we done anything else with all our reforms and all our revolutions for forty years past? Modern Society is the true hero. These two good fellows are essentially idealists ; they set out every time with confidence, naïve, so whole-hearted is it, in the power of human reason and of science. They love instruction ; . . . a thousand times their criticisms are reasonable ; . . . they are really the most enlightened and the most generous ; they represent initiative

<sup>1</sup> *Journal de Genève*, 3 Avril, 1881.

and progress: . . . yet they fail, . . . they ruin themselves where their farmer succeeds and grows fat. . . .”

We can but mistrust one who in Flaubert's interest continues :—

“ Let us at last *draw the conclusion* :<sup>1</sup> Society lives on errors and on prejudices ; do not take them away, for that which you offer in their stead cannot possibly replace them. That which makes society strong is not the truth, nor can she find a use for the truth. Man's life needs illusions, customs, traditions ; reforms are catastrophes, truth leads to nothing, for the void alone is true. Silliness of sillinesses, all is silly here below.”

After this, M. Sabatier impersonates Flaubert again : “ Sad,” he would reply ; “ enough to disgust one with life. *If* that disgust is born from my book, it is because I have experienced it, and before dying wished to express it.” Flaubert may easily be imagined using some such words, but M. Sabatier's conclusion is only one of many that may be tied to *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, as the citations in the Appendix<sup>2</sup> from MM. Remy de Gourmont, Jules de Gaultier, and J. C. Tarver indicate. The “ if ” with which Flaubert began was not forgotten, though its significance escaped. He had felt that disgust, but that was not the only thing that he had felt or expressed.

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 85, 86.

<sup>2</sup> Appendix IX. pp. 291, 292.

The accusation of Nihilism has been lightly made. Some are perhaps convinced that no fulfilment awaits man's aspirations, but it is not the same thing to believe that none has yet been achieved. As M. Lévy-Bruhl remarks, his mental attitude, like Montaigne's, "is positive, rather sceptical." Those who regard *Bouvard et Pécuchet* as an attack on science as greatly overween as those who see in *la Tentation* an onslaught on religion. For Flaubert, science was a discipline, a means to an end; its rules preserve men's minds from that corruption by pre-imagined, pre-desired goals to which they are so prone. He realised the tentative and confused nature of theories resulting from actual scientific essays; but when the method should be fully grasped "it would above all be applicable to art and religion, those two grand manifestations of idea," and would lead by degrees to "the art of the future, the hypothesis of the beautiful and the clear conception of its reality, to that ideal type towards which all our efforts ought to tend." <sup>1</sup> His satire strikes that common futility which thinks to advance either life, art or worship without method, though it may asperse presumption hopeful of replacing habits or beliefs which it only sees how to ridicule. M. Sabatier's memory, or else his comprehension, was at fault, in putting this secon-

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série ii. pp. 338.

dary effect first. "On the lack of method in human inquiries" <sup>1</sup> had been thought of as a sub-title.

The end, like the beginning, is out of sight; hope is natural since the universe presents an objective to man's effort; depression is natural, so little proportion obtains between his means and this task. "To work is the best way of scamping life"; <sup>2</sup> for to call even the most thorough application adequate is absurd. There is no escape: toil we must, since everything else is far less satisfying. Persevering labour has its reward; the master-workman feels that he is in the way of truth, he achieves faith and renews his strength. His last letter glows with triumph:—

"I was right; because æsthetic is truth, and at a certain intellectual level (when method is ours) mistakes are no more made. Reality does not yield to the ideal, but confirms it."<sup>3</sup>

*Bouvard et Pécuchet* is a fine exposition of all that in ourselves and in society besets, hampers, and defeats work. The only vengeance which the victor took on his enemies was to describe them; and those enemies were not persons, as is too often assumed, but habits of thought. Good-will,

<sup>1</sup> *Œuvres complètes*, tome vii. p. xix; also *Correspondance*, Série iv. p. 348.

<sup>2</sup> *Journal des Goncourt*, tome i. p. 307.

<sup>3</sup> *Lettres à sa nièce Caroline*, p. 523.

energy, initiative Bouvard and Pécuchet possess in a remarkable degree: but more is necessary—method, infinite patience, readiness to begin all over again, time after time. Nor could this necessity be better shown in a more abstract form; Flaubert had analysed and rejected that light and careless play with general ideas which so fascinates "*the intelligent*,"<sup>1</sup> "feeling shame to expend on it attention perhaps sufficient for some good thing," as Montaigne says of chess. Abstractions are only pregnant in particular relations, to re-word them avails nothing; there is no magic in formulas, they must be shown in living instances. Therefore with immense pains he created an aquarium in which the most widespread modern notions could be watched alive, under the simplest conceivable conditions, in an unusually clear light, so that their subtle interrelations with common passions, common prejudices, common meanness, might be followed. He says, "Look, you will see all that you are constantly talking about rendered new and strange by immersion in the inexpressible life which is a fundamental condition for its comprehension." And as sea-monsters, which were repulsive and opaque stranded on the shore, become beautiful in the glass tank when they revive and the light shines through them, so slimy, ugly,

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix II. p. 267.



clumsy notions receive beauty from the way they are shown ; its clarity, its distinctness, its perspectives set them off and transfigure them.

Before the first volume was complete Flaubert died : of the second next to nothing has been published. In it Bouvard and Pécuchet were to have copied passages which had struck them from primers, text-books, and classical authors, thereby revealing the solidarity of faulty action in trained and gifted minds with the habits of brains raw and ordinary.

Indulgent in private life, his pen served justice ; from Chateaubriand, whom he admired, he yet made a rich collection of ineptitudes, and told Sabatier, "My two heroes . . . are two fools, nevertheless I want them to be loved and pitied."<sup>1</sup> They are certainly more significant than the Pickwick Club, and though they find us less readily, every time I re-read the book they win on my affection, and I laugh more heartily. "Endowed with the sense of veneration . . . their life is nothing but a perpetual comedy which they play by themselves, a continual effort to love and understand."<sup>2</sup>

They were to have copied into the second volume not only "stupidities," but three more stories :<sup>3</sup> *le*

<sup>1</sup> *Journal de Genève*, 16 Mai, 1880.

<sup>2</sup> Jules de Gaultier, *Le Bovarysme*, pp. 53, 55, 1892.

<sup>3</sup> *Œuvres complètes*, vol. vii. p. xxxvii.

*Combat des Thermopyles* (he wanted to make of this a kind of patriotic narrative simple and terrible, that might be read to the children of any race to teach them to love their country);<sup>1</sup> *une Nuit de Don Juan*, for which a marvellous sketch has been published;<sup>2</sup> and a modern version of the *Matron of Ephesus*.<sup>3</sup> Thus of the whole which Flaubert intended we have less than half, while to the other belonged the most attractive items.

### A FAIRY DRAMA.

Before Flaubert's death *La Vie moderne* published a fairy play composed in collaboration with Louis Bouilhet and Charles d'Osmoy (who are understood to have disclaimed any real share in the invention), which Flaubert entirely rearranged and re-wrote before it appeared. If well translated *le Château des cœurs* might win a wider public here than it has in France, where fancy and make-believe are less at home. Not so pretty as *Peter Pan*, it is more powerful. On its appearance a certain Mr. Lee connected with the Strand Theatre wrote for permission to compose incidental music to it; but probably his manager could not satisfy Flaubert that the stage directions would be implicitly obeyed; their exigent

<sup>1</sup> *Œuvres complètes*, tome vii. p. xlv.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, xxxvii.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, xlv.

character seems to have frustrated more developed negotiations with Paris theatres, and could only be complied with where expense was not regarded. Another difficulty is the scene at the banker's house, for that the wife's adultery should serve her husband's swindle passes as "of course"; and though for young people probably incomprehensible, as the world grown-up is wont to seem, it might shock more initiate aunts and nurses. Worse occurs every year at Drury Lane, yet the absence of buffoonery and coarseness must make this more dangerous. Flaubert's "*féerie*" should be an absolute refutation of the charge of misanthropy and lack of heart. Hardly a critic mentions it; but Wagner "fell in love with it, and wished to make an opera of it."<sup>1</sup>

Yes, critics whose reputations stand at present highest have been found most decided in disparagement of this great master.<sup>2</sup> Men of initiative and energy are naturally the least tentative. Like Milton's, Flaubert's work has obvious limitations of mood, of temper, though he never passed what was careless and bad as Goethe and Shakespeare often did. M. Jules Lemaitre well says, "There is no thorough comprehension without

<sup>1</sup> Charles Lapierre, *Esquisse sur Flaubert intime*, p. 52, 1898. For Flaubert's remaining works see Appendix X. pp. 295-297.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix IX. pp. 292-294.

love :” perhaps there is not even passable understanding without respect.

Few opinions published before Flaubert's death have been referred to : they are either well known or their writers already forgotten. Contradictions on simple and gross points have alone been chosen ; more subtle discrepancies, if numberless, are often less clearly expressed, and therefore harder to exhibit. Doubtless the conflict is rather apparent than real, and if the parties to it forced themselves to find out and set down what they thought—no more, no less—consent would accrue to those who have taken most pains. Licence in assertion must then be foregone, and, as Flaubert did, many might cease to please themselves. His attitude recalls Huxley's, comparison with whom (creative power and a highly developed æsthetic sense being added) might help better than that with Milton, which causes an imported syntax and elaborate diction to be first thought of, though they find no parallel. Yet what other English writer owned at once such erudition, such austerity, such love of beauty ? Then too, if succinct and straightforward, the French master's prose is also musical, often grandiose, sonorous, lofty.

“Coming at the end of a long period of culture, resuming in himself the whole intellectual effort of

several generations, he is chock full of things and of ideas. His sentences, so serried, so condensed, are like Virgil's verses—Virgil whom he loved and read passionately, over whom 'he swooned with pleasure [his own words] like an old *professeur de rhétorique*.' And again, as with Virgil, . . . the sense of humanity has in him prodigiously widened. In barbarous periods he will comfort noble souls, and, by their means, save the highest moral conceptions of our race, with the purest form of its genius; and, in periods of renascence, to recognise in his pages, as in an ancient poem, luminous divinations of the future, will give delight."<sup>1</sup>

English readers may ask, "How does Flaubert stand in relation to Balzac, Hugo, or George Sand?" The reply leaps out, "He is that Hercules who cleaned out stables which had become impossible through their neglect." But, impertinence apart, I dare not answer; only those great prolific writers have not so drawn my study on. For me, he is *the* literary event since Goethe. Wordsworth, Keats, and others have been as choice, but his work has the wider range and more of it is sound. With those of the best poets alone can I rank his finest pages, which, if never more popular than theirs, will surely never win less love, less admiration.

<sup>1</sup> Louis Bertrand, *Flaubert et l'Afrique: Revue de Paris*, 1 Avril, 1900, p. 600.



## SAMPLES

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*Some little intelligence is gained through cultivating imagination,  
and much nobleness from contemplating beautiful things.*

ŒUVRES COMPLÈTES DE G. FLAUBERT, tome vi. p. 183



## SAMPLES

PERHAPS this section of my work should not close without an attempt to give the English reader some notion of the beauty of Flaubert's prose. Translations have, indeed, been published, but such as it were useless to refer to for this purpose. Flowers culled from an author, who held that "Style lives in continuity as virtue does in constancy," like woodland leaves in a vase, have lost their variety, number, and relative positions; and, if still lovely, seem wistful for a world of their own.

Besides, the melody of English, not being that of French, does not lend itself to similar effects, so my success can only resemble that of a taxidermist at a Natural History Museum.

Therefore, to take the dead taste out of the reader's mouth, I have added a passage from the greatest of English prose writers, which Flaubert would no doubt have got by heart had he been born amongst

us : and this I do the more confidently as its theme is one discussed in a later chapter.

But first of all, let me try to fill all ears that can test it with a music as unforgettable as ever any poet has created.

### *The Lament of Isis*

Égypte ! Égypte ! tes grands Dieux immobiles ont les épaules blanchies par la fiente des oiseaux, et le vent qui passe sur le désert roule la cendre de tes morts.\*

### *Lovers in Paris*

La lueur des boutiques éclairait, par intervalles, son profil pâle ; puis l'ombre l'enveloppait de nouveau ; et au milieu des voitures, de la foule et du bruit, ils allaient sans se distraire d'eux-mêmes, sans rien entendre, comme ceux qui marchent ensemble dans la campagne sur un lit de feuilles mortes.

### *Chateaubriand in the East*

Il part encore ; il va, remuant de ses pieds la poussière antique ; il s'assoit aux Thermopyles et crie : Léonidas ! Léonidas ! court autour du tombeau d'Achille, cherche Lacédémone, égrène dans ses mains les caroubiers de Carthage, et, comme le pâtre engourdi qui lève la tête au bruit des caravanes, tous ces grands paysages se réveillent quand il passe dans leurs solitudes.

\* For translations of these passages see Appendix, p. 298.

*The Close of Bouvard and Pécuchet's First Day in their  
New Home*

Déshabillés et dans leur lit, ils bavardèrent quelque temps, puis s'endormirent, Bouvard sur le dos, la bouche ouverte, tête nue; Pécuchet sur le flanc droit, les genoux au ventre, affublé d'un bonnet de coton, et tous les deux ronflaient sous le clair de la lune, qui entraient par les fenêtres.

*The Swallow*

A swallow neared : we watched her flying ; she came from the sea, soared up softly, the fine edge of her feathers cleaving the fluid and luminous air in which her wings swam at large and seemed to enjoy the entire freedom of their play. Still she mounted, higher than the cliff-top, and, mounting always, disappeared.

*Œuvres complètes*, tome vi. p. 250

*Silent Love*

Leon would not know, when in despair he left the house, that she got up in order to see him in the street. She concerned herself about his affairs ; she furtively watched his features ; she carried through an elaborate fiction for a pretext to visit his room. The chemist's wife was deemed very fortunate to sleep under the same roof with him ; and her thoughts constantly settled down on that house, like pigeons from the *Lion d'or*, which congregated in its gutters to bathe their pink feet and white wings.

*Ibid.*, tome i. p. 146

*The Rich at Carthage*

Three times a moon, they had their couches set on the high terrace which ran round the wall of the court ; and from below they could be seen at table in the open air, buskins and cloaks laid aside, the diamonds on their fingers wandering over the meats, and their large earrings stooping between the flagons—all strong and fat, half-naked, happy, laughing and eating, against the azure, like great sharks rollicking in the waves.

*Œuvres complètes de G. Flaubert, tome ii. p. 120*

*Socialism in the Revolution of 1848*

Its theories, although they were as new as "hunt the slipper," and had for forty years been sufficiently debated to fill whole libraries, yet scared the middle-class man like a hail of aerolites ; he was indignant, for every idea, because it is an idea, at first provokes his hatred, and later on seems glorious because he execrated it, always superior, no matter how mediocre it be, to this opponent.

In those days respect for property reached the plane of religion and became difficult to distinguish from God. Attacks on it appeared sacrilegious, almost as revolting as cannibalism. In spite of legislation more humane than had ever been known, the spectre of '93 rose up, and the shutter of the guillotine flashed in every syllable of the word republic ;—yet could not save that government's weakness from contempt. France, conscious she had no master, set up a wild howl like a

blind man groping for his stick, or an urchin who has lost his nurse.

*Œuvres complètes*, tome iv. p. 143

*The Monks*

I recall a journey that I once made with Ammon to discover solitudes suitable for the foundation of monasteries. On the last evening, side by side we quickened our steps, murmuring hymns, but not talking. By so much as the sun sank lower, our two shadows lengthened out like twin obelisks, always growing taller and seeming to walk before us. With pieces of our staves here and there we planted a cross to mark some site for a hermitage. Darkness was long in coming, and lakes of black shade spread the earth over while a vast rosy hue still occupied the sky.

*Œuvres complètes de G. Flaubert*, tome v. p. 240

*The Treasures of Herod Antipas*

The darkness exhaled a breath of warm air. A curved alley led downwards : they took it and came on the threshold of a cavern, of greater extent than the other vaults ; its further end opened through an arcade in the precipice which on that side defended the citadel. A honeysuckle clung under the roof, but its flowers swung down full in light. Flush with the floor, a trickle of water murmured.

White horses were there, perhaps a hundred, eating barley from a wooden shelf on a level with their mouths. Their manes were all dyed blue, their hoofs in mittens of esparto grass, and the hair between their ears curled

above their foreheads like a periwig. With very long tails they softly beat their fetlocks. The proconsul was struck dumb with admiration.

They were marvellous animals, supple as serpents, light as birds. Starting off apace with their rider's arrow, they would overthrow men, biting into their vitals, disengage themselves from difficult places among rocks, leap ravines, and across plains keep one frantic gallop up all day long ; a word would stop them. As soon as İaçim entered, they flocked to him like sheep when they see the shepherd, and stretching their necks forward, gazed at him wistfully with childlike eyes. By force of habit he threw out a raucous cry from the depths of his throat, which set them prancing gaily : they reared up hungry for the open, pleading to run.

*Œuvres complètes*, tome vi. p. 118

These passages must not be regarded as plums ; well-made books cannot be rifled of their best things any more than the heart may be torn from a living man. Translated extracts as little bring home the beauty of Flaubert's prose as engraved patterns of stuffs enable you to picture Næra filling the coming season's dress.

“ In verse,” he would say, “ the poet possesses fixed rules. He has metre, cæsura, rhyme, any number of practical indications, a complete technical science. In prose, a profound feeling for rhythm is necessary, an elusive rhythm, without rules, without fixity ; inborn qualities are needed, and also a power of reasoning,

an æsthetic sense infinitely more subtle, more acute, that the movement, the colour, the sound may at every instant change to accord with the varying theme. When a man knows how to handle that fluid thing, French prose; knows the exact value of words, and knows how to modify that value according to the place he gives them;—when he knows how to draw the whole interest of a page to one line, and give relief to one idea among a hundred others, solely by the choice and position of the terms which express it;—when he knows how to strike with a word, a single word, set in a certain manner, as with a weapon; knows how to overwhelm the soul, fill it suddenly with joy or fear, with enthusiasm, chagrin or anger, by merely passing an adjective beneath the reader's eye;—he is truly an artist, the paragon of artists, a master of prose.”<sup>1</sup>

*Conjectures Concerning the Invention of Devils  
from “A Tale of a Tub”*

“And whereas the mind of man, when he gives the spur and bridle to his thoughts, doth never stop, but naturally sallies out into both extremes of high and low, of good and evil; his first flight of fancy commonly transports him to ideas of what is most perfect, finished, and exalted; till having soared out of his own reach and sight, not well perceiving how near the frontiers of height and depth border upon each other; with the same course and wing, he falls down plumb into the lowest bottom of things; like one who travels the east into the west; or like a straight line drawn by its own

<sup>1</sup> *Œuvres complètes*, tome vii. p. liv.

length into a circle. Whether a tincture of malice in our natures makes us fond of furnishing every bright idea with its reverse ; or whether reason, reflecting upon the sum of things, can, like the sun, serve only to enlighten one half of the globe, leaving the other half by necessity under shade and darkness ; or whether fancy, flying up to the imagination of what is highest and best, becomes overshot, and spent, and weary, and suddenly falls, like a dead bird of paradise, to the ground ; or whether, after all these metaphysical conjectures, I have not entirely missed the true reason ; the proposition, however, which hath stood me in so much circumstance, is altogether true, that, as the most civilised parts of mankind have some way or other climbed up into the conception of a god, or supreme power, so they have seldom forgot to provide their fears with certain ghastly notions, which, instead of better, have served them pretty tolerably for a devil."

Swift, as a rule, used his Pegasus for a cart-horse, since it was strong, and he sorely importuned by the press of men and notions in need of condign punishment : but even when plodding in the ruts, its motion betrays the mettle in which it here revels. The chime of "wing" with "things" is probably the only blemish which Flaubert would have detected in the marvellous music of this page ; but he also acknowledged that, however great the older French classics were, it was only quite the moderns who, though of less pregnant virtues, had been scrupulous in removing flaws.



# IMPERSONAL ART

*It should be our earnest endeavour to use words coinciding as closely as possible with what we feel, see, think, experience, imagine, and reason. It is an endeavour which we cannot evade, and which is daily to be renewed.*

*Let every man examine himself, and he will find this a much harder task than he might suppose ; for, unhappily' a man usually takes words as mere make-shifts ; his knowledge and his thought are in most cases better than his method of expression.*

GOETHE'S "MAXIMS AND REFLECTIONS," translated by  
Bailey Saunders, p. 129

*Literature first transgresses equity by not conforming to æsthetic law, which is nothing but a finer justice.*

CORRESPONDANCE DE G. FLAUBERT, Série iv. p. 81

## I

"I believe that great art is scientific and impersonal. You should by an intellectual effort transport yourself into characters, not draw them into yourself. That at least is the method; which amounts to saying: Try to have a great deal of talent and even genius if you can. What vanities all poetics and criticisms are! And the self-assurance of those gentlemen who write them knocks me down. Oh! Nothing makes them uneasy. . .!"<sup>1</sup>

THIS description of great art has been more debated than understood; some notion of the result may be gathered from the Appendix.<sup>2</sup>

Wherein personality consists is not known; many conceptions are implicit in common speech. Some assume that there is no absolute element; all shifts and changes, we are what we seem, not what shapes our seeming. The impress of most men on surviving thought is gone like the shadow of a cloud from the sea: yet a few ride there like stately ships which, even when distant, hang

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série iii. pp. 331 and 332.

<sup>2</sup> See pp. 299-301.

indefinitely on the horizon—or reappear a mirage in the sky.

“*A beautiful life*, it has been said, is a youth’s great thought realised in man full grown.”<sup>1</sup> But could the lad meet his destined self, there might be no recognition, for the finished work never has been what its author first conceived; even when neither transcending nor falling short, it has been other than he meant. The same and not the same, planned and accidental, permanent and fleeting, complex fact, admits the whole gamut between these statements. To pretend that one alone is comprehensible may amuse, but must soon seem silly. ‘Impersonal’ in æsthetic was for Flaubert the equivalent of ‘disinterested’ in administration. It did not mean ‘not personal’ any more than that excludes taking any interest or than ‘unselfish’ implies ‘non-existent.’

“For from the moment you offer a work [to a publisher] if you are not a knave, you believe it good. You ought to have made every possible effort, and have put your whole soul into it. One personality cannot be substituted for another. A book is a complicated organism. Then every amputation, every change operated by a stranger, takes from its integrity. Though it might be less bad, no matter, it would not be itself.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> F. Paulhan, *Les Caractères*, Introduction, p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série iii. p. 326.

“ His worship of beauty made him say : ‘ Morality is only a part of æsthetic, yet is its fundamental condition.’ ”<sup>1</sup>

“ Wit is not enough. Without character, works of art, whatever you may do, will always be mediocre ; honesty is the first condition of art.”<sup>2</sup>

Man believes he must act as a whole, not as a fluctuating chaos of desires and fancies. He must hold himself responsible for his various faculties and be able to pledge their action when he will. Integrity, common honesty, the hope and foundation of civil progress demand impersonality from the artist, as justice demands fair play in human dealing. Should beauty be created to seduce ? is it a cloak for self-indulgence, or armour for malignity ? Nay, such perversion spoils it. Besides, a man cannot write even of himself save relatively ; then he need attend to both terms of each comparison. If he is naturally engrossed by home affairs, effort must overcome lukewarmness on foreign questions, that his credit where all can judge may stead him where he alone has information. His own advantage will not let him see himself magnified and others dwarfed, for decisions so ill prepared will often prove erroneous, nay, even ridiculous. There must be no pretence of knowing

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série i. p. xxxviii.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Série iv. p. 299.

what he ignores, nor neglect where imagination might be nourished with matter of fact or chastened by more reflection. What these imperatives mean to each individual will depend on his capacities, on his social and historical position. Learning is only necessary to him who sees it from such a vantage that he longs for it. So much of what we *can* know as we feel we *ought* to know, is alone requisite for sincerity. M. Dumesnil has amply shown how Flaubert's capacities and situation claimed an unusual erudition. In assimilating this he suffered the throes of style. To attain fine cadences he needed his subject-matter at hand and in order. "Image or sentiment wholly clear in the head brings the right word on to the paper."<sup>1</sup>

And we read in another place—

"Perfection has the same characteristics everywhere, precision and justness. If this book that I suffer so much over writing turns out well, I shall have established by the mere fact of its execution the following truths which for me are axioms, namely, in the first place *that poetry is purely subjective*, that there are not for literature æsthetically beautiful subjects, and that therefore Yvetot is as good as Constantinople; and consequently, *no matter what* may be written as well as *whatever it may be*. The artist ought to raise everything: he has within him a great pipe which goes down into the bowels of things, into the lower beds; it sucks up and sends high

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série ii. p. 331.

towards the sun in giant spouting fountains that which lay spread under the earth and out of sight.”<sup>1</sup>

Here is one of those contradictions with which Flaubert has been so sagely reproached. How indeed can art be *purely subjective* and impersonal at the same time ?

Man does not choose a universe; one is offered to study, yet the temper and pains with which it is inspected may be improved; and perhaps as much delight has been found in understanding finely as was anticipated when the discovery of congenial things was hoped. Style is ideally the ultimate manner of seeing and thinking and must be approached by departing from present ways.<sup>2</sup> If to apply the mind both shape and strengthen it, then those who at times perceive and think splendidly will grow less and less like their own and other mortal selves. In them and not in the object of their study sojourns consideration free from personal concern, which can only be conceived of as thus subjectively existing. All men desire that what in such happy hours has been created may outlast the anxious and greedy make-shifts with which they buy off necessity or waste their time and strength. Hence works of art, though subject to accidental destruction, are defended by widespread if often ill-judged efforts.

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série ii. pp. 252, 253.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Série iii. p. 199; Série ii. p. 71.

## II

THE authority of this impersonal attitude in literature will grow as we discover the like influences elsewhere.

“Seekest thou great things? seek them not.”

“I lay down my life, that I may take it again.”

“Magnanimity despises all, in order to possess all.”

“He that loves himself

Hath not essentially but by circumstance

The name of valour.”

“Every man may be said to be mad, but every man doth not show it.”

“Egoism gives the measure of inferiority; a perfect being would no longer be egotistical.”

“Hide thy life.”

“The man is nothing, the work is all.”

“We need to efface our own opinions as well as those of others when confronted with decisive experiment.”

“Let us prove keen and honest in attending to anything which is in any way brought to our notice, most of all when it does not fit in with our previous ideas.”



These sentences express vividly a widespread sentiment of opposition between two categories of motive, which may conveniently be called selfish and unselfish, corrupt and disinterested, personal and impersonal, or subjective and objective, according to the field of action proposed. In psychology and history, phenomena lie beyond the reach of thorough investigation and uniform experiment, therefore the attempt to be too precise must here be unintelligent. If any man doubts the existence of two such lines of conduct, one effective, the other ineffective, no proof is possible. Whether or no choice be a necessary illusion, those subject to it cannot determine. They may surmise as much,—perhaps they should, if they gain thereby a greater elasticity in choosing; since he who decides for ever is under a self-imposed illusion that he must not choose again. Flaubert's "The supreme ineptitude consists in wishing to conclude"<sup>1</sup> is another way of saying "Judge not that ye be not judged:" but choose we must to die to this, live to that tendency; starve these, feed those faculties; embrace or neglect one of two opportunities.

"A man must be mad to undertake such a task! But we should do nothing if we were not guided by

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série i. p. 338.

false ideas—a remark of Fontenelle's which I think far from silly.”<sup>1</sup>

These choices are experimental : we must expect to regret and correct them ; they are not conclusions or judgments, only the short-sighted so regard them. Saints ever need some form of salvation by grace, because it forbids man to conclude himself saved or lost. The last shall be first ; let those who stand beware lest they fall. The sons of God were comrades once : “ the brightest fell.”

Flaubert rightly says :—

“ Reality is always misrepresented by those who wish to make it lead up to a conclusion ; God alone may do that. . . . Every religion and every philosophy has pretended to possess God, to measure the infinite and know the receipt for happiness. What pride and what inanity ! I see on the contrary that the greatest geniuses and the grandest works have never concluded. Homer, Shakespeare, Goethe, all the elder sons of God (as Michelet says) have been careful not to meddle with anything save representation.”<sup>2</sup>

But if some still think the assertion, “ The artist should take such measures as will make posterity think he has never lived,”<sup>3</sup> mere midsummer madness, Renan has yet other considerations to offer.

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série iv. p. 334.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Série iii. p. 270.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Série ii. p. 77 ; see also Appendix XI., p. 299.

“Anonymity is, for a book destined to become popular, an immense advantage. Obscurity of origin is the condition of prestige ; a too clear view of the author belittles the work and, despite ourselves, from behind the finest passages obtrudes on us a scribe busied polishing phrases and combining effects.”<sup>1</sup>

Not only books that in the same sense as the *Imitation* are to be popular, but all grand works, benefit when dangers run in their native homes can be forgotten, so much so that divinity has received the credit of some. Even self-reflections like Montaigne's triumph by an estranging attribute, when we wonder how any mind could treat its soul so like a third party. The secret of strong characters has often lain in capacity to think of themselves comparatively unmoved. It will appear later that Flaubert recognised originality as some equivalent for impersonality ; a master might be so unlike others that neither modesty nor oblivion could add the prestige of more wonder to his work.

<sup>1</sup> *Études d'histoire religieuse*, p. 317.

### III

ART selects and exhibits perceptions appealing for their recognition to a chosen audience, since the artist must divine the capacity he addresses and the suitability of his means of expression both to it and for rendering his theme. The rest is experimental, for, as Claude Bernard says, "an intuition cannot be established and proved save by experiments";<sup>1</sup> the artist must track beauty as scientists follow up the immediate causes of phenomena. Doubtless, like them, he has to work with imperfect instruments under variable conditions, for his faculties dilate, contract, and are hindered. There is not even relative safety till that extreme of sensibility be reached at which he best responds to pleasure and is most revolted by offence. Discord arrests the born artist, because the means of exposition are sensuous and his sole aim is to exhibit beautifully. He is rightly convinced that harsh accidents prove him not to have

<sup>1</sup> *L'Introduction à l'étude de la médecine expérimentale*, pp. 56, 71.

grasped the true nature of his initial perception ; otherwise he has expressed something that cannot be harmoniously rendered, which was none of his business. Yet he acted on faith in an intuitive forecast that the chosen perception was suitable : to justify this he must conclude that what he has embodied is not what he meant to embody ; then to discover differences he must compare the copy with the original anew, which leads to his treating this latter with yet nicer respect. Thus his passionate hunger for harmony begets effort to master every inertness in respect to observation or analysis.

“ I declare for my part that the physical overbears the moral. No disillusion gives such suffering as a rotten tooth, nor can an inept remark exasperate me so greatly as a creaking door ; and that is why an assonance or a grammatical kink causes the best-intentioned sentence to bungle its effect.”<sup>1</sup>

Everything invented so as to fill mind, heart, and soul is true.<sup>2</sup> Inventions are not mature just as facts have not been digested till the whole man is alive to them. Some myths, some imaginations, some statements of fact have set poets tingling with complete harmonies, hence arose masterpieces ; proportion dwells between their parts, music and

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série ii. p. 383.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 117.

fascination inform all their details. "Poetry is simply the most perfect speech of man," in which his organs of perception, conception, and expression are at one, and Flaubert called their union style. To discover this in any work you must read it perfectly aloud—which includes faultless thought and feeling about its theme. Before you can do or at least imagine this your opinion on its beauty is merely hazarded. The criterion, satisfaction given to thoroughly trained and copiously gifted men, is inborn, absolute, and necessary. "Indeed, the greatest truths are at bottom only sentiments,"<sup>1</sup> as Claude Bernard said, and an eminent English physicist is even bolder:—

"Scientific truth or æsthetic beauty are but different names for that which satisfies the instinctive needs of the creative imagination."<sup>2</sup>

Unfortunately he has not emulated the French master's caution, but, led away by Oscar Wilde's paradoxical ingenuity, has overstated his case.

"A great man of science invents a theory and life tries to live up to it. He is no thick-skulled rationalist, but a dreamer, and his dreams come true. He dreams, and messages flash across the empty ocean; he dreams

<sup>1</sup> *Introduction à l'étude de la médecine expérimentale*, p. 48.

<sup>2</sup> Norman R. Campbell, "The Meaning of Science" (the *New Quarterly*, October, 1908, p. 503).

again, and a new world springs into being and starts upon the course that he has ordained."

Does Mr. Campbell really believe that their planet did not exist till Adams and Leverrier conceived that its creation would account for the deflection of Uranus's orbit, when it obediently came into being? Rossetti and Burne-Jones found elements for the types of beauty, which they are said to have created, among actual women, selected and set them off by well-calculated arrangements of dress and hair; these were copied by ladies who had some slight resemblance to the type thus defined, and the intention of the fashion was recognised when men found themselves constantly reminded of a beauty which had been and remained extremely rare. It would in the same way be more rational to think that Balzac taught us to see the nineteenth century than that he invented it. Mr. Campbell's statement would be better worded, "Scientific truth or æsthetic beauty are but different names for that which satisfies man's imaginative instinct." Genius creates the description, not the object described, and our nature hankers after true and harmonious descriptions, for they alone consist with all our impressions. If the diverse facts concerning a complex object raise conflicting feelings we are not satisfied; for us the criterion of truth is the integrity

of sentiment. In other words, all parts of an object with which we are concerned must have comprehensible interrelations and evoke its harmonious representation in our minds.

The part played by imagination in scientific method cannot be better described than by Claude Bernard:—

“It is true that the results of experiment must be recorded by a mind stripped of all hypotheses and preconceived ideas. But we must be careful how we proscribe the use of ideas and hypotheses when the work in hand is to set experiments on foot, or imagine means of observation. Here, on the contrary, as we shall soon see, the imagination must be given free course; the idea is the principal root of all reasoning and all invention, to it is due all the credit for every kind of initiative. To stifle or drive it away under pretext that it might do harm were folly; all we need is to regulate it and provide a criterion for it.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Introduction à l'étude de la médecine expérimentale*, pp. 40 and 41.



#### IV

A PART from the truth or erroneousness of its positions, this impersonal method in art has been rejected as impracticable. The effort required is held to put felicity out of question, so that still-born harmonies alone can result.

“Most writers sin by an excessive confidence in the infallibility of their genius. Flaubert has sinned by excessive distrust of his. . . . Goethe said, ‘Poetry is deliverance.’ . . . Flaubert might have said on the contrary, ‘Poetry is torture’ . . .”<sup>1</sup>

But this is misrepresentation : for Flaubert never denied that ease and joy in production were desirable, or had belonged to great masters. His letters tell how he experienced them himself.

“If at times I pass galling hours which cause me almost to cry with rage, I so feel my impotence and weakness, there are others also when I can hardly contain

<sup>1</sup> Paul Bourget, *Œuvres complètes*, tome i., pp. 138 and 143.

myself for joy ; something profound and super-voluptuous overflows me in hurried gushes like an ejaculation of the soul. I feel myself transported and intoxicated by my own thoughts.”<sup>1</sup>

However, not a present rapture, but a child, sound, vigorous, and capable of a long career was what Flaubert craved for.

“ He had an exquisite passion for what is properly, in the sense of ease and pleasure, poetical Luxury ; and with that it appears to me he would fain have been content, if he could, so doing, have preserved his self-respect and feel of duty performed ; but there was working in him as it were that same sort of thing as operates in the great world to the end of a Prophecy’s being accomplished : therefore he devoted himself rather to the ardours than the pleasures of Song, solacing himself at intervals with cups of old wine.”<sup>2</sup>

Thus Keats wrote of Milton ; the words apply equally well to Flaubert, who speaks of the lyric opportunities which the severity of his tasks allowed him and of the “ good times ” when he was writing the early version of *Saint Antoine*, as one who loved and refused himself “ cups of old wine.”

“ Taking a subject which left me entirely free as to

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série ii. p. 188 ; also p. 91.

<sup>2</sup> Notes on Milton’s *Paradise Lost*.

lyricism, movement, extravagances, I found myself well within my nature and had only to go ahead. Never again shall I find the rapturous abandonment to style that I then gave myself during eighteen long months.”<sup>1</sup>

And even over subjects “which stank in his nose”<sup>2</sup> when he had worked himself up to the full pitch he would spend entranced hours.

“No matter, well or ill, writing is delicious—to be yourself no longer, but to circulate through all the creation of which you are speaking. . . . Is it pride or pity, is it the silly overflow of an exaggerated self-satisfaction? or really a vague and noble religious sentiment? Anyway, when I ruminate after experiencing those delights, I should be tempted to put up a prayer of thanks to the good God if I knew He could hear me. Be He blessed then, since He has not let me be born a cotton merchant, a *vaudevilliste*, a man of wit, &c.!”<sup>3</sup>

Men do not choose what they shall suffer and enjoy; they are capable or incapable, can train and acquire taste or can not. Though our sensitiveness may be controlled in various degrees, some without effort can make light of much that is untoward, while others with great self-mastery rarely obtain a thrill of spontaneous satisfaction even in chosen surroundings. Flaubert was as enthusiastic as he

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série ii, pp. 70.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Série iii, p. 331.    <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Série ii, p. 359.

was irritable. He had the good fortune to be ever up and down with a vengeance, so that his was an unusually vivid appreciation of both the goods and the ills of life. In love with art, he felt as continually provoked by difficulty, hindrance, and imperfection, as he was thrown into ecstasy by all great examples and achievements. Emulous, yet a keen analyst, his pleasure in his own success was the least likely to endure.

Walter Pater grasped this question more firmly than many of Flaubert's countrymen :—

“The unique term will come more quickly to one than another, at one time than another, according also to the kind of matter in question. . . Quickness and slowness, ease and closeness (*sic* : effort ?) alike, have nothing to do with the artistic character of the true word found at last. . . . If Flaubert had not told us, perhaps we should never have guessed how tardy and painful his own procedure really was.”<sup>2</sup>

Flaubert did not tell us ; he told his intimates, who for our good thought right to disregard his declared wishes. The proper rôles of ease and pleasure in creating art can be endlessly discussed ; yet reason why so much is made of them by brilliant critics may be suggested without a wish to dogmatise where circumstances ought to determine.

<sup>2</sup> *Appreciations*, 1890, Style, p. 29.

## V

HOW delightful it is to watch a child's eyes as, enchanted, it tilts a tray on which beads of quicksilver "roll and unite, then self-divide anew!" M. Anatole France, following his bright and mobile reflections, exerts a similar charm. "According to me," Flaubert had said, "the artist is a monstrosity, something outside nature;"<sup>1</sup> and his critic cries, "There is the mistake. He did not understand that poetry should be born naturally out of life, as tree, flower, and fruit spring from the earth,"<sup>2</sup> to which let Renan reply, since only for him M. France uses the deference due to a superior. "Scarcely human, scarcely natural. Doubtless, but we are only strong by opposing nature. The natural tree does not bear fine fruit. The espalier bears fine fruit, that is a tree which is no longer a tree."<sup>3</sup> Yes, all civilisation, all religion, all art have been bought at that price.

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série ii. p. 19.

<sup>2</sup> *La Vie littéraire*, Série iii. p. 305.

<sup>3</sup> *Souvenirs d'enfance et de jeunesse*, p. 341.

Flaubert's correspondence abounds in proofs of how he loved freedom, wildness, ease, like a truant revelling the more in his own and his friends' escape since he had realised how the crucified tree nailed to the wall, like the man nailed to the tree, were symbols of the tax too often levied on excellence. "Not ideal!" he gibes the pilloried orchard: "but necessary"; he bows his head. Fortified by the discovery of this contradiction, M. France, taking the words out of Brunetière's mouth,<sup>1</sup> who might have found them on Louise Colet's lips,<sup>2</sup> says he is not intelligent.

Though too prudent so to speak of a great artist; M. Bourget may yet have led M. France astray; this latter has told us how he then thought no man was ever more intelligent.<sup>3</sup>

"That which because it moves us we seek in the work of great old-world poets, is the impression, on tangible material, of this soul-shape forever vanished; it is the charming line of the little leaf of a morning reproduced on a stone which remains, and which permits us to muse endlessly over it. Such is the truth against which Flaubert rebelled all his life long."<sup>4</sup>

No plant ever laboured to print its form on a

<sup>1</sup> *Histoire et littérature*, tome ii. p. 131.

<sup>2</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série ii. p. 385.

<sup>3</sup> *La Vie littéraire*, Série ii. p. 10.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Bourget, *Œuvres complètes*, tome i. p. 146.

stone, much less to print that of other objects which it had studied and loved, tracing the beauty of some creating harmony by the arrangement even of those deficient in grace. The choice of that image reveals the untrustworthiness of the writer's critical conception which, as Flaubert said,

"perforce leads to talent being treated as negligible. The masterpiece has no longer any significance save as an historical document. . . . Once literature was believed to be a wholly personal affair, and works fell from heaven like aerolites. Now all purpose, everything absolute is denied. The truth lies, I believe, between the two."<sup>1</sup>

Yet M. Bourget is able to blame others for "more and more repressing in their books the study of the will."<sup>2</sup>

Now after "*toute volonté*" Flaubert added "*tout absolu.*" Modern critics, in tracing developments and seeking origins, are prone to ignore absolute values.

"The feeling for beauty, for truth, for good . . . these sentiments are facts revealed by study of human nature,"<sup>3</sup> says a great scientist; and he has treated one of them as "primordial," and "imposed

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série iii. p. 196.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Bourget, *Œuvres complètes*, tome i. p. 126.

<sup>3</sup> *Dialogues philosophiques*, par E. Renan. Berthelot's reply, pp. 235 and 236.

on us, apart from all reasoning, all dogmatic creed, all idea of penalty or recompense"; as "never again to be compromised by the downfall of metaphysical systems." <sup>1</sup>

The study of objects in series may cause inborn and necessary perceptions to fall into abeyance. Since no one thing is absolutely, and everything may be relatively true, good, or beautiful, expectancy of better or worse influences criticism, as it enters into a nurse's praise or blame. Yet where is the analogy? No work of art ever improves or deteriorates in this sense. Terms have been used of objective relations which are only proper to the living subject. The historical evolution of stylistic characters is not regular or continuous in regard to beauty, and any stage, independently of antecedents or prognostics, may approach most nearly; neither source nor climax has the better chance.<sup>2</sup> A fervid preference for mature or primitive art springs from some pathetic fallacy. Thus historical study betrays and deludes the critic. "A

<sup>1</sup> *Dialogues philosophiques*, par E. Renan. Berthelot's reply, p. 209.

<sup>2</sup> Chinese notions were saner; "the style varied with the subject," instead of with the age. "Nothing is more unsafe than to generalise about the style of a Chinese or Japanese artist; one never knows what manner or model he may not adopt"; a primitive one for this mood, the most up-to-date for this other: it being clearly recognised that the excellence attained may be at once diverse and equal. See L. Binyon, *Painting in the Far East*, pp. 45 and 92, 1908.



link in the chain," he says, when another at its far end is alone valuable. Partial resemblances to childhood, virility, age, seduce him, and kindness for his own dear life tunes sentiment in regard to utterly disparate things. To maunder over early or late failures as we spoil children, or flatter senility, has seemed profound, exquisite—nay, even judicious. Again, as the colour-blind perceive only one or a few tints, appreciation of subtleties in character or psychic developments is to-day a fashionable jaundice indicative of insensibility to completer harmonies, in which such quality plays but one of many parts, and is sometimes subordinate. This lop-sided admiration soon tempts an artist to adopt forms in which he is at ease. His self-development may be watched most advantageously when he is freed from preoccupation with it; discipline is relaxed; leaf covers leaf, though fruit be sparse and never ripen.

We can all correct our fellows; even M. France accepts Flaubert's theory for this purpose:—

"To set the same value on what every man does for himself as on what one alone does for all; to weigh, as Mr. Laujol appears to, the nurture of a child against giving birth to a poem, amounts to proclaiming the inanity of beauty, of genius, of thought, of everything." <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *La Vie littéraire*, Série iii. p. 301.

Yes, and to point this out amounts to saying that "poetry is not born naturally out of life, as tree, flower, and fruit spring from the earth,"<sup>1</sup> or as children arrive in due course.

To those who live on inherited intellectual and moral capital the conviction that we do not know or feel or act as well as we might by taking pains may easily appear a little ridiculous. Even when they have striven in youth to augment their fortune they put away childish thoughts and accept themselves for what they are. Their gifts push forward, flower, and bear almost unconsciously; and who would dispute their happiness? But if genius remains childlike, as is sometimes asserted; if to live and die for others be not always futile; if barriers that checked man's advance have been taken down by conscious effort and voluntary suffering; to call those *unintelligent* who, instead of spending the much that is to hand, strive to mine or mint for currency the more that is still to seek; may not only be ungracious, but deserve that lightly bandied disparagement.

Great powers and inherent convictions will be obeyed; a man is not more his own when singled out from classes and masses by originality, but becomes the servant of forces we cannot measure. In his case our standards cease to be adequate;

<sup>1</sup> *La Vie littéraire*, Série iii. p. 305; see above, p. 97.

in describing him our science meets a fact of which the parallels are too widely scattered, too variously conditioned for safe generalisation. Here is love's happiest use, here admiration nourishes while those starve who contest ; to receive is here to give, since only attention, receptiveness, and respect are asked for.

## VI

BELLOWING and chanting his periods, Flaubert gauged their fitness to be heard, uttered, and delighted in by the human organism.

“A sentence will live when it answers to the needs of respiration. I know it is good when it can be read out loud.”<sup>2</sup>

If the current of thought is embarrassed, the effort to attend causes hesitation; if the vocables do not lead harmoniously one on to the other delivery is impeded, and if these two streams do not keep pace, the voice will pant after the sense or the thought pause while a sinuous verbosity overtakes it. Both must rush or both must loiter, or one will tax our faculties in excess and cause a dislocation. This conception was rendered yet more fertile by its application. On discovering a flaw or hitch Flaubert refused to tinker, and

<sup>2</sup> G. Flaubert, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. vii. p. lii.

returned to his idea convinced it had not been thoroughly grasped.

“As to correction, before carrying a single one out, re-meditate the whole and try hard to ameliorate, *not by excisions, but by a new creation*. Every correction ought to be reasoned ; the subject should be thoroughly ruminated before a thought is given to the form ; a good form only occurs to the mind if the illusion of the subject has become an obsession.”<sup>1</sup>

When his conception shall live in him, the musical expression will gush forth and be found also more lucid and complete. Hackneyed, idle, or vague epithets, purposeless repetitions of sense, sound or rhythm, conventional circumlocutions, he early banished altogether. Vivisection of his own work and of acknowledged masterpieces had shown that they could always be replaced or omitted with advantage.<sup>2</sup> The best vocables are explicit to the brain, while they satisfy heart and voice, so that the whole body is in tune with the mind when it utters them.

“He intoxicated himself with the rhythm of verse and the cadence of prose (which should also lend itself to reading aloud). Badly written sentences cannot

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série ii. p. 350.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix XII. p. 302.

stand this test; they oppress the lungs, hamper the beating heart, and are thus outside the pale of vital conditions.”<sup>1</sup>

He was not alone. Montaigne had said:—

“When I see (in the Latin authors) those fine forms of explaining what is meant, so lively, so profound, I do not say ‘well said,’ I say ‘well thought.’ The bravery of the imagination lifts and fills out the words, *pectus est, quod disertum facit*; we (French) think judgment lies in speech, and that fine words are as good as full conceptions.”<sup>2</sup>

*Boileau*: “That which is well conceived is clearly delivered.”<sup>3</sup>

*La Bruyère*: “Let us only try to think and speak exactly, without wishing to win others over to our taste and our feelings; that is too vast an undertaking.”<sup>4</sup>

“Among all the diverse expressions which can render a certain thought for us only one is good: we do not always come across it when speaking or writing, nevertheless it exists, and a good judge who wishes to make himself understood finds everything else feeble and unsatisfying.”<sup>5</sup>

“All an author’s power consists in defining and paint-

<sup>1</sup> *Préface aux Dernières chansons de Louis Bouilhet: Œuvres complètes de G. F.*, vi. p. 181.

<sup>2</sup> *Essais*, Livre iii. ch. v.

<sup>3</sup> *L’Art poétique*, Chant Premier.

<sup>4</sup> *Les Caractères: Des Ouvrages de l’esprit*, par. ii.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, par. xxvi.

ing well ; . . . to write naturally, strongly, delicately, you must express the truth.<sup>1</sup>

"Mediocrities think to write divinely, a fine intelligence hopes to write reasonably."<sup>2</sup>

*Fénelon* ; "If a work is to be truly beautiful, the author must forget himself, and allow me to forget him ; he ought to leave me alone in full liberty."<sup>3</sup>

*Montesquieu* : "An organ more or less in our mechanism would have necessitated another eloquence, another poetry. . . . If the constitution of our organs had rendered us capable of a longer attention, all rules which proportion the disposition of the subject to the measure of our attention would no longer exist ; . . . laws founded on the fact that our mechanism is of a certain kind would be different if our mechanism were not of that kind."<sup>4</sup>

*Buffon* : "To write well is at the same time to think, to feel, and to render well ; it means wit, soul, and taste conjoined."<sup>5</sup>

*Goethe* : "Everything depends on the conception."<sup>6</sup>

This last the French master amplified thus :—

<sup>1</sup> *Les Caractères : Des Ouvrages de l'esprit*, par. xv.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, par. xxix.

<sup>3</sup> *Lettre à l'Académie*, p. 63.

<sup>4</sup> *Essais sur le goût : Des plaisirs de notre âme*.

<sup>5</sup> *Discours sur le style*.

"In order to form a correct judgment on what he was writing Buffon would have his manuscript read to him by a stranger. If the reader became embarrassed, if he did not read freely and harmoniously, Buffon marked the passage and re-worked it later on, then put it to the same test again" (*Antoine Albalat, Le Travail du style*, pp. 153 and 154).

<sup>6</sup> Quoted by Flaubert, *Correspondance*, Série ii. p. 132.

“The more beautiful an idea is, the more sonorous will be its expression. . . . The precision of the thought is and necessitates that of the word.”<sup>2</sup>

French artists have been perhaps pre-eminently conscious and rational, and by her prose has France taken highest rank among the nations of the world. If Flaubert understood the statements of his fore-runners as well as he continued their achievements, then we may call art scientific, because it implies the discovery of the physiological conditions which determine æsthetic approbations. These artists, following the same procedure as men of science, intuitively divine, then develop the hypotheses thus formed by more or less consequent experiment. Taste is only subjective in the same sense that all knowledge is: and though at present more immature than some branches of science, yet the same method that has given them consistency must consolidate its essays.

However, the end of art not being physiological knowledge, but an application of it, whether empirical or reasoned, art is not that science any more than a water supply is hydraulics. Results may be excellent where very little or no conscious method has been exerted, and may be bad where great mastery over principles has wrestled with niggardly nature.

<sup>2</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série iii. p. 116.



## VII

THE words, "I believe that great art is scientific," had, however, a further significance for Flaubert: though they never meant, as is generally assumed, that to represent fact is her sole function, for he added, "I regard technical details, local information—in short, the historical and exact side of things—as altogether secondary." <sup>1</sup> Still Flaubert thought that artists, in preparing their subjects, might apply the methodical wariness by which accidental and personal decoys have been eliminated from scientific study.

Perfect docility would dispose the mind continually to assimilate new impressions; but men rest on old association, or are welded into it—then their only escape is by voluntary renunciation. Effort may achieve what youth in a measure enjoys and some more happy natures maintain—freshness in pursuit of experience. When sight dims, instead of the old horn spectacles of prejudice and desire,

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série iii. p. 331, iv. p. 220.

let us employ the pure lens of disinterested examination, polished by patience. He would not have the artist less imaginative or inventive, but let him use better material—as Michael Angelo applied the knowledge of anatomy to the creation of unheard-of types which dwarf mere men. This if he can; but less ambitious designs will mature by the same process. Better provided, each inventor has a greater range of choice, and fixes on the best, not the second best, feature for his purpose; besides, in the presence of those vast and intricate vistas, his own passions and peculiarities take a truer proportion and seem less absorbing, leaving him free to sympathise with more varied existences.<sup>1</sup> He might be tempted to forget himself in his work.<sup>2</sup> Learning from the Mayor of Trouville in 1853 that during forty years there had only been two convictions for theft among a population of three thousand, Flaubert writes:—

“To me that seems luminous. Are fisher-folk moulded of other clay than labourers? what is the reason? I believe it should be attributed to *contact with vastness*; a man who has ever before him as much space as the human eye can scan should draw a disdainful serenity from frequenting it (witness the prodigality of sailors of all grades, careless of life and money). I

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance*, Série iii. p. 203.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Série ii. p. 298.

believe the morality of art should be sought in the same direction."

And of natural science he cries :—

" Look what stretches of facts ! what an immensity open to thought ! "

Haunted by that, who will filch a satisfaction for his vanity, his sentimentality, or his comfort ?

In this sense the art of Homer and Shakespeare is scientific ; like sailors on the high seas they gave all and were whatever they might be. A fundamental docility in respect of experience was the air by breathing which they held all human beliefs lightly. Their curiosity was animated with reverence for things observed rather than with personal needs and preferences. This temper was for Flaubert the soul of great art, by which it is akin to science. M. René Dumesnil<sup>1</sup> set passages from his letters side by side with others from *L'Introduction à l'étude de la médecine expérimentale* in order to show that, like Claude Bernard, Flaubert had been a spiritual grandson of the great doctors Bichat and Cabanis, and such parallels may be extended.<sup>2</sup> Though no number of them can, of course, show that Flaubert could, if he would, have written some such perfect

<sup>1</sup> *Flaubert : son hérédité—son milieu—sa méthode*, p. 294, &c.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix XIII. pp. 304-307.

Introduction to Experimental Method, perhaps they indicate that he might have tabulated the main positions, and was at least far on the road to grasp their full bearing, before the publication of Claude Bernard's master thesis.

Critics forget what hasty outpourings his letters were, written after the day's work to friends, arguing with them, shouting to rouse them ; eager to make notepaper a substitute for personal communion, and so serve both as relief and recreation.

"Often Flaubert gave outrageous, paradoxical, or provoking expression to his ideas : so much so that he has been accused of ferocity or immorality. Their profound justness will strike those who relate them to the social period of their enunciation and their due place in the mind that conceived them."<sup>1</sup>

However, for us, the main interest of this parallel between the great doctor's and the great writer's thought lies in the latter's application of such ideas to æsthetic ends. He regarded experimental preparation as neither necessary nor binding on every artist : the realist alone must suffer from lack of it.

"And then, *that* (scientific preparation) matters very little, it is secondary. A book may be full of enormities

<sup>1</sup> G. Lanson, *Pages choisies des grands écrivains* : G. Flaubert, Introduction, p. xxix, 1895.

and blunders and be none the less very beautiful. Such a doctrine, if it gained ground, would be deplorable ; I know *that* in France above all, where the pedantry of ignorance is rife. But I see in the opposite tendency—which, alas ! is mine—a great danger. Study of the coat makes us forget the soul.”<sup>1</sup>

Writers who abjure phantasy can be scientific and create beauty only by keeping to “probable generalities,”<sup>2</sup> and by displaying “more logic” than can be traced through “the hazard of occurrences.”<sup>3</sup>

“Characters must be worked up to the height of types : paint that which will not pass away, try to write for eternity.”<sup>4</sup>

“Special cases are for that reason false ;” for exceptions<sup>5</sup> will not fuse in harmonies based on cause and effect rather than on the author’s sentiment.

Flaubert well perceived the danger of vain curiosity, which hovers round such odd incidents as must lack definite significance and therefore cannot yet form parts of intelligible wholes. Mysteries, unless typical of some ignorance which plays a constant and recognised part in human life, cannot

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série iii. p. 103.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Série iii. p. 340.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 376.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 209.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 306.

beget mature emotion, and sound impertinent in any sequence of vital impressions. Instead of wooing our contemplation they rouse us from it with a start. Thus Flaubert, wishing to work with conscious observation and experiment, is anxiously on his guard against bootless excursions; and, devout to achieve beauty, is not content to surprise alone, but seeks always to entrance and fascinate.

"I believe . . . you may interest with any subject : as to creating beauty with any, I think that too, theoretically at least, but am less sure."<sup>1</sup>

And he says of a scene in *Madame Bovary* that "even perfectly succeeded in . . . it will never be beautiful on account of the subject."<sup>2</sup>

In order to nourish our sense of beauty, curiosity must not be merely irritated, but attuned to follow a definite evolution, and return, instead of fainting exhausted where its tether becomes taut.

"I try to think well in order to write well. But to write well is my end, I make no secret of it."<sup>3</sup>

The risk of loss is thus diminished : not only has an outlook been achieved, but a golden stair thither is provided by perfectly fitting words. Thus the forms of enlightened interest may become a racial

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série ii. p. 319.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 275.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Série iv. p. 221.

possession, a dance of thought. Then generations joining in will be carried through certain figures on lovely rhythms by which every step is determined. The beyond not yet subject to vision or survey will be better divined and explored by those for whom past experience is consolidated in habits effecting the ends proposed, exhilarating the performers and beautiful to witness; reading aloud might be all this. Some Greek rhapsodist or actor with a happy audience may have touched this ideal. Homer may have once produced his due effect, and style been freed an hour from the gaol in which the lack of harmonious training and exercise universally confines it.

“The world’s injustice, baseness, and tyranny, and all the turpitudes and fetidness of existence revolt you . . .” (Flaubert says to the artist).

*“But are you quite sure of knowing life? Have you been to the bottom of science? Are you not too feeble for passion? Let us not accuse alcohol, but our stomachs or our intemperance. Who among us without hope of recompense, without personal interests, without expectation of profit, constantly strains to approach God? Who works to be greater and better, to love more strongly, to feel more intensely, to understand more and more?”*

“How can we, with our bounded senses and finite intelligence, reach absolute knowledge of truth and good? Shall we ever grasp the absolute? If you want to live, you must do without a clear idea of any-

thing whatsoever. . . . Life is so hideous that the only way of enduring it is to avoid it. And it may be avoided by living in art, in ceaseless search for *truth rendered by beauty.*"<sup>1</sup>

To-day, beauty may express truth more directly than in myths and legends : for of them, as of his licentious tales, La Fontaine might have said :—

“The beauty and grace of these things lie neither in truth nor in verisimilitude, but in the manner of telling them alone.”<sup>2</sup>

Yet beauty is “the *splendour of truth?*”<sup>3</sup> Yes, but not only that of ascertained circumstances. Sincerity—truth about what a man thinks and feels even when he is ignorant, deceived, and vicious—nay, even when he is jesting, ridiculing, or romancing—is capable of admirable expression. It includes the best that has yet been thought of human life. Errors, illusions, dreams have in the past been rendered by beauty, often doubtless charged with detached or half-apprehended verities ; now, with the experimental method and the historical sense added, modern artists have the opportunity of thus rendering the probable and the known. Solidarity of thought, feeling, and expres-

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série iii. pp. 85, 155, 85, 86.

<sup>2</sup> *Préface de La Fontaine pour la seconde édition du premier livre de ses contes*, 1665.

<sup>3</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série iii. p. 80.



sion begets beauty. He who would use objective reality in art can never, as Flaubert said, have enough sympathy;<sup>1</sup> for heart and soul, as well as mind, must be filled by the facts studied, or he will fail.

“Everything invented is true, be sure of that; poetry is as precise a thing as geometry; induction is as good as deduction. And then on reaching a certain level, mistakes are no longer made about all that belongs to the soul; without doubt, at this very hour, my poor Bovary suffers and weeps in twenty villages of France at once.”<sup>2</sup>

The throes of style are caused by the painful parturition of what is comprehensible in thought and emotion from what is incoherent. Flaubert felt that so much as could live in other minds, and augment their efficiency, must be freed from all taint of matters which could only swell prejudice and hasten corruption. The public should have his best after it had passed the inquisition of his most active hours.

“He did not lay down principles in order to give authority to his natural bent, but in order to defend himself against it, rectify and complete it.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série iii. p. 367.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Série ii. p. 284.

<sup>3</sup> *Pages choisies des grands écrivains*: Gustave Flaubert, par G. Lanson, Introduction, p. xxxv.

A large amount of incomprehensible jargon passes unnoticed in the work of those who address their contemporaries ; but to win a hearing from men who will use quite other cant, and detest the old-fashioned, a writer must traverse current opinions for a better view of his object. Though he disassociate himself from those who are called "the intelligent"—who are introducing the next fashion, or wielding the present one with exceptional fluency—he may approach minds of far distant periods and purge his conceptions of temporary oddities. The lasting esteem due to reason is worth the risk of seeming a little out of date to-day. Those who strain after immediate effect are often nettled by those who suffer that their work may live. Alas!

"the strong also, the great, have said in their turn, 'Why not agitate this crowd hourly instead of making it dream later on?' And they have climbed on the platform, they have written for newspapers ; and there they are, buttressing with immortal names ephemeral theories. . . . To me it seems finer to reach several centuries ahead and to set beating the hearts of generations to come, flooding them with pure joys ; who shall tell the divine thrills that Homer has caused, all the tears that the good Horace has sent flowing through remembrances ?" <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série i. pp. 158 and 159.

## VIII

“POOR Flaubert could *never understand* what Sainte-Beuve tells, in his *Port-Royal*, of those solitary souls who, passing their whole life in the same house, addressed each other as ‘Monsieur’ to their dying day.”<sup>1</sup>

Flaubert had written to Sainte-Beuve :—

“It is precisely because their ways are very far from mine that I admire your talent in making me understand them,”<sup>2</sup>

which is not quite the same thing. However, the reproach which immaculate criticism might venture on would probably be that here implied by Renan. For though profound respect from his intimates rarely failed him, Flaubert perhaps leaned towards the extreme that breeds contempt rather than that

<sup>1</sup> E. Renan, *Souvenirs d'enfance et de jeunesse*, p. 339.

<sup>2</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série iii. p. 250.

which regards the asking of a service between friends as "an act of corruption." <sup>1</sup>

To explain the contrast between his attitudes in work and leisure, he says :—

"I have always tried not to belittle art for the satisfaction of an isolated personality." <sup>2</sup>

Could he have foregone his freedom with those whom he trusted, have tamed his exuberance in private as in public, making life itself a work of impersonal art, as saints have done, he had been more irreproachable, if hardly more lovable.

He never dared to compare himself with the Shakespeares and Rabelais who are assumed to have produced with ease,—not even with the Montaignes who say just what comes into their heads. Carefully and respectfully though M. Albalat has defended his judgments, he has not done justice to their coherence. He thinks "the method matters little, for to re-work again and again proves to be *the* necessity." <sup>3</sup>

"Talent consists in understanding that you can do better." <sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> E. Renan, *Souvenirs d'enfance et de jeunesse*, p. 339.

<sup>2</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série i. p. 128.

<sup>3</sup> *Le travail du style*, p. 10.

<sup>4</sup> *Ouvriers et procédés*, p. 325.

Anxious not to exclude any great reputation, he failed to grasp the catholic nature of Flaubert's physiological test. The nice convenience of voice, heart, and brain while reading aloud, as it could only be applied by a perfect man, would only discover one style capable of adequately varying with every subject. Divergencies between actual styles, not derived from change of theme, are necessarily due to imperfections in writers. Fortunately, great men have owned as diverse excellences as faults, so that true eloquence exists in their successes, though no *one* has complete control of it. But for each man's style Flaubert's method holds good, though its effect will vary with individual limitations. All good writers have probably used it, though often unconsciously, and with every degree of thoroughness. M. Albalat even champions some whom Flaubert consistently admired against a severity which he reads into his theory.

"To conceive of art as the expression of a collective (?) sensibility, is to declare the inferiority of works of personal sensibility and of reflective autobiography such as *Montaigne's Essays*, *Adolphe*, *René*, *Rousseau's Confessions*, Hugo's poetry, certain pieces by Lord Byron. The predominance of a personality in a literary work seems to us as reasonable as the non-intervention of the author, and as powerful works may result from treating only of yourself as from treating exclusively of others." <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ouvriers et procédés*, p. 245.

Yet we have seen that M. Albalat admits the very best works to be all impersonal.<sup>1</sup>

What was Flaubert's contention ?

"Poets are of two classes—the very great and the rare ; the true masters sum up humanity ; preoccupied neither with themselves nor with their passions, throwing their personality on the rubbish-heap in order to absorb themselves in those of others, they reproduce the universe, which is reflected in their works, sparkling, varied, manifold, as a whole sky is mirrored in the sea with all its stars, and all its azure ; there are others who have only to create in order to be harmonious, only to weep in order to touch us, and only to occupy themselves with themselves in order to remain with us eternally ; they could not perhaps have gone farther by acting differently, but in default of amplex they have ardour and zest, so much so that had they been born with other temperaments they would perhaps have had no genius. Byron was of this family, Shakespeare of that other ; of a truth is there anything to tell what Shakespeare loved, what he betrayed, what he felt ? He is a Colossus who terrifies, it is difficult to believe that he was a man. Ah well, fame ! we want ours to be pure, true, sound as that of those demi-gods ; we put ourselves out of joint, we strain and strut to reach their level, we lop away from our talent naïve caprices and instructive fancies in order to fit them into the type agreed upon, into a ready-made mould ; or possibly at other times one has the vanity to believe that it suffices, like Montaigne and Byron, to say what comes into head

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix XI. p. 300.

and heart in order to create beautiful things. This last method is perhaps the wisest for those who are original, for writers would often have far more qualities if they strove less after them, and the first man to hand who knew how to write correctly could make a superb book of his memoirs, completely, sincerely written. Now then, to come back to myself. I saw I was not of sufficient stature to make true works of art, nor eccentric enough to fill them with myself alone; and not having cunning enough to procure success, nor genius enough to conquer glory, I condemned myself to write for my own satisfaction, as one smokes a pipe or goes out riding."<sup>1</sup>

Flaubert had an "inverted hypocrisy,"<sup>2</sup> as Sabatier says, and willingly gave you to understand less than the truth about his motives.<sup>3</sup>

In any case perfection pleased him, and his exercise was a rigorous and patient effort to compass it. He would invent sequences of articulate sounds which, even when the information they conveyed should be outgrown, might still seem worth repeating for the sake of hearing such melody and uttering with so much grace thoughts buoyant with sympathy. Why publish what is less well written, unless it be news or discoveries? He was neither journalist nor scientist, nor even an historian.

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série i. p. 180.

<sup>2</sup> *Journal de Genève*, Mai 16, 1880.

<sup>3</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série i. p. 115.

Having observed matters that any one might look into, he thereafter retold tales as Homer and Virgil had, or composed a new one out of scraps as Shakespeare sometimes did. Dances, songs, and more ponderate rhythms outlive systems, catch-words, and arguments because they enchant, they occupy the living with beauty and re-create joy. Harmony is more explicit than any language; it alone informs the soul, begetting the temper which welcomes knowledge and achieves peace. In spite of the grandeur of this conception Flaubert was not consistently so contemptuous of his own effort as in the passage quoted above—at other times he is kinder to his hopes than to treat them as a self-indulgence.

“In writing this book [*Madame Bovary*] I am like a man playing the piano with a lead shot tied to every finger-joint, but when I shall know my fingering, *if I hit on an air to my liking*, and can play with my sleeves turned up, *it will perhaps be good*. . . .

“*I believe that as to this I am in line*, what you create is not for you but for others. Art need not take account of the artist: so much the worse for him if he does not like red, green, or yellow, all the colours are beautiful, the thing is to copy them.”<sup>2</sup>

Flaubert manfully copied dull colours while preferring bright ones; he felt that subjects imposed

<sup>2</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série ii. p. 128; see also p. 91.



themselves and were not chosen ; modern life invited observation, bygone and foreign existences baffled it, and, as Buffon says :—

“ Human intelligence can create nothing, and only produces when fertilised by experience and meditation ; knowledge is the seed of its productions.”<sup>1</sup>

*Madame Bovary* and *l'Education* embody knowledge which alone could impregnate such conceptions of the imagination as *Salammbô* and *Saint Antoine*. Not to have repined at having to seek his experience in such colourless dirt would have been grander : but those to whom he complained were always ready to listen, and many of us are delighted to overhear.

<sup>1</sup> *Discours sur le style.*

## IX

AS Flaubert's critics have but little followed up this idea of impersonal art, so they have ill-observed his application of it.

"If the reader does not draw from a book the lesson which ought to result from it, that must mean either that the reader is an idiot or that the book is inaccurate. . . ." <sup>1</sup>

"By virtue of the profoundly just dilemma which he thus formulates, Flaubert *always* abstains from appreciating both the events which he exhibits and the characters which he develops."

M. Dumesnil is not alone in making this observation ; most of the critics I have quoted acquiesce in it more or less explicitly ; yet we read in *Madame Bovary* :—

"'I bear you no ill-will,' he said.

"Rudolph remained silent. Charles, holding his head

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série iv. p. 230.

in both hands, spoke again with faded voice and the resigned accent of a limitless grief.

“‘No ! I no longer bear you any ill-will !’

“He even added a great comment, the only one he ever made.

“‘The fault lies at fate’s door.’”<sup>1</sup>

The whole book is written by one of Charles Bovary’s school friends, to whom Flaubert not only attributes his own powers but his self-restraint in the use of them. This very decided appreciation of his hero’s pronouncement occurs in a position that gives it the air of being the corollary of the whole history. Again, where will you find a more definite appreciation than that of Dr. Larivière or than that of Rudolf’s heart, when, after reviewing his mistresses’ letters, he says to himself :—

“‘What a heap of rot !’

“Which summed up his opinion, for his pleasures, like the boys in a school playground, had trodden his heart, till nothing green grew there ; and that which passed over it, more giddy than children, never even left, as they will, a name cut on the wall.”<sup>2</sup>

Could Rudolf himself have written that ? No, only one of Charles Bovary’s companions could so express his appreciation of such a man.

<sup>1</sup> *Œuvres complètes*, vol. i. p. 474.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 275.

Not pedantically impersonal we found his theory, and so from his practice, too, pedantry is absent : but he strove to remove from his pictures, appreciations, and aspersions all colour of ignorance, passion, prejudice, insolence, negligence, or indifference that he found deforming his first impressions. He felt he "could never command sympathy enough" <sup>1</sup> to be wholly just and wholly lucid.

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série iii. p. 376.

## X

FLAUBERT'S "A new æsthetic is latent in every proposed work, which it is our business to discover,"<sup>1</sup> is indeed the flattest contradiction of all arid conformities. Yet for him perfection had everywhere the same characters of power, of precision, and of inconclusiveness; that is, it never fell flat, or struck at random, or overweened. Feebleness, aimlessness, and pretension always mar.

Man's perceptions are, for the time being, seen independently of his origin and destiny, they appear essential and necessary just as much even of his ignorance does; therefore if he is true to them, that like the night sky will serve to concentrate and set off their light. Blunders and errors will not outweigh great gifts save where the individual should have been conscious that he might and could have avoided them: for insincerity spreads like blight. George Sand and Tourgueneff had Flaubert's hearty admiration,

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série ii. p. 380.

though he could have passed little of their work. From him it would have been insincere. They were happily blind to its defects; and the power and large freedom of their conceptions is often patent in spite of clumsy construction and careless writing. But "Boileau will last as long as Hugo . . . La Fontaine as Dante,"<sup>1</sup> because though they were not so richly endowed, they embodied what they had more perfectly. Great men carry off an ill fit: he lesser men need to be perfectly dressed. Most critics have found that Flaubert's faults might easily have been trusted to his ample nature: he thought otherwise, and though born a downright Brobdingnagian conformed himself to soft-skinned and squeamish Lilliput in matters of toilette. As a consequence he has been adored and admired, but not always by the same people. Little wits find the giant too gross for love—and we know the scrupulous stylist astonished his easy-natured and prolific comrades by wasting so much effort and conscience over, for them, imperceptible niceties. Those who are neither too great nor too delicate might make sure of the advantage, had not several critics like Gulliver proved first too big and then too little.

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série ii. p. 194.

# REALITY AND THE IDEAL

.

*Do not read, like children, for amusement, nor, like the ambitious, for instruction. Read to live : compose for your soul an intellectual atmosphere emanating from all great minds.*

CORRESPONDANCE DE G. FLAUBERT, Série iii. pp. 329 & 330

*To read books treating of grave matters, is not what I call serious reading, but to read well-built and above all well-written books, realising for oneself each author's method.*

FÉLIX FRANK, "GUSTAVE FLAUBERT D'APRÈS DES DOCUMENTS INTIMES ET INÉDITS"

*Try in reading the great masters to grasp their methods, to draw near to their souls, and you will come forth from study in a blaze of admiration, joyous. You will feel like Moses descending from Sinai.*

CORRESPONDANCE DE G. FLAUBERT, Série iii. p. 86



## I

ART'S functions were for Flaubert, as for all great masters, the evocation, development, and perpetuation of beauty. If you asked him to define he replied by telling you what beauty did for him.

“He reads us his notes ; we are closeted the whole day ; at its end we are tired with running over all those countries and picturing all those landscapes.

“By way of rest the reading is cut in lengths by short pipes which Flaubert smokes quickly, and by literary dissertations, contentions entirely opposed to the nature of his talent, show-off and ready-made opinions, and sufficiently complicated and obscure theories, about a beauty not local, not particular ; a pure beauty, a beauty to all eternity, a beauty in the definition of which he loses himself in a maze whence he escapes wittily enough by this phrase, ‘Beauty—beauty is that by which I am vaguely exalted.’”<sup>1</sup>

Flaubert himself said of his friend and disciple Bouilhet—

<sup>1</sup> *Journal des Goncourt*, tome ii. p. 159.

"He thought art should be seriously treated; the vague exaltation, which it aimed at producing, sufficed to give it moral value;"<sup>1</sup>

vague, or rather indeterminate, because it must be comprehensive.

"In art neither to provoke laughter nor tears, nor lust, nor rage, seems to me to be highest (and most difficult), but to act after Nature's own fashion, that is, to set musing."<sup>2</sup>

Particular emotions grow tyrannous and drown other, often exquisite, perceptions that might have set them off.

"There, that is poetry as I love it,—tranquil and crude as nature, without a single striking idea, and every line of which opens an horizon to set you musing all a day long."<sup>3</sup>

Like emotions, ideas easily usurp more than their due attention. Abstract thought seems jealous of the five ways in which matter carries on her commerce with us. General definitions only exist by ignoring subtle shades, but these distinguish individual objects. Artists cannot be rigidly intellectual,

<sup>1</sup> *Œuvres Complètes*, vol. vi. p. 178.

<sup>2</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série ii. p. 304.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

since logic to become practical must yield something to the sensuous illusion in which life is immersed. Anatole France was perhaps feeling after this fact when he made the clumsy assertion that Flaubert was unintelligent.

“God is everywhere present in the universe, nowhere visible : so should an author be in his work. Since art is a second nature, its creator ought to act in an analogous manner in order that a secret and infinite impassibility may be felt in every atom, in every aspect ; the effect on the spectators should be a kind of dum-foundedness. ‘How has it all been done?’ they should say : and let them feel crushed without knowing why. Greek art was on those lines, and to attain its end the more quickly, persons were chosen from exceptional social conditions—kings, gods, demigods ; it did not interest you with yourself, the divine was aimed at.”<sup>1</sup>

No doubt Keats laboured with a similar experience when he wrote—

“Poetry should be great and unobtrusive, a thing that enters into one’s soul, and does not startle it or amaze it with itself, but with its subject.”<sup>2</sup>

On questions of beauty the authority of Keats and Flaubert is as good as any : both had actual

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série ii. p. 155.

<sup>2</sup> J. Keats, letter to T. H. Reynolds, dated February 3, 1818.

experiences in view, and neither was sophisticated by the metaphysics of subject and object. The import of their words is practical. Goethe, at times their peer in æsthetic sensibility and in other ways the superior of both, powerfully grasped the same idea—

“I for my part should be glad to break myself of talking altogether, and speak like creative nature only in pictures.”<sup>1</sup>

“Unhappily,” Flaubert cries in another place,

“French mentality so rages for amusement, and so imperatively demands garish things, that it little lends itself to what is for me the essence of poetry, exposition,—whether effected sensuously in pictures, or morally by psychological analysis.”<sup>2</sup>

The organism that shall thus represent will not only receive an image, but find it living room; more than a faithful mirror, its sympathy, like a still lake, will give new relations to objects without disturbing those proper to them, and reflect them enhanced, more luminous, intangible. Less perfect poetry shows the grain of some current or has a ripple: it may seem more lively, but less completely lives.

<sup>1</sup> Falk, *Characteristics of Goethe*, trans. S. Austen, vol. i. p. 55.

<sup>2</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série ii. p. 252.

Effective as the tide on limp seaweed, the full mood bathes our impressions and memories, displays them with unforgettable grace, and enables the artist enchantingly to dispose sounds, words, colours, or forms. That felicitous access is as necessary to the poet as the deep and vital water to the weed. Before perception can dilate, the faculties must be relieved from pressure of anxiety, greed, business, inquisitiveness, or any insistent effort. The nice poise of innumerable tender hosts should entertain the fluid aspects of all things contemplated with unflagging cordiality. Therefore, like perfect expression, the whole beauty of the world exists for the ideal man alone. The fine capacity of the creative atmosphere or temper is tested by the complexity and crudeness of the matters which without strain it can envelop, while its integrity is gauged by power to order the symbols of expression as the vibrations of musical notes arrange sand on a plate of glass. Are not misfortune and suffering the ordeals of moral fibre? Will not holiness compose feelings, thoughts, and deeds in lovely pattern, despite harsh circumstance? Human success must ever be more than it has been; for man, not to advance is to give way. "How will he show under trial?" we muse about one with a native tact for behaviour,—“Has his rich patrimony been kept in training?” and we make the same

reflection about an artist: "Is it gift alone, or that backed by mastery?" Sometimes the heir of integrity or strenuousness may fail to achieve the graces and decencies that enchant and give confidence. In every case personal effort has completed endowment before we acknowledge a master in art or life.

As the radiance of a star must encounter a sensitive nerve before it can be perceived, a polished surface before it can flash again, and would otherwise for ever permeate dark space in vain,—so unadmired, unemulated beauty is futile as eloquence poured out above a crowd both deaf and blind. Only known when felt, like sound, light, heat; like form, life, goodness, it cannot be defined, yet as a literary quality its character is constant as that of "*the ideal type towards which all our efforts ought to tend.*"<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série ii. p. 338

## II

BEFORE he commenced *Madame Bovary* Flaubert wrote :—

“Literature has lung disease. . . . Christs of art are needed to heal this leper.”<sup>1</sup>

Several critics have independently thought that he answered this need.

“He is the Christ of literature. During twenty years he wrestled with words, he agonised over phrases. . . . His case is legendary.”<sup>2</sup>

“Such a method only allowed him to attain beauty by a long ascent, every stage of which was an affliction, and implied an ordeal.”<sup>3</sup>

“Flaubert conceived of æsthetic creation under guise of a moral effort, and every one of his sentences is rigorously a sacrifice of pleasure to duty.”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série ii. p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> A. Albalat, *Travail du style*, p. 65, 1905.

<sup>3</sup> René Dumesnil, *Flaubert*, p. 252, 1903.

<sup>4</sup> G. Lanson, *Pages choisies de G. Flaubert*, p. xxxvi, 1895.

“To state the matter simply, he is our operative conscience, or, as may be said, our vicarious sacrifice; animated by a sense of literary honour, attached to an ideal of perfection, that enable us comparatively to sit at ease, to surrender to the age, to indulge in what lapses we may find profitable. May it not in truth be said that we practise our industry, so many of us, at comparatively little cost, because poor Flaubert, producing the most expensive novels ever written, so handsomely paid for it?”<sup>1</sup>

How old our minds are! “Let us sin now, that grace may abound”; what Gnostic argued thus? Happy Mr. James! Because the master’s work is lucid, are we absolved from having a definite meaning and clear expression? I fear nonsense is still as futile as before those novels appeared. There is in all this, however, something that takes from M. Mauclair’s apparent wildness when he wrote of Flaubert, “The pessimist threw himself at the foot of the cross,” and his “Work yields but one conclusion—*believe*. The victory of the Christian spirit dominates it throughout.”<sup>2</sup> Why should we not charge M. Sabatier,<sup>3</sup> sometime *doyen* of the faculty of Protestant Theology at Paris, and M. Brunetière,<sup>4</sup> defender of the Pope, with having failed to recognise a primary attitude of the great ensample of their sects, when assumed

<sup>1</sup> Henry James, *Introduction to Madame Bovary*, p. xxv.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix, p. 272.   <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 300.   <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. 2



in a new field by a man who communicated with neither Church ?

Flaubert was in no marked sense a Christian. Though an exceptionally affectionate, generous, and loyal man, neither chastity nor charity was by him pursued for its own sake. Yet in his art their equivalents, concision and impartial sympathy, were paramount; and such scrupulousness there is perhaps rarer even than in the social sphere. When we slight our fellows, revenge or discontent informs us of the fact: but when reason and mental delicacy are flouted, who is sufficiently concerned to take offence? Few men have done more by self-discipline: yet his temper may have only reaped some thirty, while his art profited a hundredfold.

“In religion, it was with the temperament and views of M. Renan (1875-1878) that he most sympathised. Like the latter, he delighted in the religious emotion and disdained formal worship and dogma. ‘You are a Christian,’ he would say to me at times, ‘I remain pagan; I am religious in my own way. Atheism is a great stupidity; but my God is the unknown God.’”<sup>1</sup>

Action is more veracious than words; there is a flavour of humbug about verbal professions. A

<sup>1</sup> A. Sabatier, *Journal de Genève*, 16 Mai, 1880; see also *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série iii. p. 143.

rule describes a series of instances : a million will claim conformity for one whose life is in line.

If Flaubert's great effort proved that art's autonomy implied loving obedience and emotional freedom from self-concerns, similar to those which Jesus had prescribed for His kingdom, perhaps no nominally subjected province, no Church was in such a condition as ought to have startled him into recognition of the fact. Besides, he may have perceived it, but refrained from the pretentiousness of insistence ; for he did write :—

“That is what Socialists all the world over have always refused to see with their eternal materialistic preaching ; they have denied suffering, they have blasphemed three-quarters of modern poetry ; Christ's blood which stirs in us—nothing will extirpate that, nothing will drain its source : our business is not to dry it up but to make channels for it.”<sup>1</sup>

A later letter suggests how he thought art could furnish channels for vicarious suffering.

“Some natures do not suffer—are people without nerves happy ? Yet of how many things are they not deprived ? Nervous capacity—that is to say, power to suffer—augments the higher you trace the scale of beings ; to suffer, to think—are they one and the same ? Genius may be after all only a refinement of pain—that

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série ii. pp. 129 and 130.

is to say, a meditation on the objective throughout the soul. Molière's melancholy sprang from the human stupidity which he felt comprised within him ; he suffered from the Diafoiruses and Tartuffes who crowded into his brain through his eyes. I think the soul of Veronese imbibed colours like a piece of stuff plunged in a dyer's boiling vat ; all objects appeared to him with their tints so heightened as to arrest his gaze. Michael Angelo said that blocks of marble trembled on his approach ; that he trembled on approaching blocks of marble is certain."\*

The reluctant soul must receive impressions, however importunate they may be (as Christ is supposed to have accepted the sins of the world) or confess that since it cannot carry that burden the intransigence of desire and aspiration is insane presumption. The ideal must comprise the real or be irrelevant. Had Veronese been unable to use the tints his eye discriminated, had Michael Angelo lacked power to turn the quarried mass to account, had Molière failed to provoke laughter over what he ached to perceive, might not their impotencies have well thought: "Better be a dog without taint of speculation" ?

\* *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série ii. pp. 329, 330.

### III

FLAUBERT thought the literary artist should find every event, transposed as by an illusion, lend itself to verbal description, and should count no sacrifice great by which that pregnant ecstasy was fostered.<sup>1</sup> With what pride he spoke of having been finely worked up!<sup>2</sup> And to render truth by beauty was the final triumph<sup>3</sup> when "*reality, instead of yielding to the ideal, confirmed it.*"<sup>4</sup>

His language has often disconcerted those whose acquaintance with beauty was conventional or at secondhand.

"I do not share Tourgueneff's severity in regard to 'Jack' nor the immensity of his admiration for 'Rougon.' The one has charm, the other strength. But neither is in the first place preoccupied with that which is for me the end of Art, namely, beauty. I remember with what violent pleasure my heart beat

<sup>1</sup> *Œuvres complètes*, tome vi. p. 184.

<sup>2</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série ii. p. 359 ; iii. pp. 192, 223, 313 ; iv. p. 77.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Série iii. p. 86.

<sup>4</sup> *Lettres à sa nièce Caroline*, p. 523.

when contemplating a wall of the Acropolis, a quite bare wall (that which is on the left as you go up to the Propylæa). Well, I wonder if a book, quite apart from what it said, might not produce the same effect? In the precision of its groupings, the rarity of its elements, the polish of its surfaces, the harmony of the whole, is there not intrinsic virtue, a kind of divine force, something eternal like a principle? (I speak as a Platonist.) Thus, why is there a necessary relation between the right word and the musical word? Why does one always write a verse when one condenses one's thought too much? The law of numbers then governs sentiments, and what appears external is very really the inside. If I continue long at this rate I shall poke my finger in my own eye: for, from another point of view, art ought to take its ease (*être bon-homme*); or, rather, art is what you can make it, we are not free. Each follows his own course willy-nilly. In short, your Cruchard no longer has a single idea in his head that stands on its feet."<sup>1</sup>

Brunetière quoted the first half of this passage by itself. His comment was, "This means that words need not express ideas, and that if you group them somewhat harmoniously, without troubling further about their significance, the end of art is attained. Or, if you like it better, it means that thought is no help to a writer, and is even a hindrance."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série iv. p. 227.

<sup>2</sup> Brunetière, *Histoire et Littérature*, vol. ii. p. 144.

Such gross misrepresentation would be dishonest in one who was not passion's slave. The passage really develops Buffon's.

"Now a style is only beautiful by the vast number of truths which it presents. All the intellectual beauties which are found in it, all the inter-relations of which it is composed, are so many truths as useful as those in which the subject treated can consist, and perhaps more precious to the human spirit."<sup>1</sup>

The niceties of conception, the clarities of exposition, the proprieties of temper and humour in approach and pursuance, are in very deed more beneficial to men's minds than information can easily be. A powerful and delicate rendering implies that the given subject has been grasped as a whole and justly conceived. Thoroughness and fineness are among the most beautiful things we know—they have a divine force, there is something eternal about them. So much of the subject as might be conveyed in less happy words is negligible, is perhaps a commonplace. Thus the felicity and harmony of sentences are a more important part of thought than can exist elsewhere, its truest truth, its adequacy; and the musical is the only right word, since in it dwells the splendid soul. Thus the law of numbers

<sup>1</sup> *Discours sur le style.*

governs our feelings, for the melody is all we know of its burden, which only lives in us while we hear it. Thus the envelope is the contents and the outside very simply the inside. Beauty is not produced without thinking but by the most subtly pervading intelligence. And then too, Flaubert cries, all should be miracle, done with ease, found as readily as an honest smile. Yet both ease and smile must needs result from a man's own or his forefathers' effort; and it is a snob that spends without adding to the stock.

The pith of perfect book or poem cannot be extracted, for all is essential. Write it shorter or expatiate upon it, you blight its rarest effect. The true subject exists only in that form which no other can rival. To show such work is the only way to praise it; nor can it be possessed till learnt by heart. This is why those who expound the psychology of Flaubert's personages are so irritating. He himself has pictured all far more completely. Why, he even took greater pains than any one else, let alone the more patent disproportions in point of intellect and genius.

“If I had my way, books would be written by simply rounding periods, as to keep alive you have only to breathe the air; tricks of design, combinations of effect are what gravel me, all those sub-calculations which are

none the less part of art, since style depends on them for its effect, and that exclusively."<sup>1</sup>

"What I think fine, what I should like to write, is a book about nothing, a book without external connections, which would hold together by the internal force of its style, as the earth without being underpropped hangs in the air ; a book well-nigh devoid of subject or at least with an almost invisible subject, if that is possible. The most beautiful works are those with least substance ; the nearer expression comes to thought, the more closely the word fastens upon it and disappears into it, the more beauty there is."<sup>2</sup>

"I believe art's future lies in that direction. I see it, in maturing, refine as much as possible, from Egyptian pylons to Gothic needles, from Hindoo poems twenty thousand lines long to the tirades of Byron. Form in becoming skilful attenuates ; it quits all liturgy, all rule, all proportion, abandons the epic for the novel, verse for prose, no longer acknowledges any orthodoxy, and is free like each individual will which produces it. This enfranchisement from materiality is found in everything : and governments exemplify it, from Oriental despotisms to the Socialisms of the future.

"That is why there are neither beautiful nor ugly subjects, and why, from the point of view of sheer art,

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série ii. p. 252.

<sup>2</sup> Remark that Flaubert is indifferent as to whether the word disappears in the thought or the substance in the form ; his idea is that both must merge in an indissoluble entity, so that to think the same thought would necessitate reinventing or else repeating those identical words. Thus the subject of a book would only exist in it, and could not be conceived of by any other means ; this is actually the case in a poem like Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale."



an axiom might almost be laid down that there is no subject, style being in itself an absolute manner of seeing things ; I should need a whole book to develop what I want to say. I shall write about all that in my old age when I have nothing better to make a mess of ; in the meanwhile I work heartily at my novel. Are the good times of St. Antony about to come back ?”<sup>1</sup>

To understand Flaubert’s lyrical cry, “A book about nothing,” we must go to another artist : critics will be of no use, they lack the necessary experience.

“There are some who think that this simplicity is a proof of small invention. They do not consider how, on the contrary, all invention consists in making something of nothing.”<sup>2</sup>

No modern has ever spoken of the subject with more contempt than Racine does here : it is that nothing of which his invention can make a tragedy : and he was composedly inditing a preface, not in excitement scribbling a letter to a friend. That the best books are those which have the least substance was altogether Racine’s feeling. There is weight enough in legendary tale or pure invention enveloping a few chosen circumstances or a fascinating situation, such as from age to age may be endlessly transformed,—not burdened by any definite problem

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série ii. pp. 70, 71.

<sup>2</sup> Jean Racine, *Préface à “Bérénice,”* 1670.

or weighty conviction, but capable of re-achieving life in the right mood, as the skeleton rose of Jericho responds with delicate green to the caress of humid winds ; then the philosopher may glean hints, the man of the world tact, while the child's eye gathers wonder, the young man's love, awe, and the girl's beauty, peace, as each listens or reads.

“ Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow  
For old, unhappy, far-off things,  
And battles long ago :  
Or is it some more humble lay,  
Familiar matter of to-day ?  
Some natural sorrow, loss, or pain,  
That has been, and may be again ? ”

That it was familiar, that it had been and might be again, was an essential quality,<sup>1</sup> Flaubert felt, in choosing a near theme ; while that those more rare should be old, unhappy, far-off and full of strife, added to their fitness. I am a little re-draping his conceptions with aid from analogies presented by English achievements. Though splendidly sensuous compared with most French classics, he had the Latin delight in precise and ultimate expression, and responded where we remain insensitive. The whole Roman spectacle, like a boundless horizon, was given to his eye by Montesquieu's

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série ii. p. 264.

stately dialogue between Sylla and Eucrates,<sup>1</sup> as lines from Wordsworth will bring about us the hills and the beauty of frugal uncrowded human life. The Campagna on a fine day might effect this better for men of our race than those clear-cut sentences, and Flaubert would have fully relished that prospect; but the well-turned and resonant reflections of the historian could overwhelm him with infinite perceptions, as a distant peal of bells can immerse us in an atmosphere and local associations too complex and far-reaching for words. M. G. Lanson has admirably remarked:—

“It is not himself that Flaubert wishes to transport to Rome; he wanted to put off the Flaubert he is, French and of the nineteenth century. . . . ‘Have you sometimes thought about the evening of a triumph, when the legions returned, and perfumes were burning round the car of the victorious general, while the captive kings walked behind?’ He does not put himself on the scene, he does not make himself its centre; he is only an onlooker, an anybody among the antique folk. . . . ‘And those poor Kaffirs, what are they dreaming of now?’

“That is Flaubert’s attitude. How far are we from romanticism? Since there is no question of sensationally enjoying or stretching oneself, the imagination will no longer obey appetites and temperaments, it will

<sup>1</sup> Paul Bourget, *Œuvres complètes*, Critique I., p. 139.

have its own rule and direction in the intellect ; it will become an instrument of exact knowledge and concrete resurrection. . . .

“ But art cannot possess this high value . . . save on condition of serving to translate something other than the ephemeral self . . . let it find a form which is not simply the artist's satisfaction, the relief of his sensations, but which by expressing the intrinsic beauty of things, inexhaustibly communicates that to all generations to come.”<sup>\*</sup>

<sup>\*</sup> G. Lanson, *Pages choisies de G. Flaubert* : Préface, pp. xxvi, xxviii, including quotations from *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série i. p. 102, and Série iii. p. 10.

#### IV

GUY DE MAUPASSANT was not deeply pre-occupied with beauty, and would perhaps never have given it the importance as a constituent of style which he did, had he not been Flaubert's disciple. The Preface to *Pierre et Jean* and the Introduction to *Bouvard et Pécuchet* well represent the master's advice to a writer whose subject-matter was mainly direct observation. But all he would have taught a young genius of lyrical and mystical tendencies, still to seek, is needed to complete the exposition of his ideas. Doubtless, as he urged the observer to respect beauty in certain ways, he would have bid a poet nourish his visions on matter of fact.

"In order to describe a bonfire and a tree in the field, plant yourself in front of them till they seem no longer to resemble any other tree or fire. That is the way to become original." <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Pierre et Jean*, p. 22.

"The unexplored is in everything. . . . The least object contains an unknown element or aspect. Find that." <sup>1</sup>

"Whatever you may want to say there is only one word that will express it, one verb that will animate it, one adjective that will qualify it. You must hunt then till you have discovered them." <sup>2</sup>

To supplement such maxims, we should have to distil passages of Flaubert's letters which have been very rarely quoted, wherein the ideas of nicety and precision suddenly take a second place, and the excessive, the colossal, are held up to admiration.

"Never fear to be exaggerated, all the very great have been so—Michael Angelo, Rabelais, Shakespeare, Molière. . . . But in order that the exaggeration may not shock, it must be everywhere constant, proportional, in harmony with itself; if your good folk are a hundred feet high your mountains must be twenty thousand; and what is the ideal if it be not that kind of bulking out" ? <sup>3</sup>

"Let us always remind ourselves that impersonality is the sign of strength; let us absorb the object and let it circulate in us, that it may reproduce itself outside without leaving room for any one to understand the marvellous chemical process. Our hearts should be

<sup>1</sup> *Pierre et Jean*, p. 22.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>3</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série ii. p. 247.

good for nothing save to feel what those of others feel. Let us be magnifying mirrors of the truth." <sup>1</sup>

"How excessive the great masters are! They push an idea to its last limit; Michael Angelo's men have cables rather than muscles, in Rubens' bacchanals folk piss on the ground, see all Shakespeare, &c., &c., and the last of that family, old father Hugo, what a beautiful thing *Notre Dame* is! I have lately re-read three chapters, the *Truands* among others; that is *strong*. I believe the characteristic of genius is, before all else, strength; thus what I most detest in art, that which sets my teeth on edge, is ingenuity, wit. How different it is with bad taste! that is a good quality gone astray, for to produce what is called bad taste, you must have poetry in you. But wit, on the contrary, is incompatible with true poetry; who ever had more wit than Voltaire, and who was less a poet?" <sup>2</sup>

"The prime quality in art is illusion: emotion, often obtained by certain sacrifices of poetic detail, is an altogether different thing and of an inferior order. I have wept at melodramas which were not worth two-pence; and Goethe has never moistened my eye, unless it has been with admiration." <sup>3</sup>

"Very beautiful works set you musing as nature does. To look on they are serene and incomprehensible; in their processes they are motionless as cliffs, rough as the sea, as full of sprays, verdancies, and murmurs as the woods, forlorn as the desert, blue as the sky. Homer, Rabelais, Michael Angelo, Shakespeare, Goethe seem to me pitiless; their work is an abyss, infinite,

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série ii. p. 348.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 277 and 278.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 320.

manifold. Through tiny rents we catch glimpses of precipices : blackness is down there, to make you giddy, and yet something singularly sweet hovers over the whole ! It is the ideal of light, the smile of the sun, and how calm it is, how calm and strong ! It has neck and dewlaps like Leconte's bull." <sup>1</sup>

"None the less, one thing saddens me, namely, to see how great men achieve effects easily outside the pale of art ; what could be worse constructed than a crowd of things in Rabelais, Cervantes, Molière, and Hugo ? But what sudden hits straight from the shoulder ! what power in a single word !" <sup>2</sup>

"The prodigious thing about *Don Quixote* is the absence of art, the perpetual fusion of illusion with reality, which make the book at once so humorous and so poetical." <sup>3</sup>

"Generalisation and creation are the mark of great geniuses ; they sum up scattered individuals in a type and make mankind conscious of new characters ; do we not believe in Don Quixote's existence as in Cæsar's ? Shakespeare is formidable from this point of view. . . . Those folk have no need to work at style, they are strong in spite of all faults and on account of them ; but we, the dwarfs, we only count through finished execution. Hugo in this century will knock out every one else although he is full of bad things ; but what go ! what go ! I will here hazard a proposition that I should not dare to utter anywhere else : those great men often write very badly—so much the better for them. You must not seek the art of form there, but among

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série ii. pp. 304 and 305.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 189.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148.



geniuses of secondary importance (Horace, Labruyère). You must know the masters by heart and idolise them ; try to think as they did, and then part company with them for ever. In the matter of technical instruction you can reap more profit from learned and skilful geniuses.”<sup>1</sup>

These passages throw the precepts on observation and style which Flaubert taught into perspective. He never considered himself the equal of those whom he admired. Several critics have thought he failed to give his full measure because, though mature, he held himself in need of further schooling. Others see in him the only master who largely combines the abundance and strength of great with the virtues of perfect writers. His ambition had certainly entertained this last notion as a programme.

“ We must show the classical school,” he says, “ that we are more classical than they, and turn the romantics pale with rage by surpassing their intentions ; these two purposes are really one and the same, therefore I believe the thing may be done.”<sup>2</sup>

Every one of his works is so absolutely what it is, that it could only be rivalled in another field. The same task is never attempted twice, whereas all the books of many authors are approximations to

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série ii. p. 138.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 252.

one they never write. But, for him, the conception of every intended work carried within it a new æsthetic, the laws of which must be found and applied.\*

It may be that by achieving this distinct character in each volume he did what Michael Angelo, Rembrandt, Rubens, Shakespeare, Molière, or Cervantes had done. Were they really less deliberate, or does he only seem to have disciplined his gift more strictly? The gradual stages by which these great personalities cleared their talents survive in abundance, whereas he destroyed as he went along all trace of hesitation or wandering after false scents. The world presented him with a more perplexed spectacle; science had dissolved those grandiose generalisations in which the mundane pageant had for them been comprehended. The Creator had withdrawn; perhaps for a reason analogous to our experience, that beauty can only be perfected when the artist has purified emotion from self-concern; thus Flaubert, like those great masters, formed himself on the most authoritative example. They had divined a god, and shaped a world in his likeness because they conceived this earth to have been so moulded: in the modern master's work the author's character must baffle curiosity, as he had found his own nonplussed. Both efforts are grand, both

\* *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série ii. p. 380.

are religious and in the best sense of the word impersonal ; for their efficacy consisted in winning free from petty aims and sordid considerations.

“Sancho Panza’s belly bursts the girdle of Venus,”<sup>1</sup> he would say to those who, like Leconte de Lisle, wished to copy antique models and reproduce effects peculiar to a vanished world ; and he thought that the infinity of science had dwarfed the miracles of Christian passion, by presenting a wonder more apt to overwhelm and annihilate each man’s self-absorption.

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série ii. p. 277.

## V

MANY of his admirers have attempted to foist their own conclusions on the master. M. Gaultier believes that as bees taught botanists to distinguish the members of certain families of plants, so artists of Flaubert's very rare type start before the attentive philosopher coveys of ideas, which hitherto, like pheasants by bracken, were screened under unobserved facts, but which, breaking cover, can be shot down by a theory loaded with coined words for slugs. Rembrandt, Shakespeare, Mozart, and Corneille were, he thinks, this sort of beaters to the sportsman philosopher.<sup>1</sup> M. Émile Bergerat, "wishing to humiliate man before the mere animal," described him as "endowed for sole privilege with the power of conceiving himself to be other than he is."<sup>2</sup> M. Gaultier cried, "So Emma Bovary conceived herself to be a refined lady when she was only a farmer's daughter;" and so on through all Flaubert's characters to Bouvard and Pécuchet, who

<sup>1</sup> *Le Bovarysme*, 1892, p. 3, and ch. i., 1902.      <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

typify humanity which conceives itself as capable of possessing knowledge that it will never conquer, since a formidable disproportion yawns between the questions asked by the uneasiness of our spirit and our means of answering them.<sup>1</sup>

Consciousness consists in conceiving things as being other than they are. If an intelligence grasped the truth, subject would be fused with object and it would lose consciousness both of self and the universe.<sup>2</sup>

But I should wrong M. Gaultier's ingenious and suggestive developments if, like an Italian beggar closing his accordion, I squeezed all the wind out of *Le Bovarysme* to fit it into my box.

M. G. Palante has very well shown how hypothetical the bases of this theory are. . . . The existence of the non-apparent normal must be assumed, in order that the glamour of the object may cause the subject to deviate from that true line of development. Yet how can so much be granted, if, like M. Gaultier, we hold the personality to be absolutely determined by heredity and environment? <sup>3</sup>

The Devil says to Saint Antony :—

“ Things only reach thee through the mediation of thy spirit, which, like a concave mirror, deforms objects ;

<sup>1</sup> *Le Bovarysme*, 1892, p. 56.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 1902, p. 199.

<sup>3</sup> *Mercur de France*, tome xlvi. p. 75 *et seq.*

—and thou lackest all means wherewith to verify its exactness.

“Never wilt thou know the full extent of the universe, therefore thou canst not conceive of its cause. . . . May not appearance be the truest truth that exists, illusion the only reality? . . . Perhaps there is nothing!”<sup>1</sup>

In regard to things we do not know, the act of faith is not to confide in any theory—no more in illusionism or nihilism than in Satan’s suggestion that he alone is.

M. René Dumesnil calls his book *Flaubert: son hérédité—son milieu—sa méthode*, and claims to have followed this last: yet Flaubert held it inapplicable to just such cases.

“So much the better if Taine’s *English Literature* interests you. His work is dignified and solid, though I find fault with the position from which he sets out. Art contains more than the environment wherein it is exercised and the physiological antecedents of the workman can account for. By that theory, the series, the group, may be explained; but never individuality, the special fact which makes *a man, that man.*”<sup>2</sup>

“The first man to hand is more interesting than M. G. Flaubert, because he is more general and in consequence more typical.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Œuvres complètes de Gustave Flaubert*, vol. v. p. 236.

<sup>2</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série iii. p. 195 and 196. The continuation of this passage is quoted above, p. 99.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 306.

The books about him prove that Flaubert was vastly more fascinating than the first man to hand. The attraction that is felt for great men is not and cannot be scientific, but is analogous to that exerted by the supernatural. As Renan said, "the miraculous is only the unexplained,"—the unaccountable must necessarily be the most essential factor in a peerless man ; so much as is typical of common mortals or of great men as a class lessens this glamour. A unique fact cannot be classed ; the exception only proves the rule in the sense that light makes the nature of darkness more obvious. If Flaubert's heredity and circumstances explain him, why was his brother who shared them so different ? The most important factor in him is obviously one which neither experiment nor observation can control. The greater, the rarer a genius, the less can cause and effect be traced in respect to him, to portray such a man will be proportionally difficult. Flaubert always spoke of Shakespeare, Rabelais, Homer, Aristophanes as giants, as vaguely defined and monstrous beings beyond the reach of our senses, our judgment, our science. He could only picture Michael Angelo to himself as an old man seen from behind.<sup>1</sup>

Nearly all the causes of Flaubert's characteristics discovered by M. Dumesnil may quite as well be denied or explained differently.

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série ii, p. 77.

“ His impulsive character and his exaggerated love of the grotesque, which make so large a part of the particularity of his genius, are attributable to his nervous malady.”

But this impulsiveness and this love of the grotesque are remarkably expressed in the early letters and the *Mémoires d'un fou*, written before Flaubert was stricken; while M. Dumesnil tells us that his personal antecedents before his first attack present no noteworthy fact which might have led to the incidence of his nervous malady being foreseen.

Is it not likely that M. Dumesnil's real ground for the first of these statements was, that he had failed to find sufficient analogy for such impulsiveness and love of the grotesque in the characters of Flaubert's forefathers, and therefore sought its cause in the one salient influence to which Gustave was subjected and from which his brother was free? Again we read:—

“ Flaubert incontestably owes his aristocratic character to his maternal ancestors.”<sup>2</sup>

Yet his father disdained money, titles, honours; expressed anger openly, had beautiful hands, exercised a paternal hospitality, possessed a debonair

<sup>2</sup> Dumesnil, *Flaubert*, pp. 113, 86, 87, 15.



majesty : why should not these traits have counted in that result ?

M. Dumesnil has not recognised the limits of the method he seeks to employ, and therefore his whole book is erroneous, quite apart from the questionable nature of such deductions and of the many mis-statements which have escaped his vigilance. The passage which he quotes in order to show that Flaubert's blessing rests on his enterprise runs thus :—

“ Literary criticism, like natural history, must work without moral ideas : it is not our business to declaim against *such and such a form*, but to show in what it consists, how it links with another and by what means it lives (æsthetic awaits its Geoffroy Saint Hilaire, that great man who demonstrated the legitimacy of monsters). When the human soul shall have for some time been treated with the impartiality that in physical science is given to the study of matter, a great stride will have been made. . . . There is perhaps, as in the case of mathematics, nothing but a method to find, which will be applicable in the first place to art and to religion, those two great manifestations of idea. *Let us imagine a beginning thus : the first idea of God being granted (the most rudimentary possible), the first glimmer of poetic feeling (however trifling that may be), find at the outset its manifestation, and this may easily be traced among children and savages, &c. ; there is your first step ; from it you ascertain its relations ; then go ahead, taking count of all relative contingents, climate, language, &c. ;*

then from level to level you may climb to the art of the future, *and the hypothesis of the Beautiful*, to a clear conception of its reality, *to that ideal type towards which our whole effort should tend. . . .*"<sup>1</sup>

M. Dumesnil omits the phrases in italics, making the last words run "to the art of the future and to the clear conception of the Beautiful," and assumes elsewhere that "such and such man of genius" might have been substituted for the words "such and such form" at the outset of the passage; but forms of literary art—lyrical, narrative, dramatic, &c.—are in question, not individualities, much less exceptional ones. Referring to Flaubert's criticism of Taine<sup>2</sup> M. Dumesnil remarks: "That is, he blames him for attaching too much importance to the seed (*i.e.*, heredity, &c.) and not enough to the soil (*i.e.*, personality)." Had Flaubert used this metaphor the seed would surely have been personality with its vital capacity; the soil, hereditary and other influences which conditioned its growth. He differed from his brother by the kind of energy with which he drew sustenance from or reacted against hereditary and other influences—by being able to wage a better battle both within himself and against the world.

The superior vitality commonly attributed to love-

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série ii. p. 338, and Dumesnil, Préface, pp. v and vi.      <sup>2</sup> See passage quoted above, p. 162.

children points to fulness of excitement in their begetters as a cause of rare endowment. Any who have experienced the vitalising effect of contact and situation will easily credit post-natal conjunctures also with considerable efficacy. Some flowers await fecundation by a single kind of insect, and if it fails them die fruitless ; so the child who at the due season meets the rare stimulus develops and hence encounters fresh pregnant occasions ; each time having a better chance of repeating the process. He alone will explore the full riches both of his hereditary resources and of his environment, while his less lucky companions wistfully resign themselves to spiritual sterility. The possibilities which children of the same race receive at birth must almost necessarily be fairly equal. A series of timely outward accidents produces keys giving access to closed rooms in the soul's mansion and permitting her to throw open to the sun her long shuttered heirlooms. Most find one or two, some ten or a dozen keys, but who has ever handled the whole bunch ? while every generation adds room or furniture. Education proceeds on some such assumption, but its success is restricted by the difficulty of recognising and commanding the germ-bearing contingencies.

Psychologists naturally wish to simplify the problems that baffle them, but the soul smiles, con-

scious of inexhaustible complexity, and does not expect their success. They may describe her more common misfortunes but never estimate her worth.

I must add that while demurring to his conclusions I have found M. Dumesnil's work most valuable and suggestive. Like MM. Albalat and Lanson, he has the great advantage of loving Flaubert.

## VI

CLAUDE BERNARD has very well said :—

“In the search for truth by this (the experimental method) *sentiment always takes the initiative*, and gives birth to the *à priori* notion or intuition ; reason next develops the idea and deduces its logical consequences. But if sentiment needs to be enlightened by reason, reason in turn should be guided by experience.”<sup>1</sup>

Reason and experiment are impossible where facts are unique, for there is none save general science, therefore exceptional beings can only be known intuitively ; and in regard to excellence sentiment is love. Flaubert was here most worthy imitation, for his many admirations always partook largely of adoration. He knew how far experiment and reason could take him, and never appealed to them out of bounds. It is our instinct for self-defence against the crushing superiority of the universe that bids us worship

<sup>1</sup> *Introduction à l'étude de la médecine expérimentale*, p. 47.

the unknown god. Great men are less oppressive; we know something of them, but still we must be their lovers in order to profit by commerce with them. Phantom masters of the mind, sentiment must continually take the initiative or they will delude our powers. The first step must be taken first, and in the dark, without assurance that the second and third, although highly desirable, will ever be possible.

“In other words man, confronted with things beautiful, good, and true, goes out from himself, and, suspended by a celestial charm, annihilates his puny personality, exalted, absorbed. What is that if it be not to adore?”<sup>1</sup>

Objection may be raised that Flaubert failed to love the unknown God. He has been accused of pessimism, of nihilism—words used extremely loosely, with as little scruple as justice.

“Quit then thy sex as thy fatherland, thy religion and thy parish: we should be soul to the greatest possible extent, and by this aloofness will the immense sympathy with things and beings reach us more abundantly.”<sup>2</sup>

In his mystic moments he imagined that for man,

<sup>1</sup> Renan, *Études d'histoire religieuse*, p. 419.

<sup>2</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série ii. p. 309.

by filling out his own measure, exercising his conscience to its extreme limit,

“a time will arrive when something wider and higher will replace the love of humanity as that is replacing patriotism,”

and he—

“will love nothingness itself, so greatly he will feel himself to participate in it.

“‘I said to the worms in the grave, You are my fathers, &c.’”<sup>1</sup>

“When I look at one of the little stars in the Milky Way, I say to myself that the earth is no larger than one of those sparkles. And I who gravitate for one minute on this spark, what am I then, what are we? This feeling of my lowliness, of my nothingness, reassures me. I seem to have become a grain of dust lost in space, and yet I form a part of that limitless grandeur which enfolds me. I have never understood how that might breed despair, for it is quite possible that there is nothing behind the black curtain. Besides, the infinite submerges all our conceptions; and, since it exists, why should it present an aim to things so relative as we are?”<sup>2</sup>

Such passages, on which, I suppose, is founded the accusation of nihilism, are by Flaubert only

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série ii. p. 309.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Série iii. p. 329.

used as dissolvents for chimerical anticipations, to help "disillusioned ladies" to feel independent of distant possibilities. "The search for a cause is anti-philosophic, anti-scientific,"<sup>1</sup> because it is hopeless. In a methodical treatise such suggestions might have appeared as arguments, but certainly would not have figured as conclusions.

He showed his love of God by demanding that He should be conceived of as divine in very deed, and hence, for minds preoccupied with evil, unknowable.

"The ideal is only fruitful when everything is brought into it. It is a labour of love, not of exclusion."<sup>2</sup>

He hated the proprietary familiarity of popular religion whose ministers confidently prate about "*the goodness of God, the anger of God, and offending God,*" till such phrases become for them "a sort of habitual sneezing."<sup>3</sup> Saints do not possess God, but are possessed by Him. "The world is His and the fulness thereof." To exclude is to blaspheme. Let us rather suppose human mentality may account for evil than that it opposes God because it oppresses men. Above all, be honest, and, when you do not know, say you do not know.

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série lii. p. 281.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Série ii. p. 366.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Série iii. p. 123.



Thus he thought the methods and discoveries of science should be regarded as better material, by using which the ideal constructions of religion and art might be grandly extended. Every man is a determinist in his own trade; in practice we cannot reject all that this idea has achieved. The notions of Fate, Providence, Chance, and Absolute Mechanism are in the same quandary, it is impossible to justify their ways to man; events are not moral, and apparently useless suffering exists. But, like science, morality is based on sentiment, which "always takes the initiative"; and though it too has been enlightened by reason and solidified by experience it has not so developed in regard to these vast relations. Still spontaneous there, how it shall be illumined and compacted cannot be even imagined; but that necessary first step is "none the less respectable," however ridiculous the "ephemeral dogmas" in which from time to time it hopes to express itself. If by conquering his vices and by obliterating the effects of egoism an artist disappear from his work, the Creator of the universe may be invisible because He is without fault and selfishness.

Respect for the object silences the artist's impulse to explain and palliate. Imagination fails

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert, Série iii. p. 281.*

us ere the analogy can be pushed so far as this, yet, while confessing this inadequacy, such a conception as Flaubert's remains vital with awe and reverence.

"We must lay our heads on the pillow of doubt," as he was fond of repeating after Montaigne, and "we shall find life tolerable once we have consented to be always ill at ease."<sup>1</sup> For here he turned to another of those spiritual fathers in whom he so greatly rejoiced.

"'Let us work without reasoning,' said Martin, 'it is the only way to render life bearable.'

"Every member of the little group took up with this praiseworthy intent, each began to use his talents (instead of wildly chivying chances as heretofore). The little plot of ground brought forth plentifully. Cunégonde, it is true, was very ugly, but she became a first-rate pastrycook; Paquette embroidered; and the old woman looked after the linen. Every one, even brother Giroflée, helped: he became a carpenter, and even an honest man. . . ."<sup>2</sup>

Voltaire's "Let us work at our garden" is at once the most substantial and most widely accepted application of "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" A bird in hand is worth two in the bush; and who

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série i. p. 86, 106.

<sup>2</sup> *Candide*, chap. xxx.

so poor as not to have a soul? Time lost is life lost. Speculation, like the lover's quest, like fortune-hunting, is an endless adventure; our integrity must strictly limit it. Nevertheless, we depend not on our own action alone, but on that of forces which we have never controlled, never even described. Science may often figure as knowledge of an enemy's tactics; to obtain it we had to neglect our business and risk our best. Whether a foe's or a friend's, those great movements, since they may checkmate us, must be reconnoitred and interpreted as best we can. Woe to us if absorption over home concerns blind us to the advance of a pestilence, or of an army which, even though friendly, must devastate those who are unprepared!

A judgment sufficiently free from personal pre-occupations is essential to defence as it is essential for honest work, the one foundation of science, art, and of religion. Skill whole-heartedly employed achieves knowledge, beauty, goodness. That, and that only, gives life value. The workman, scorning sordid needs and particular utilities, has acted for some hours as though the resources of heaven were his, and the leisure of the angels would be theirs who should enjoy his work; he does not address the busy. Religion is life honestly thus lived—that is, not for success or maintenance, but, whether it end soon or late, as though it would be

continued for ever—and, therefore, willing to accept death rather than deterioration of character.

The soul is not tied to a locality, and may be cultivated anywhere. A Bedouin carries his work with him, and therefore needs the longer sight, the more nimble judgment, for he must treat mirages as such, and never be the dupe of even distant appearances. What does it matter to the owner of a cabbage-patch whether the distant city he descries be real or not?—he will never need to travel beyond his market. But the nomad must not swerve from his chosen course to avoid or approach the mighty vision.

Now, it is by doing what lies to hand that the soul progresses; not by actual locomotion. Yes, in kneading dough, threading bobbins, folding sheets, dove-tailing corners, and in digging and in manuring, honesty may be achieved, so long as there be no hope that *well enough* will produce the equivalent of *as well as possible*. It may, on female hearts, on the applauding world, and in the mart; but those chances are the lake, the palm-trees, the minarets and cupolas—to turn towards which, as Flaubert knew, is to be lost in the boundless and shifting sands, like Cambyses' army.

## VII

TILL now we have considered no idea of Flaubert's which lacked ancient and wide authority gathered in the service of illustrious minds: nor need originality be claimed for one which is certainly more distinctive of him, since the notion that evil is disarmed by knowledge and familiarity has been matter for proverbs. Our forefathers thought it well that a young blood should sow his wild oats; and to know the worst commonly gives satisfaction to sensible folk. But the man who, subject to epileptic (?) fits, counteracted the mesmeric effect they often exert over their victims by scientific inquiry into nervous disorders<sup>1</sup>—the man who devotedly studied stupidity and baseness, and thus cleansed his own mind from their adhesive ubiquity—the man who amusedly sought out all kinds of lasciviousness and lubricity and won thereby a disdainful mastery over his own waywardness

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série iii. pp. 84, 85; see also Dumesnil, *Flaubert*, pp. 336-350.

—the man who perseveringly analysed the bad art of wretched authors that he might improve a style which emulous admiration of the great masters had benefited to the full—such a man raises the principle of the Spartan prevention for drunkenness by contemplation of an awful example to a pre-eminence which it surely never attained before. Indeed, “the intelligent” thought the long and painful prosecution of such researches so absurd, that they ascribed to disease and defect that which was due to profound intuition and deliberate purpose. A crowd of passages from his letters, and anecdotes reported by his friends, put it beyond all question that Flaubert consciously and gratefully fostered the impulse which in childhood had directed his curiosity to the dissection of evil.

His notorious hatred for *le bourgeois*, and the attraction resembling that of love which he felt towards its object, can only be intelligibly conceived as a vigorous branch of these his life’s pursuits—intuitive in its origin, but reasoned in its developments.

The boy of nine who in a letter prattles to his friend,

“I will write comedies and you shall write your dreams, and since a lady who comes to see papa always tells us lots of stupid things, I will write them down,”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série i. pp. 1, 2.

has already set forth on the enterprise which will result in that anatomy of average mental processes, *Bouvard et Pécuchet*. The young author who carries a volume by the Marquis de Sade in his pocket, and ostentatiously proclaims it the most amusing of books, on occasion can reflect "It is the last word of Catholicism. Let me explain. It is the spirit of the Inquisition, the spirit of torture, the spirit of the mediæval Church, of horror at nature. . . . Note this, there is no mention of animal or tree in de Sade." <sup>1</sup>

And years before we find him wrestling with the still more daring idea, that the fertility of the human soul in creating symbols to express evil has a function akin to that of the knowledge which strips it of its fascination and of the familiarity which breeds contempt for it.

Some, who will never understand anything about beauty, have truncated the following passage for abusive purposes:—

"Let us not confound the yawn of the common soul over Homer with that profound meditation, with that intense and almost painful reverie which comes over the poet when he measures colossi and, sick of heart, says, '*O altitudo!*'"

"And then I admire Nero: the man of the antique world culminates in him! woe to any who has never

<sup>1</sup> *Journal des Goncourt*, tome i. pp. 259, 309.

thrilled in reading Suetonius. I have lately read the life of Heliogabalus in Plutarch. His beauty is different from Nero's; more Asiatic, more feverish, more romantic, more unbridled. It is the evening of Nero's day; but Nero is calmer, more beautiful, more antique, more stable, in sum superior. The masses have lost their poetry since Christianity. Don't talk to me of the grandiose in modern times. There is not enough to satisfy the imagination of a novelette writer."<sup>1</sup>

Like a popular poem, Nero's life fastened on the common imagination, and had in a measure been moulded by it, since he perpetually conceived of himself as a spectacle for the whole world and addressed the masses with native divination. Flaubert relates him to Homer as the devil confronts God. He is the sublime in the depths, a revelation of man to man, the antichrist who for a last time embodied the plastic and sensuous pagan ideal. His beauty outrivalled that of Satan, as the Christ's did that of Jehovah or of Jove. In a fragment written about the same time as the above letter, Satan calls Nero "the beloved son of my heart, the greatest poet the earth has seen."<sup>2</sup> Difference of moral value takes nothing from the apt significance of such symbolical figures, nor from their beauty; they were conceived to express that contrast, and

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série i. p. 72.

<sup>2</sup> *Œuvres complètes*, tome vi. p. 350.



neither is complete without its opposite. Indeed, the poetry of Hell may be regarded as reaching maturity later than that of Paradise or Olympus, and the tendency of modern art be seen in the fusion of the two which is already foreshadowed in the poems of Marlowe and Milton. For all the ultimate figures, whether historical<sup>1</sup> or mythical, which stand like boundary pillars round the world of human imagination, Flaubert had the instinctive reverence of the craftsman for unsigned masterpieces. The dulness which misconstrues his admiration is as common as the capacity to share in it is rare. He as fully realised the relative moral values of the ancient and modern worlds as he had that of their æsthetic creations.

“Christianity, though we seek to defend ourselves against admitting it, has come to enlarge all that [*i.e.*, the antique conception of man], but also to spoil it, by introducing suffering. The human heart is only enlarged by means of a cutting edge that tears it.”<sup>2</sup>

The religious and the æsthetic imaginations raise ideas and forms above fact by outrivalling its vividness, and thus enable memory and desire to intermit mechanical perception and provide the standards of comparison without which our minds could not exist.

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série i. p. 202.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116.

Reflections from his study of evil run through the richly variegated tissue of Flaubert's letters, like threads of fire flashing mysteriously now and again, and inviting to rare and pregnant meditation. A few instances may be cited.

"In the first place this woman is atrociously ugly ; she has nothing in her favour save a very great cynicism full of naïvety which highly delighted me. Besides, I witnessed the expansion of her nature in its fury, always a beautiful thing to see : and then, as you know, I like that kind of spectacle well enough. My taste for it is inborn—the ignoble pleases me, it is the sublime in the nadir ; when genuine, it is as rare as that in the zenith. Cynicism is wonderful ; the caricature of vice, it at the same time corrects and annihilates it ; all great voluptuaries are extremely modest ; till now I have not come across a single exception.<sup>2</sup>

"Who has counted all the base actions that must be contemplated in order to build up a truly great soul ? all the sickening miasmas that must be swallowed down, all the mortifications undergone, all the tortures endured, before a good page can be written ? We authors are sewer-men and gardeners ; we draw delectable things from putrefaction and grow baskets of flowers on spread-out miseries. The fact distils into form and mounts on high like a pure incense of the spirit towards the Eternal, the immovable, the absolute, the ideal. . . . Have you ever mused over the

<sup>2</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série i. p. 148.

number of wives who have lovers, the number of husbands who have mistresses—over all those homes? What lies, what tears, what anguish! All *that* gives relief to the grotesque and to the tragic; indeed, they are one and the same mask, and cover a single void, while, like a row of white teeth under a black hood, fantasy laughs in the midst.<sup>1</sup>

“More than anybody I have felt after others. I have been to sniff unknown dunghills, and have had compassion for many things over which sensitive people are not tender. Whatever my *Bovary* may be worth, there will be no lack of heart in the book. And yet irony seems to me dominant in life. Why is it that I have, when weeping, often gone to look at myself in the glass? This disposition to look down from a height on oneself is perhaps the source of all virtue. Far from prisoning you in the personal, it sweeps you away from yourself. The extreme comic, the comic that does not make you laugh, cynicism in not taking things seriously,<sup>2</sup> is the quality I most

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série ii. pp. 360, 361.

<sup>2</sup> *I.e.*, “The caricature of not taking things seriously, the corrective of that temper and its annihilation.” “*Cynicisme dans la blague*” describes the divorce of conviction which is the natural outcome of love and admiration from intellectual conceptions, on the ground that these latter are necessarily relative and experimental. Passion can only achieve particular ends. Many problems are laughably too big for it. The student confesses ignorance and is patient; over-eagerness in learning counts on a speedy occasion to desist, and may easily seem irreverent. Let us gibe at every trace of fanatic fever; after all it is usually more important to catch a train than to solve the riddle of the universe, to rescue a bird from a cat than the human race from the devil, to sweat over polishing one sentence than over the systematisation of knowledge, reso-

hanker for as a writer. Both elements exist. The *Malade Imaginaire* probes further through the inner world than all the *Agamemmons*. 'Would there not be danger in talking of all these diseases?'<sup>1</sup> is worth 'He might die.'<sup>2</sup> But how on earth make pedants understand that! It is a queer thing what a strong comic sense I have as a man, and how my pen refuses to serve it. My powers converge more and more thither as I become less gay, for it is the final sadness.<sup>3</sup>

"Hideousness in subjects drawn from modern middle-class life ought to replace the tragic which is incompatible with them."<sup>4</sup>

"Read the bad and the sublime, not the mediocre,

lutely to know one friend than to presume with God. The first of such contrasted aims is but an initial preparation for the distant second. Objects too vast or too distant demand a passive, not a militant reverence: their authority is real, but commands our silent expectancy, not our action or eloquence. For Wisdom, history is a lie which only fools and fanatics believe; she, in Emerson's words, "does not like our benevolence or our learning much better than she likes our frauds and wars. When we come out of the caucus, or the bank, or the Abolition convention, or the Temperance meeting, or the Transcendental club, into the fields and woods, she says to us, 'So hot, my little sir?'"

<sup>1</sup> This trait is not in Molière's comedy: the idea is often immanent, but is never so concisely expressed. The nearest approaches are in Act III. Scene IX.: "Look you now, all those diseases that I know nothing of oppress me, those . . ." And in Act III. Scene XVII.: "Is there no danger in counterfeiting death?"

<sup>2</sup> The reference is to Corneille's *Horace*, Act III. Scene VI.:—

"*Julia*: What would you have him do single-handed against three?"

"*Horace the Elder*: He might die."

<sup>3</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série ii. pp. 97, 98.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 350.

. . . I assure you that in the matter of style those whom I detest most have been more useful to me than any others." <sup>1</sup>

Both love and hatred are useful, yet the latter has been less consciously and less constantly employed. To raise his nature to its highest efficiency man must learn to hate with determination and refinement (that is, impersonally), as the best have known how to love; equally honest and serious study is needed for success. To realise precisely what you want not to be helps to define what you would be. The saint has an abyss constantly beside him—"the brightest fell." The man least likely to lie mangled at the foot of a precipice is he who has climbed down its face and acquainted himself with its footholds and treacheries. Holiness is irresistibly drawn to the morally sick, its essence is expressed most perfectly by conquering their resistance; where is most difficulty is most glory. The best climber is chosen to risk his life for the companion who has fallen. The man who is most familiar with danger has least to fear.

"The Dutch and Venetians are colourists, not the Neapolitans; for living always in fogs, they love the sun.

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série ii, pp. 99, 100.

“Let a man be small or great, when he wants to meddle with the good God’s works, he must begin, if only on the score of health, by putting himself in a position not to be their dupe. Thou shalt depict wine, love, woman, glory—on this condition, my good fellow: that thou art neither drunkard, nor lover, nor husband, nor soldier-lad. Life is seen badly by those mixed up in it; they either suffer from it too much, or enjoy it too much.”<sup>1</sup>

The common run turned from contemplation of the devil and were either haunted, or, stumbling on him unawares, terrified out of their wits. For the unknown is respected and gathers portentousness; what is great attracts. Hell’s mouth devoured crowds. But the artists and poets pursued Old Nick and inventoried every circle of hell, till familiarity bred contempt.

Study is pricked on by a stirring of attraction; but to desire evil is repugnant to reason; how then can it be so well known as to be contemned? The artist longs to give every perception harmonious form and function in a mental world. Evil exists, impresses, must be rendered; this imperative keeps him busy. William of Orange while directing his gunners said to a gentleman—

“Do you know, sir, that every moment you spend here is at the risk of your life?”

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série ii. p. 19.

"I run no more risk than your majesty."

"Yes, but my duty brings me here ; yours does not."

A few seconds later the gentleman was killed. Though those who prosecute tasks of moment may only seem to bear charmed lives, they are at least exonerated from courting danger. It is more comprehensible that the artist's preoccupation may save him from obsessions fatal to idle minds. The note of depression which in later life, after the nightmare year of the Franco-Prussian War and his own private losses in friends and fortune, so often clouded Flaubert's enthusiastic and worshipful nature, was perhaps caused by his having too steadfastly inspected evils for which neither he nor any one else could conceive an adequate image or an ideal significance. Those who launch on grand adventures are liable to be thus stranded naked beyond the reach of human aid. It was George Sand's inexhaustibly buoyant emotional force which, though comparatively ignorant, yet restored to him the love and devotion needed in the prosecution of his labours. For a period he had been unable to achieve his daily hours of impersonal life ; his own woes drew him tyrannically away from those of his characters. No longer sustained by the æsthetic passion of finding harmonious expression for the ills he recognised, he

felt their dreadful fascination—the wish to yield to them, to be crushed, to be seduced, to feed their Juggernaut progress with yet another mangled life. Yes, he realised once more what he had often said, that

the less you feel a thing, the better fitted are you to express it as it is (as it is always in itself, in its generality, and disengaged from every ephemeral contingency). But it is necessary to have the faculty of making one's self feel it. This faculty is no other than the genius of seeing—of having the model before you, posing.”<sup>1</sup>

Tears are the worst possible spectacles : and he was weeping who had wished to raise himself above the happiness that the sense of well-doing brings, in order that even so much rosy colour might not tinge the purity of his vision.

“Alas, vice is no more fecundating than virtue ; it is necessary to be neither the one nor the other, neither vicious nor virtuous, but above all that.”<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, the ideal man will be consciously neither good nor wicked : he will be above all that, seeing things as they are, and expressing them in their beauty ; he will be adequate to the universe and

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série ii. p. 82.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121.



satisfy his own nature, without pride, without anxiety; evil will no longer exist for him save as the blood-shed round Troy walls is present with lovers of the *Iliad*. His science will control all elemental forces, his polity have purged the crowd of any taint of the ancestral beast and intermediate villain, fool, and prig. To count on such a consummation is to overween as Flaubert never dared: yet at times he was forced to cry:—

“Has life not made thee aware of a somewhat loftier than happiness, than love, than religion, because it springs from a more impersonal fount? A somewhat which sings through everything, whether we stop our ears or delight ourselves with listening: on which contingencies have no effect and which is of the nature of the angels who do not eat: I am speaking of idea. They love by its means whose life it is.”<sup>1</sup>

That is from his last letter to Madame Louise Colet: and in the last he ever wrote, twenty-six years later, the same note is sounded again, though on a paltry occasion, with more precision:—

“Guy has sent me my piece of botanical information. I was right! . . . My authority is the professor of botany at the Jardin des Plantes, and I was right, because æsthetic is true, and at a certain intellectual level (when method is ours) we no longer make mistakes.

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série ii. p. 397.

*Reality does not yield to the ideal but confirms it.* For *Bouvard et Pécuchet* I had to make three journeys into different regions before I found the neighbourhood proper to the action. Ah! ah! I triumph! That is a success! and one that flatters me.”<sup>1</sup>

Those words which I have italicised give fresh expression to that which raises Spinoza above philosophers, and makes his temper and character an object of contemplation for many whom his reasoning cannot satisfy. Flaubert has been called a pantheist, and his niece has in a measure authorised this designation.<sup>2</sup> However, I feel sure that he had not been willing to subscribe to any system, even that of his adored Spinoza. Perhaps the whole extent of his pantheistic leanings is expressed in the devout conviction of the assertions, “Reality does not yield to the ideal, but confirms it,” “The ideal is only fruitful when everything is brought into it,”<sup>3</sup> which are but another way of saying that “Beauty is the splendour of truth,”<sup>4</sup> and “Style the absolute manner of seeing things,”<sup>5</sup> since only by its achievement can any subject be grasped with lustre entire.

That every fact would confirm the hopes of one who had so deftly hated waste as to live both

<sup>1</sup> *Lettres à sa nièce Caroline*, p. 523.

<sup>2</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série i. p. xxxv

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Série ii. p. 366; see above, p. 172.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, Série iii. p. 80; see above, p. 34.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, Série ii. p. 71; see above, p. 149.

exactly and musically, and so shunned injustice as to realise charity both in deed and in representation, is a proposition to be neither gainsaid nor asserted lightly. But say, "The ideal demands a labour of love, not of exclusion,"<sup>1</sup> and few will demur from the practical rule suggested, however diffident they might feel in prospecting its logical outcome across the future. Evil may grow transparent to those who, no longer dreading, study it, and with ignorance might vanish away; as the loathsome leper, when St. Julian had conquered the last shudder of his natural repugnance, became, on the instant, the very presence "of that ideal type towards which all our efforts ought to tend."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série ii. p. 366.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 338.







Elijah in the fiery chariot

BLAKE AND HIS ÆSTHETIC

*It is a fine thing to write our very thought, it is man's privilege.*

. . . . .

*The freedom which inspires English men of genius would please me, if passion and party spirit did not corrupt the most estimable half of that precious liberty.*

VOLTAIRE, "CANDIDE," chapter xxv



## I

**A**RT needs autonomy, but for the artist's sake accepts many imposed tasks ; for only through him can she become "self-schooled, self-scanned, self-honoured, self-secure."

Her servants, in France and England, have had contrasted characters and circumstances. If we liken the author to an host, the French type will seek a peer or even a superior in his reader ; hence anxiety to inform succinctly, deferentially to entertain, and that self-effacement which, wherever possible, leaves guest and theme in presence,—having only drawn back the curtains, cleaned the windows, and tempered the atmosphere, like a collector who shows a treasure he knows the value of to a judge whom he respects.

The English host receives poor relatives and such as would gladly know the owner of such property, whoever he might be. Confident that to them his ideas, his talents, his knowledge, his temperament, reveal the divine, he feels free to dictate a reverent absorption or an ecstatic trance, to browbeat and depress, rally and detect, teach, be hearty, hob-nob ;

or, if his mansion be sufficiently palatial, he need not trouble himself to appear. Thus even Shakespeare is included.

Pedantry is the pitfall in accepting an outside standard; the presumption of inspiration leads to fatuity. There the poet so dreads suggesting that he has taken the lead of your comprehension, that he neglects his own thought to show appreciation of what yours surely is. Here, whether his walk be through Paradise or with Pickwick, he ignores every alternative of gait or bearing, unweariably maintaining the first he happened on. Across the Channel adopted virtues often stifle spontaneous growths; on this side you must look for every kind of fruit on one proud plant, sometimes a bramble.

The most admirable products of both soils have been extremely diverse; but now the exchange of influences has begun and will proceed.

We have already considered Flaubert, who may stand for the French type at its strongest. In Blake the English presumption of a God-illumined judgment reached its acme of assurance; no writer of the same force has deviated from initial impulse so little, or gathered less from experience and observation. The path of destiny was for him strangely straight and bright. All that he learned in pain was the pace at which his course might be run, till at last he was patient and trod delicately as a lamb.

## II

A GREAT critic has said that applied to work the word "genius gives . . . the notion of felicity and perfection"; but mark in "this divine gift of consummate felicity" how large a part we allot to effortless power to receive or effect. Such unaccountable superiority is more generally thus denoted than perfection itself. Men do not ask whether fertility, delicacy, proportion, coherence, and serenity were his; they call Blake a genius in spite of his obvious deficiency in many of these qualities. Nor does recognition "that his ideas and language are substantially underived" give a writer the fame of originality, but our sense that his nature compels him to be eloquent, that he is apprehended by his conceptions rather than with labour and forethought become their master. All ideas, like all language, must of necessity be derived: few will even inquire how apparent the lineage of a great man's thoughts may be. "He has made it his own," they say, and bid us observe how those

whose poetry or action was their life, not merely an occupation, shape their own rules.

The *Poetical Sketches*, though full of direct thefts from Elizabethan poetry, produce the effect of a very marked originality in their author ; whereas we have all read verse not to be reproached with stolen phrases, but making no such impression.

Blake believed his verses to be the voice of God within him, and held "the worship of God is honouring His gifts in other men, each according to his genius, and loving the greatest men best. Those who envy or calumniate great men hate God, for there is no other God." Hence, conscious of great powers, he saw no occasion to correct his work, and misconceived the motives of those who urged him to better it.<sup>1</sup> He failed or refused to learn the A B C of history, of literature, of art, of religion, of prosody : this gave his confidence an air of madness. Commercial obscurity surrounded the issue of his work, and deprived it of immediate influence. As soon as they were known, and wherever they became known, both poems and pictures told on original artists as an influence, while lesser talents did their best to imitate them. If his poetry had even less effect than his designs on his contemporaries, that is because fewer encountered it. Blake was in touch with professional

<sup>1</sup> Edwin J. Ellis, *The Real Blake*, pp. 46 and 47.

artists, but the only poets he came in contact with were mere dilettanti, like Hayley. Had death and fate permitted Collins, Gray, or Cowper to chance on the lad who wrote the *Poetical Sketches*, there is no reason to suppose that they would have been less impressed than were Fuseli, Flaxman, and Romney with his designs; and if, later, Wordsworth, Coleridge, or Lamb had come to know Blake personally, they would have made at least as much of him as did Lawrence, Richmond, or Linnell; while we can imagine Shelley sitting at his feet with Calvert. On men of talent not the felicities alone, but the very imperfections of his pictures and poems, are calculated to exert attraction. Fuseli put it grossly when he said Blake was "damned good to steal from." Works of genius which have never benefited by the second heat, or that long, patient process of sifting and clarifying which so often precedes it, must need gleam with stimulating accidents for the experienced workman's eye, inspiring him with both thought and word which he can but prize the more because they first arose in another mind, and are real additions to his primary perceptions, however truly their final shape may have become his own.

With the exception of a few stanzas and lines, the *Poetical Sketches* and *Songs of Innocence and Experience* contain all of Blake's poetry which

should be called beautiful. What remains is in movement and diction neither simple nor sensuous; and, if impassioned, lacks that ease and grace which passion sometimes gives; only to provoke thought and arouse curiosity can it claim effectiveness. Surveying the earlier work, one notes how largely it is preoccupied with poetical commonplaces; there is little new observation, few subtleties of sentiment; yet all is fresh, ardent, naïve, and not infrequently felicitous. The influence of Blake's peculiar religious apprehensions has already been felt; and henceforth the burden of dark meaning will increasingly overstrain syntax and rhythm. *Thel* has been made much of because it is less horrid; yet is it not insipid? Passages about the awakening of birds and flowers are relished in *Milton* that elsewhere would appear hackneyed in theme and less magical as effect.





"CITY LIKE A NAKED, NEW-JOHN BARE  
STRIDING THE BLAST, OR HEAVEN'S CHERUBIM HORSE-ED  
UPON THE NIGHTLESS COURSERS OF THE AIR."



### III

IT may help us to discover the literary value of Blake's prophetic writings to enumerate those of their main characteristics which criticism would seem to have established, and such as are obvious the moment they are set beside accepted masterpieces.

1. They were intended to present Christianity afresh ; or, as Matthew Arnold would have phrased it, "to renew the intuition that righteousness is not an observance of rules, but a well-head of mutual forbearance and effort springing up to spiritual reunion within us."

2. The Christianity presented is orthodox in its main outline : the Fall, the insufficiency of the law (righteous observance) as a means of salvation, the sufficiency of spiritual union in Jesus to redeem, and the final establishment of the kingdom of heaven by his means.

3. It is "advanced," like the "higher criticism," in the sense that it presented this orthodox sub-

stance, not merely as an historical fact, but mainly as a symbolical description of the inner life.

4. It was eccentric in that it identified Jesus with the imagination, in that it added a vast structure of heterogeneous elements to the traditional myth, and in the literalness with which it accepted the suggestion that the apparent universe was a veil, could be put off as a garment, and would finally by every man be laid aside.

5. It was efficacious in effect on Blake's character and life because the psychology inherent in it was borne out by experience, in the same sense as that of the Churches is ; while the myth which expressed it equally gave enhanced importance to the events and sentiments of individual lives, by showing them as parts of a grandiose whole.

6. Its psychology was apparently more complex than any that is usually associated with the traditional myth, and in this better corresponded to the infinitely complex conception of the material universe which has been gaining on the European mind since the time of Descartes.

7. The myth which embodies this psychology is confused and ugly because its personifications of tendencies and forces are not complete enough, and are never entirely freed from their roots in abstraction. They are continually undergoing metamorphoses and are always distinct from their

actual appearance. No kind of tolerable plasticity or comeliness could be or is maintained for more than a short passage with this ungainly machinery. Besides, the habits of these tremendous persons are extremely few and mostly gross; they are without the finer shades, and, like their emotions, are bewilderingly common to a whole group of names. One can but deplore that reality as revealed by vision is neither so varied, so highly organised, nor so beautiful as the material universe that deludes the senses.

8. It is obvious that the writer of these books was becoming less and less observant in regard to this unworthy "contraction of spirit perceived by the five senses;" and so his stock of images steadily perished, losing in fineness and vividness as the subtler shades of all that in youth he had been so eagerly enchanted by wore out in his vision-laboured mind.

9. The language he employs grows more and more monotonous and exasperating, since all æsthetic control over it is abandoned, even when he does not write subconsciously at the dictation of visions endowed with only part of the faculties of their amanuensis. Tedious repetitions of every kind abound, while the natural malapropism of a self-educated mind leads to peculiar efficacy being attached to just those words the writer does not

quite understand, such as "redound," "chartered," &c.

Certainly if it is, as I think, not to be gainsaid, that the above are main characteristics of the prophetic books, these must be very poor literature. With so absolute a trust in vision it is not likely that they can hold, in respect to great poetry, a relation more favourable than that which the Book of Ezekiel or the Apocalypse bears to the Book of Job. But even as compared with Ezekiel's, Blake's prophecies stand at a very sorry disadvantage; not having so simple a message, so significant a relation to history, or so intelligible an aim as the establishment of an ideal theocracy. The elder prophet's visions are not subject to violent metamorphoses; nor can it be claimed that any of Blake's is so acceptable as that of the valley of dry bones, or presents so elaborate and imposing a cumulative effect as that of the four living creatures,—combined, as it magnificently is in Ezekiel's last chapters, with the completion of the holy city. And, of course, the style of "Milton," "Vala," and "Jerusalem" is nowhere when compared with our Authorised Version of the book written on the banks of Chebar.

On the other hand, Blake having apprehended with marvellous integrity certain of Jesus' most penetrating intuitions, at which popular Christianity has always boggled, a far richer harvest may be

gleaned from his prophetic writings than from those of Ezekiel in lines and phrases vividly expressing an exquisite religious sense.

“If God dieth not for Man and giveth not himself eternally for Man, Man could not exist, for Man is Love as God is Love; every kindness to another is a little Death in the Divine Image, nor can Man exist but by Brotherhood.”<sup>1</sup>

No reasonable man will feel convinced that Blake's prophetic writings have been understood until he is shown a full paraphrase of them which he can understand. In the meantime there may be less impertinence than appears, in advancing considerations why we should not hope ever so to understand them. The most overwhelming is that, though a man possessed by great themes insecurely grasped may write confusedly, no man not mad, having definite and important ideas to convey, would so impenetrably have wrapped them up. This reflection brings those who entertain it great advantage; by it they become defenders of Blake's sanity. They, and not those devoted scribes who labour to discover the immaculate order of his system of ideas, should be fired by a conscious generosity. Though less quixotic, are they not as chivalrous? For, as Professor Raleigh says,

<sup>1</sup> *Jerusalem*, ed. by Russell and Maclagan, p. 118.

“What can be intelligibly deciphered can be intelligibly expressed, so that it needs no deciphering;” and, we add, must much better have been so expressed.

Perhaps mysticism must always lead to a licentious use of language; while, like poetical licenses, mystical ones may sometimes justify themselves by bringing within range of expression conceptions that lie beyond it. Though we cannot measure the necessary bondage of thought to speech, I ask all Blake's hopeful editors, Is it really conceivable that thoughts should be clear in a mind that could choose to express them in words so far wrested from their common use, or in such a code of symbols, as Blake's? <sup>1</sup> I think it is greatly to the credit of his sanity that a nucleus of ideas was consolidated, in spite of the untrustworthy nature of the mental recreation which he wrongly supposed to be the best; and I think it proves that his character was very much more constructive than his mind.

<sup>1</sup> It is useless for Mr. Ellis to bid us learn the code and become familiar with it, as with a foreign language, so as to enjoy it. It is not a foreign language; it is nothing so beautiful, so vast, so approved. It has not quickened in, grown in, and mastered millions of minds. It is a crude and barbarous novelty; it is one man's bastard, stained and soiled throughout by insensitive incongruities, and its every fault is a crime against our own most beautiful tongue; it is a code in English.

#### IV

BLAKE'S education was wretched, and his genius makes its inadequacy horribly obtrusive; he was too impatient ever to feel the force of ignorance, while the power of his mind made it easy for him to despise accepted conclusions. He read considerably, but understood only about half. No one can picture Blake's mind who does not realise how every passage which baffled his immediate comprehension was supposed by him to be transcript from a visionary revelation.<sup>1</sup> His enemy was the intellectual assurance that has never surveyed the world it presumes to judge, and judges most things by

<sup>1</sup> An amusing instance of his ineffectual reading is reported by Crabb Robinson (A. Symons, *William Blake*, p. 263). He said Milton had come to him in vision and begged him to correct the false doctrine promulgated in *Paradise Lost* "that sexual intercourse arose out of the fall." The famous passage (Bk. iv. l. 741) actually illustrates the opposite opinion. But both Blake and the visionary Milton had forgotten or failed to grasp this fact. What mental deterioration awaits a great poet when he is forced to visit such ill-trained minds to supply them with reality and save them from the illusion of matter-of-fact knowledge!

standards not applicable to them. His madness is that of ignorance with the best intentions, trying to set machinery it does not understand in motion.

Like those citizens at the time of the French Revolution, who revealed to the world that they had not received preparation as a governing class, by making monstrous mistakes, Blake reveals that he had not received or been able to achieve the culture necessary for the adequate treatment of themes which he rightly perceived to be the proper ones for great poetry. He alone felt the need and answered it to the best of his ability; though his effort was abortive, it is honourable. The main result of all his spiritual warfare was determined by the assumptions of popular Christianity, which he had imbibed in childhood before he could think for himself. These he never doubted, though he did reinterpret them. The question of his sanity will be reduced to this question: Have not many of the greatest intellects done less to conquer their faults of temper and sensuality than did this man to conquer his ignorance? Is not his victory, with its industry supported without weariness, its poverty free from all envy, its violent temper subdued almost entirely to peace and forgiveness, its disappointed ambition accepted finally without rancour or despair, its lifelong preference for the things of the spirit over those of this world, of being to



seeming and having—is this not of the very essence of sanity? Is it not holiness? Could we have hoped for a judgment from Voltaire on a man like Blake, comparable to that vision reported by Crabb Robinson, in which Voltaire said to Blake, “I blasphemed the Son of Man, and it shall be forgiven me; but my enemies blasphemed the Holy Ghost in me, and it shall not be forgiven them.”<sup>1</sup>

There may have been periods when a nation’s mind has needed men like Blake; when, under Druid oaks, the reverent colleges of elect souls would have listened in the moonlight to his admired dreams. The ideal is always partly located in the past, partly in the future; the father and the son of man are divine. We lose while we gain. Blake may have been born too late, he may have been born too early. I prefer to think that nothing essential divided him from the men with whom he lived; that he was no belated antediluvian, nor yet “fallen all before his time on this sad world,” but that accidental circumstances prevented his full effectiveness. The improvement shown in the style of the “Ghost of Abel” may have been due to the influence of Byron’s poetry. Can we not imagine Blake’s having felt, when reading that or Wordsworth’s, how his own books, true and vital

<sup>1</sup> A. Symons, *William Blake*, p. 301.

though their burden was, were not fit for publication in this world? Are not his words to Crabb Robinson an arch and gentle confession of this? "I shall print no more: when I am commanded by the spirits, then I write; and the moment I have written, I see the words fly about the room in all directions. It is then published. The spirits can read, and my MS. is of no further use." <sup>1</sup>

Every young and in consequence half-educated man of pregnant parts has been through a similar experience. Things written and thought with the eccentricity natural to ignorance he has come across done adequately by fully equipped minds; and of some tasks once lightly undertaken perhaps been convinced that they were not for him, for he could never acquire the scholarship, breadth of experience, or dexterity required. Yet they truly had been revelations to him, and some may receive them even now best from his work; besides, it often happens that the more fully equipped prophets have only half the message or have mingled it with errors. Blake did not talk like that about his designs; he was surrounded by young and ardent admirers of them, and if the spirits were even more enthusiastic, still, his latest and best designs were commissioned, published, and paid for. Gazing on his picture of "Cain Fleeing from the Face of his Parents by the

<sup>1</sup> A. Symons, *William Blake*, p. 268.

Grave of Abel," in that distracted figure he came to see not, as he had intended, the murderer, but the spiritual form of the murdered in agony demanding vengeance; and wrote his last poem.<sup>1</sup> A murder was an accident of no consequence, a material event; vengeance, the living influence of the dead man on his surviving friends, was big with evil import and strong to perpetuate war against the forgiveness of sins.

" "In Hell all is self-righteousness. There is no such thing there as the Forgiveness of Sins.' 'It is not because angels are holier than men or devils that makes them angels, but because they do not expect holiness from one another, but from God only.' 'Men are admitted into Heaven, not because they have curbed and governed their passions or have no passions, but because they have cultivated their understandings.' 'The fool shall not enter into Heaven let him be ever so holy.' " <sup>2</sup>

These interpretations are beautifully apt to prick the bubbles of popular religion which the rich blow for the poor and the clever for the stupid, that they may amuse them. Intelligence is an essential part of the ideal, and holiness is not holy enough without it.

<sup>1</sup> See the "Ghost of Abel," *Poetical Works of W. Blake*, ed. by J. Sampson, Preface, p. xvii.

<sup>2</sup> E. J. Ellis, *The Real Blake*, pp. 326, 327, 325.

NOT merely in religious devotion to art and in fascinated horror at vulgar errors does Blake resemble Flaubert, but he has formulated very similar æsthetic principles : indeed, his contempt for reason and science alone divides them.

Like Buffon, he understood that the manner of seeing things may be as rich in revelations of truth as the simple perception of any object can be,<sup>1</sup> perhaps richer, and said, "The tree which moves some to tears of joy is in the eyes of others only a green thing which stands in the way. . . . To the eyes of the man of imagination, Nature is Imagination itself" :<sup>2</sup> or, as Flaubert put it, for the artist, "The accidents of the world, as soon as they are perceived, should appear transposed as though to serve an illusion intended for description" <sup>3</sup> (*i.e.*, a vision prepared for art's means).

<sup>1</sup> For a more literal translation, see above, p. 146.

<sup>2</sup> *The Letters of William Blake*, ed. by A. G. B. Russell, p. 62.

<sup>3</sup> *Œuvres complètes*, vol. vi. p. 184.





JOB CONFESSING HIS PRESUMPTION TO GOD

Like La Bruyère,<sup>1</sup> he perceived that style was a consequence of sincerity.

"No man can write or speak from his heart but he must intend truth."<sup>2</sup> "Expression cannot exist without character as its stamina."<sup>3</sup>

Therefore for him, too, "Execution is the Chariot of Genius." . . . "Invention depends altogether upon execution or organisations" . . . "Grandeur of ideas is founded on precision of ideas;"<sup>4</sup> and this results in a parallel to the theory of the one right word: "Ideas cannot be given but in their minutely appropriate words. Nor can a design be made without its minutely appropriate execution."<sup>5</sup>

Hence the necessity of hard work: "Without unceasing practice nothing can be done. Practice is art. If you leave off you are lost."<sup>6</sup>

Then his "Exuberance is beauty," or "The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom,"<sup>7</sup> corresponds to Flaubert's admiration for exaggeration.<sup>8</sup>

Nor could a stronger estimate of the beauty and permanence of types be found than in Blake's "Chaucer makes every one of his characters perfect

<sup>1</sup> See above, p. 107.

<sup>2</sup> *Poetical Works*, edited by E. J. Ellis, vol. i. p. 212.

<sup>3</sup> Gilchrist, *The Life of W. Blake*, ed. by W. Grabam Robertson, p. 525.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 282.

<sup>5</sup> *The Real Blake*, p. 302.

<sup>6</sup> *Poetical Works*, edited by E. J. Ellis, vol. i. p. 434.

<sup>7</sup> *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, pp. 10 and 7.

<sup>8</sup> See above, p. 154.

in his kind; every one is an antique statue, the image of a class, and not of an imperfect individual;”<sup>1</sup> or when he says: “The oak dies as well as the lettuce, but its eternal image or individuality never dies but renews by its seed. Just so the imaginative image returns by the seed of contemplative thought.”<sup>2</sup>

The association of sympathy with intelligence is for him as for Flaubert a guarantee of fruitful labour—

“Be assured, my dear friend, that there is not one touch in those drawings and pictures but what came from my head and my heart in unison.”<sup>3</sup>

The necessity of banishing foregone moral conclusions from both representations and inquiries shone for Blake like the noonday; for, as he says, “Here [*i.e.*, in heaven], they are no longer talking of what is good and evil, of what is right or wrong, and puzzling themselves in Satan’s Labyrinth, but are conversing with eternal realities as they exist in human imagination.”<sup>4</sup> The study of evil and admiration for art’s portrayal of types of evil, was for him, as certainly as for Flaubert, an antidote for the fascination exercised by infernal powers.

<sup>1</sup> Gilchrist, p. 506.

<sup>2</sup> *The Real Blake*, p. 318.

<sup>3</sup> *The Letters of William Blake*, p. 104.

<sup>4</sup> *The Real Blake*, p. 323.



“The uses to society are perhaps equal of the Devil and of the Angel: *their* sublimity who can dispute? . . . Let the young reader study what he [Chaucer] has said of her [the Wife of Bath]; it is useful as a scarecrow.”<sup>1</sup>

As La Fontaine is Dante's equal where both are at their best, Wordsworth is Shakespeare's when he writes about Hartley Coleridge, six years old:—

“This is all in the highest degree imaginative and equal to any poet, but not superior. I cannot think that real poets have any competition. None are greatest in the kingdom of heaven. It is so in poetry.”<sup>2</sup>

Even impersonality, at least in respect of narratives, is upheld by Blake—

“Reasons and opinions concerning acts are not history, acts themselves alone are history. . . . Tell me the acts, O historian, and leave me to reason upon them as I please. . . .”<sup>3</sup>

Doubtless Blake's practice was not, like Flaubert's, consequent on these principles. He did not view them clearly; their disentanglement from that old poetry of a last judgment, a forgiveness of sins,

<sup>1</sup> Gilchrist, pp. 505 and 508.

<sup>2</sup> A. Symons, *William Blake*, p. 299.

<sup>3</sup> Gilchrist, p. 517.

a happy life to come as a reward to faith and self-conquest, might have caused him to demur. Occasionally he may be found contradicting this or that one rebelliously even in his extant writings. Yet was he not bound to reach acquiescence in them, however associated? Born an artist, everything else, even the apocalyptic character of his visions, was accidental, had grown out of unpropitious circumstances. Besides, can the truth, in view of what is and is not known about it, be conceived as less glorious than these prophetic dreams? Any answer to have weight must come from as valiant and as faithful a spirit.





THE ENTOMBMENT

# VISIONARY ART

*There is no surer way of evading the world than by Art ; and no surer way of uniting with it than by Art.*

GOETHE'S "MAXIMS AND REFLECTIONS," translated by Bailey  
Saunders, p. 172

## I

**B**LAKE was entirely deluded about the historical development of art, and therefore misinterpreted the origin and needs of his own gift. Stylistic characters were for him faithful copies after spiritual objects seen in vision. He considered that Michael Angelo had gazed on men nine, twelve, or fifteen heads high ; and, when he grouped them together so that it was very difficult to make out what they were doing or why they were moved, it was because he in trance had watched them behaving so. He thought the long straight lines of Gothic sculpture and the simplified forms dictated by the difficulty of overcoming stone with chisels and fitting statues to pillars were a literal rendering of spiritual realities. And all the stylistic characters which he adopted from ancient tombs, old prints, or even from his contemporaries, had been seen by him in vision, and proved that those other artists had seen the same things in the same way. Thus we see that he was fundamentally in the dark as to

the nature of his own art, as to its relations with other art, and as to its limitations and their relation to the materials and implements employed. Had he been consequent in these ideas he would have seen that Rubens' women or Titian's children were as necessarily copied from vision, since in their work the stylistic developments from natural forms are quite as marked. But Blake was not observant enough to make such a reflection. The commercial world was the work of Satan, and artists who obviously appreciated it were demons. They delight in deep shadows, vague perspectives, and the soft confusion of rich wardrobes; their women belong to the satisfied classes, who are not pilgrims but leaseholders in respect to material conditions. To contemplate such pictures results in a higher value being set on good living, not in a longing for rustic simplicity.

Blake confesses that "the spirit of Titian was particularly active in raising doubts concerning the possibility of executing without a model." At such times "memory of nature and of pictures of various schools possessed his mind instead of appropriate execution." We who perceive that his mind was equally possessed by memories when it was most self-satisfied can explain his experience better. The stylistic character with which Titian tempted him could not be used at once, like those which he had



unconsciously got by heart through constant copying when young. Probably he viewed him through even worse travesties<sup>2</sup> than the prints which veiled Raphael and Michael Angelo from his divining enthusiasm. His very limited stock of mannerisms failed before this new revelation; he had to rack his memory, and wanted to explore the correspondences which he intuitively felt must exist between Titian's stylistic developments and natural forms. But he tells us he had "the courage to suffer poverty and disgrace," rather than enrich his mind by quitting the narrow circle of his acquired habits docilely to learn of yet another great master. He had taken up with the spirit-world, and easily believed that his senses deceived even when they delighted him. Still, he was no consistent Puritan. Affinities to Michael Angelo, who "created his visions of beauty, pity, and terror through the sole instrument of the human body," may be too heavily insisted on; for the Englishman's preferences were not so exclusive; certain motives of landscape and idyllic life had always an equal power over him, and in his treatment of these he is really more akin to the Venetian than to the Florentine school. He did not love the solidity of the nude in nature as did Michael Angelo.

What he found in the great Florentine's art was a stylistic treatment of the human body in harmony

<sup>2</sup> Gilchrist, p. 283.

with august and religious emotion—just what he found in Gothic draperies and peaceful poses. Thus the whole reach of his art is provided with a language of outline ; and if any other element be added, it is something from the conventional art of his own time—high-waisted damsels floating like wind-flowers from their toe-tips in a gush of sentimental ravishment. He had no idea that all these characters had been slowly evolved from the study of nature and humoured into harmony with moods that were equally a conquest over the world. He had no objection to detail or homely accident, only to the use of both made by the Dutch painters. Had it been granted to him to see them in pictures by Puvis de Chavannes he would certainly have been enchanted. His pupils, Calvert and Palmer, were doubtless encouraged by him to make a similar if less perfect use of such motives. In the illustrations to the Book of Job and the Eclogues of Virgil—nay, even here and there in the borders of *Milton* and *Jerusalem*—we find a treatment of such themes really worthy of comparison with that of the great French painter-poet.

Blake never dreamed that the materials and implements used had dictated each its proper stylistic tendency, and that, tutored by these, every master had shaped yet another natural trait till it conformed with their straitness. His theory of in-

spiration left him at the mercy of every inane impulse or freak which arose in an exceptionally mobile imagination. Reynolds was the only man he met who could have understood his difficulties and have helped him to overcome them, but bigotry prevented him from profiting by that noble and seasoned experience. His education as an artist rigorously limited his means of expression; while he was debarred from adding to these formulas, as most great artists do, by his dogmatic dread of the influence of memory and nature. The slow process of evolving out of the wilderness of natural suggestions articulate items capable of working together for a definite pictorial effect was unknown to him, for both superstition and impatience prevented his discovering it, though he was continually prompted thereto by his native gift and the needs it created.

Added to this endless difficulty, which was always tripping up Blake's feet whenever he might have made an advance in his art, was a superhuman power of self-delusion. He tells us in an often quoted passage, "I question not my corporeal eye any more than I would question a window concerning a sight"—a very foolish negligence indeed if the window happened to be dirty or have bubbles in it. "What!" it will be questioned, "when the sun rises do you not see a round disc of fire somewhat like a guinea?" "Oh! no, no! I see an

innumerable company of the heavenly host crying—'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty!'" With the same lovable perversity he appears never to have seen his own works, but always, in their stead, a vision flattering their creator. Compare his own description of the colouring and finish of the items in his catalogue with that of Crabb Robinson, or with the works themselves, and one is immediately convinced of this happy self-delusion, which would seem to have proved contagious for one or two of his admirers. He asserts that "precision," "clear colours," and "determinate lineaments" are the qualities aimed at—and, one can but conclude from his tone of confidence, attained—in such works as "The Bard," "Pitt," and "The Canterbury Pilgrims." As a matter of fact the colour is not clear, and "precision and determinate lineaments" are the last qualities attributable to at least two of these strange pictures. Even his "rival" the contemned Stothard's "Canterbury Pilgrims," however vulgar and vapid, is at least clearer in colour and nearer to its original appearance than Blake's dull and ineffective, if weightier and more pregnant picture. Yet he tells us "All frescoes are as high finished as miniatures or enamels; they are known to be unchangeable." To this capacity for self-delusion must be attributed the unbelievable carelessness of a great number of

his works, which come within no measurable distance of the standards set by the rest.

But if this artist is thus self-impeded and stunted, on the other hand he is, at his worst as at his best, entirely free from the superstitions and confusions that frustrate the more part of his fellows. There is no tendency to regard accidental nature as a fetish, nor to confuse the idea of beauty with that of truth or the aim of science with that of art. He is always direct and sincere; if the result is not beautiful, that is merely because the impatient creator neglected to sort and select, or to balance and complete, and contented himself with hasty work, or the deadly smoothness of elaborated mechanical processes which have been dreamed over. Instinctively conscious of the limitations of his materials, he is sometimes careless in employing them; and he always has an intention, if often that intention is crude or silly. His line work is sometimes direct and bold as that on a Greek vase; but, instead of the fund of observation which the best vase painters added to their limited and conventional means of expression, he is for ever making snapshots at sublime effects, which had been attained, through very much more elaborate processes, by masters patient of the necessarily slow evolution of beauty. His sudden recollections were visions, spurring his hand—already impatient to a fault.

When he is at his best he goes as straight to his point as a caricaturist, and is then unsurpassed for accent and power of suggestion.

Blake knew little about the anatomy of horses; yet he has been strangely fortunate in treating them. The horses in the "Canterbury Pilgrims" have been found to need apology.<sup>1</sup> But all artists and designers will, in this dull, over-laboured production, be first delighted with these horses. "Wherever did Blake get them from?" we cry.<sup>2</sup> The artist tells us lies about equine anatomy perhaps, but he never pretended to tell the truth on that subject; what he was full of was the grandiose aspect, the proud stepping, superb holding of the head, the sculpturesque stability and groomable simplicity of their forms. Two of them are fine inventions in picture language, and could be used decoratively in a thousand ways, because they speak so simply and so well about equine impressiveness. Between them and those on the Parthenon frieze there are the difference and the affinity that exist between Giotto and Michael Angelo. One could imagine a good and interesting artist who, having

<sup>1</sup> *The Real Blake*, p. 327.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. A. G. B. Russell informs me that they are undoubtedly derived from an engraving on which Blake may have worked. Its title runs: "The Procession of King Edward VI. from the Tower of London to Westminster, Feb. xix, MDXLVII, previous to his coronation. Engraved from a coeval painting at Cowdray in Sussex, the Seat of Lord Viscount Montague, by James Basire."

once invented them, would have used them his life through ; nay, a school of designers that would have repeated them for centuries. But Blake does not ; he has created others as fine and quite different : those with the stormy manes in what is, I think, his grandest creation, "Elijah in the Chariot of Fire" ; that, finest of all, with the griffin-like head, in "The Rider of the Pale Horse" ; those crouching low on the earth, almost invisible, behind "The Bard" ; and last, though not least, the sightless couriers of the wind in "Pity." All these have the superb directness of the greatest art, though they have not its completeness.

Blake apprehended that the obsolete tempera and fresco would yield greater beauties than the oil medium, the consummate use of which was still extant in his day. He set to work to rediscover these lapsed mediums, from insufficient inquiries leaping to insecure results. His two finest "frescoes" are "The Bard," from Gray, and "Pitt Guiding Behemoth." Both are unusually delightful to the eye ; we think of the most decadent Tintorets or El Grecos as we gaze at their gleaming topsyturvydom. There is something grand about them that suggests how Blake might have evolved a technique with Venetian affinities, resembling that of G. F. Watts, whose "Curse of Cain" in the Diploma Gallery is in every respect such a monumental picture as

would have satisfied Blake's innate aspirations fully. Perhaps the most enchanting of his drawings is "The Wise and Foolish Virgins," of which Lawrence ordered a replica. "It was Sir Thomas's favourite drawing," and "he commonly kept it on his table in his studio, as a study"—"which is high praise when we remember that Lawrence's collection of drawings by the Old Masters was one of the finest that has ever been brought together."<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, the artist's intention, not the actual work on the actual paper, wins praise for "The River of Life," since the composition suggested has never been really found. This drawing, and even more "The Entombment," and "Job Confessing his Presumption to God," make one think how, more fortunately situated, Blake might have become to Fra Angelico something of what Puvis de Chavannes became to Piero dei Franceschi.

Blake is a real art force: therefore he would certainly have benefited—not, like Barry and Fuseli, been rendered impossible for ever—by gazing up at the Sistine ceiling or wandering through the cells at San Marco.

Evidence of the way Blake must often have been hypnotised by his own work is to be found in the much vaunted minute detail in some of his colour

<sup>1</sup> *The Letters of William Blake*, Introduction by A. G. B. Russell, p. xxi.



prints, which is entirely thrown away, because it is out of scale with the design as a whole, and out of harmony with its generalised character. Of course the forms of these plants growing like sea-anemones over the hills and valleys of his visionary world were suggested by the peculiar patterns that the sticky oil paint raised upon the paper when the millboard was torn from it, and had nothing to do with the design as originally conceived. Blake's attention is caught by this strange surface, and he follows its suggestions, obviously elaborating fantastic forms of vegetable growth, helping to explicitness the hints it gave, like a child tracing fairy trees on a frosted window-pane. In the much later water-colours for "Dante," we find him drawing these same growths from recollection as an inherent part of the design—an absurdly minute scale being no longer imposed by the broken surface left by the sticky millboard. In the same way he had no doubt been hypnotised by the colours in his paint-box or on his palette when he painted the tiger green.

His books were printed by a similar process, revealed to him in a dream by his brother's spirit. Presumably the possibilities of some such invention had been discussed between the brothers before the younger's death. These books are great rareties, especially copies worth having; they are therefore often overestimated. A few pages reveal an instinc-

tive sense of decorative propriety ; the more part is rather curious than beautiful.

It was a fresh study of old engravings and other works of art, to which he was roused by the sympathy and encouragement of younger artists like Linnell, Palmer, and Calvert, which caused the great improvement in his illustrations to the Book of Job. This work must really count among the finest ever produced in England ; the designs for "Dante," begun later, are of much inferior promise, being less coherent and less central in conception.

Folk who complain of Blake's bad or incorrect drawing do not understand what they are talking about ; for such censure is as relevant as complaints of the incorrectness of Japanese paintings in the same respects, or that of a Gothic statue. It is not fidelity to natural fact which is wanting, but sensitiveness as to what forms are cheap and empty, what fully developed and refined. He did not pretend to copy nature, but visions ; unfortunately he neglected to insure that these visions were always the best he was capable of receiving, and sometimes, in his impatience, he treated them more cavalierly than even the shoddiest deserved.



Rose up against me thundering from the Brook of Albion's River  
 From Waddington & Strunthole from Capswell's borders to Chelsea  
 Thy face of wounded Soldiers, but when he saw my face  
 Which he found from heaven to earth, trembling he said, his cold  
 Persons rose up; & his sword deers covered them all over  
 With a tender cloud. His thou art now; such was he O Spectre  
 I know thy deat & thy revenges; and unless thou desist  
 I will certainly create an eternal Hell for thee. Listen:  
 Be attentive: be obedient: Lo the Furnaces are ready to relieve thee.  
 I will break thee into shivers; & melt thee in the furnaces of death.  
 Desist not from thine own will, & obey not my stern command:  
 I am clos'd up from my children; my Emanation is dividing  
 And thou my Spectre art devoted against me. But mark:  
 I will compell thee to assist me in my terrible labours. To beat  
 these hybernical Nations on the cliffs of bitter Death  
 I am inspired: I act not for myself: for Albions sake  
 I now tell what I am: a horror and an astonishment  
 Shuddring the heavens to look upon me: Behold what cruelties  
 Are practis'd in Babel & Shinar, & have approach'd to Zions Hill  
 While Loo spoke, the terrible Spectre fell shuddring before him  
 Watching his time with glowing eyes to leap upon his prey  
 Loo opened the Furnaces in fear, the Spectre saw to Babel & Shinar  
 Across all Europe & Asia, he saw the tortures of the Victims,  
 He saw now from the outside what he before saw & felt from within  
 He saw that Loo was the sole uncontroll'd Lord of the Furnaces  
 Crucian; he kneel'd before Loo's iron-shod feet on Lardian Stone.  
 Languid; & thirsting for Loo's life yet preferring obedience.  
 While Loo pursued Loo's speech in threatenings loud & fierce.  
 Thou art my Pride & Self-righteousness: I have found thee out:  
 Thou art revealed before me in all thy magnitude & power.  
 Thy Unmerciful preferences to Chastity must be cut in sunder:  
 Thy holy wrath & deep deceit cannot avail against me  
 Nor shalt thou ever assume the triple-form of Albions Spectre  
 For I am one of the living: dare not to quack my inspired fury  
 If thou wilt cast forth from my life: if I was dead upon the mountains  
 Thou mightest be paid & lov'd: but now I am living: unless  
 Thou abstain rayning I will create an eternal Hell for thee.  
 Take thou this Hammer & let Justice heave the thundering Bellow:  
 Break & shive the Rocks, strike thou alternately with me labour obedient  
 In the Walls of Babel & Shinar, all their Enclosures were  
 Condens'd. Hand has absorb'd all his Brothers in his might  
 All the infant Loves & Graces were lost, for the mighty Hand

Com



## II

BLAKE was probably right in believing that the greatest artists had worked from vision ; "students of nature" clumsily supply their physical defect by handicapped labour. Michael Angelo and Rembrandt watched the world in order to enrich their visions, not each item piecemeal for each several work ; hence, as in fine literature, their observation is thoroughly assimilated. On a lower plane, Wordsworth's " bliss of solitude," and " eye upon the object," suppose a visionary habit perhaps less vivid but possibly better trained than Blake's : but in Flaubert's case we have indisputable evidence that one as exceptional can be treated seriously.

" Do not class the artist's inward vision with those of the hallucinated. During what is properly called hallucination, terror is always present ; you feel your personality escaping, you think yourself about to die. With the poetic vision, on the contrary, joy comes, something enters into you. Yet none the less truly you

know not where you are. . . . Such a vision often forms slowly, piece by piece as the parts of a scene slide on to the stage ; but often also it is sudden and fugitive like the hallucinations of sleep. Something passes before your eyes ; then you must throw yourself eagerly upon it.

The taste of arsenic was so really in my mouth when I described how Emma Bovary was poisoned, that it cost me two indigestions one upon the other—quite real ones, for I vomited my dinner.”<sup>1</sup>

Imagination cultivated to the point of vision, ~~it~~ of great service to an artist, needs a constant supply of trustworthy material, and correction by a free critical reference to logic and æsthetic judgment ; for, like any other human faculty, it must be disciplined and not worshipped blindly. Flaubert was at vast pains to acquire a stock of precise information about objects, persons, places, and periods with which his work was concerned, though we are to understand that he often wrote his actual descriptions from visions for which his mind had been thus prepared. Blake would have dreaded the influence of any preparation other than prayer or good deeds, since, in his belief, it could only have imposed on the real spiritual world shadows, stains, and contortions, characteristic of the outward spectacle, which was inherently false.

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série iii. pp. 349 and 350.

### III

THE surmise that there exists in the actual ordinance of sensuous objects far more significance than has yet been divined, enhances the value of correctness in memories and of probability in imaginations, just as it spurs on the analytical observer. This hope was strong in Flaubert; it barely existed for Blake; yet both owned the visionary's power of re-picturing things no longer present, and the artist's impulse to construct novelties out of similar elements. Blake infinitely preferred the most adventitious of these creations to the mere fidelity of remembrance. His own eager divinations could alone be consulted as to their import—which, since they were fortuitous, was always possibly rare. At least they were no common experiences; his neighbours could not bid him correct his first impressions of them or reconsider their significance.<sup>2</sup>

However, even these visions possessed some con-

<sup>2</sup> *The Letters of W. Blake*, p. 114.

sequent characters and were subject to a few critical comparisons. Since the pieces in his mental kaleidoscope were numbered, more especially the larger and more striking ones, the delight Blake took in reviewing their arrangements would cause him to welcome the same or similar combinations in differing moods: and then he compared new with old, as we all do with sense impressions at first hand. Besides, he had instructors—the great artists who had won his boyish admiration for forms, shades, and colours supernaturally proportioned and unlike any seen abroad. Goethe remarked how, after studying pictures, objects in the street appeared isolated and modified to suit the style of the master he had been absorbed with; that is, his eye instinctively selected those qualities the artist in question would have chosen, and adapted them to the effects which his pictures had aimed at. From his earliest youth Blake thus played not only with real but with visionary appearances. Whenever he turned over his loved prints or saw new works by those great spirits, his inward world no doubt received that kind of castigation which our first impressions gain from renewed inspection of object and scene. Later, however, not even so persuasive a *daimon* as Titian could induce him to acclimatise quite foreign organisms. The flames of his indignation girt the strict



innocence of his passionately adored Eden against the amenities and perspectives of luxury.

Flaubert, though he nourished and chastened his visions till they corresponded to a highly complex possibility, nevertheless, as we have seen, appreciated exaggeration in proportion, though only so long as coherence was maintained. For him the articulation of such enlargements must remain of the natural type, though they would acquire a greater ease and directness from the exclusion of all the supernumerary details which so distract and confuse observation in the real world. Even visions often presented him with more detail than his art could cope with ; then a conscious synthesis must be undertaken before words could suffice. He rightly saw in this process a method of thought parallel to the determination of scientific formulas which describe the object deprived of all save general qualities and relations : only for him truth was a means, beauty the end. Man sensuous, emotional, intellectual, harmonised in a mood, was addressed—not his understanding isolated from its concomitants.

Again, Blake never clearly grasped, as Flaubert did, the fact that “the words of the poet are not merely symbols of what he wishes to say, they are what he wishes to say.”<sup>1</sup> For him vision itself was

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Rudolf Kassner, quoted in *The Letters of W. Blake*, p. 62 :

a purer art than any canvas or paper could assist ; it existed in the real, they only in this unreal world. Thus, the lines, tints, and shades of the painter did not always constitute his success ; but, like much less gifted artists, he often hoped the public would meet him half-way, and supply in response to stale and poor indications fulness of vision—persuaded that what sufficed to re-awaken his mind ought to arouse theirs.

His equivocations about the meaning of the word “reality” balked him of the saving health of his own conviction that art could not exist without “minutely appropriate execution.”<sup>1</sup> His paintings were too often but wretched copies of his true creations, and these latter, illusions only, were all too like nature in being devoid of the characters of appropriate brush or pencil work. Thus bigotry in holding a silly creed robbed him of the benefit due to the perception that art is outward and not inward, that style is thought, and that complete ideas only exist in perfect forms.

“Die Worte des Dichters können nicht nur das bedeuten, was er mit ihnen sagen will, sondern sie sind es auch.”

<sup>1</sup> See above, p. 213.

#### IV

USURPATION by the will of that control over sensation normally exerted by impress from without, lies perhaps at the root of expression. The origins of speech, like the first subtleties of grimace, may have accompanied the reproduction of sensations without the aid of external stimulus.

A volition commands the senses to ignore the world and serve some desire ; thus thought is born. The eager divination of mechanical inventors and scientific discoverers watches the action of unconstructed machines, predicts the result of investigations not yet set on foot. Men gifted with vision create sensuous illusions by transforming and rearranging elements furnished by memory ; art's triumph is to register this marriage of sensation to purpose.

If abstractions free from the most summary sensualisation even of a symbol occur in thought, use may have obliterated the process—as is perhaps the case with instinct, which always looks like a

leap in the dark and occasionally proves so. The rapidity of mental activity, and the rareness of capacity for self-observation, make testimony on these matters extremely unconvincing.

Less gifted men develop their conceptions from sketch to sketch, from stage to stage, till at length they satisfy the impulse which drives them, weary it, or transform it. How much more finely must the retentive mind correct and develop, advancing from vision to vision! while thus aided skill performs her prestigious miracles. Genius fluctuates between these two habits, always in some measure conforming to both.

Every perception, divination, and expression awaits corroboration or correction from the renewed experience. Rash judges condemn or acquit a thousand times, before the proper witnesses are cited again and the court of appeal can sit to quash or uphold each finding. Hence the tardiness with which the conquests of exceptional minds are received even by the intelligent.





THE WISE AND FOOLISH VIRGINS

V

WHO, even in his own case, can rightly apportion responsibility for failure between inherent deficiencies and avoidable disloyalty? Yet can we think any of his contemporaries more obedient to duty than Blake, or any Frenchman of his day more conscientious than Flaubert? Society was hostile to the excellence and maimed the efforts of them both. This oppression revealed their profound genuineness but marred its efflorescence. Human perfection implies reciprocity; no man can give perfectly unless his gift be as well received.

Both were precociously independent: and if the one was poor, the other well-to-do, the one fully, the other under-educated, yet the insanity of a fashion may be as cramping as want, and overconfidence as baffling as too vast a task.

Ecclesiastes is not more resigned to the unintelligible vanity of human things than *les Mémoires d'un fou*; but that book was written in reaction

from violent and hopeless passion. The recurrence of the same mood when Flaubert found his body mysteriously stricken only proves that the same person suffered both misfortunes. Every thought of competing for the prizes all desire was banished; as much as any hunchback he knew himself a monster.

Blake might claim to be at home with prophets dead, but not with his neighbours, amongst whom no angel could have felt more strange: and the only rivals his vast ambition espied, rendered it ridiculous, so despicable they seemed.

The Frenchman was quicker to take advantage of this isolation, to feel that it made him what the true artist should be, a Nazarite, a priest. Proudly, if with a shudder, he noted how other human monsters were drawn to him, as to a brother who yet had a royal strength with which to hold his own against the untainted crowd. He had touch for all whose mentality, whether through default or excessive delicacy, was a stranger—idiots, savages, disillusioned ladies, poets, artists, monks, and the victims of vice.

Blake took longer in resigning himself to the fact that the rich and powerful chose others to paint and write for them; but in the end his serenity was more beautiful. Both had to wrestle with the exasperation of those who, fully endowed,



find that some primary instinct is being starved in them. Blake's marriage proved barren, Flaubert probably held that his malady forbade him to think of fatherhood. No doubt there were compensations in either case ; for Mrs. Blake was an ideal wife, and if the French master's makeshift love-affairs were unsatisfactory, his relations with his niece and later on with Guy de Maupassant were in the best sense of the word paternal.

Flaubert poured his vitalising enthusiasm into the conceptions of trained freethinkers, Blake his into the prejudices of those who shared Bunyan's outlook : both splendidly overflowed these moulds and proved them inadequate. Yet the Frenchman's advantage was, I think, as great here, as that which the Englishman drew from his genius for personal religion.

The first cried—

“The artist has no right to live like other men,”  
the second—

“All men should be painters, poets, sculptors, or musicians ; for none save artists can be Christians.”

Flaubert saw in style the crown of life : Blake in power to forgive sins the fruition of art's labour.

Agreement underlies their difference. Each, with the other's advantages, must have accepted the dual ideal. The one harmonises religion, the other science, with æsthetic effort.



## PROSPECTS

*Genius is not rare nowadays, but what no one any longer has and what we must strive for, is conscience.*

CORRESPONDANCE DE G. FLAUBERT, Série i. pp. 202, 203

*Principles imply logic, and give room for debate, doubt, and exposition; but genuine conscience knows only feeling, and goes straight forward to its object, which it tries lovingly to comprehend, and when comprehended never lets go again. Like the innocent flock, that seeks not to crush under foot the herbs or flowers which instinct teaches it are pernicious or poisonous, nor to tear them up with impatient rancour, but peaceably passes them by, and goes in quest of that alone which is its appropriate nutriment and suited to its gentle, quiet nature. . . .*

FALK'S "CHARACTERISTICS OF GOETHE," translated by  
S. Austen, vol. ii. p. 65

## ART AND SCIENCE

THE most successful artists for a century past have recombined in relation to modern mentalities elements derived from bygone arts. Alfred Stevens and Watts, Delacroix and Puvis de Chavannes, avail themselves of the opportunity to do this as of a chief privilege won for us by the superior mechanical prowess, economic stability and sympathetic freedom of our times. No former age could have enjoyed such touch with so varied and rich a past : its exercise is proof of the utmost actuality.

Nevertheless, other knowledge, till now never dreamed of, exerts strange influence over souls : the temper, the co-ordination, and the perspectives of science are puissant and beautiful.

Alone among their contemporaries Gustave Flaubert and Antoine Louis Barye perceived æsthetic possibilities here.

Of course, the glamour of scientific successes has enervated much modern art. Crowds of

aspirants, as though hypnotised, strive to rival the insignificance of unco-ordinated facts: others are constantly preoccupied with ill-digested information, exaggerating and misapplying the so-called results of investigation. But these masters alone sought the beauty of general types as the scientist seeks for laws or formulas of experience.

How can you know in what a fine tiger should consist until you have watched, measured, and compared a great number? Barye taught his eyes to distinguish where all others were ignorant. Whether of a man or a stag, he knew, as precisely as the horse-trainer, what points and measures to look for and prize. "I am not tempted," he said, "to consecrate in sculpture the relative disorder of an individual's forms." With an equal patience Flaubert sorted the herd of men, revealing the fateful progress of mental and moral inadequacy, like a Japanese artist inventing demon or dragon, or a Gothic sculptor characterising a chimæra—only his resources were as infinitely more varied as they were more intimately terrible to the soul.

Barye's biographer, Roger Ballu, though an intelligent man and thorough scholar, could not divine what benefit that master drew from recording the measurements of so many animals of each species: and Maxime du Camp was, of course, still more at

a loss to explain Flaubert's having read every book on mediæval venery before writing *Saint Julien l'Hospitalier*. The idea that you must know all the facts before you can make a free, a reasoned, or an æsthetic choice, had never dawned on their minds: though the former had made a special study of, and the latter associated with, a more ample nature who from it drew power and inspiration.

This experimental method of study adds enormously to the difficulty, if perhaps as vastly to the possible successes of art. However, enthusiasm, not observance of or abstention from any practice, preserves spontaneity: danger lies in every process to which our zeal is not equal.

Art is the science which determines what expressions are agreeable to the best developed human senses.

All artists are consciously or unconsciously experimental investigators in respect to the means of expression, if all save Flaubert and Barye have mainly been empirical in regard to the appreciation of their theme.

Organs of sensation act variously, but wherever life is examined the same disconcerting instability of phenomena has been met; and nevertheless its limits to a great extent have been determined and allowed for. Likewise sufficient consent exists

that recognised masterpieces effectively impress, and such exceptions as arise may on the whole be satisfactorily explained.

The object of science is to determine the conditions that play the part of immediate causes in respect to phenomena. Art discovers those conditions in respect to certain highly pleasurable emotions and sensations.

In most undertakings a clear view of the conditions of effort and of the goal to be achieved saves time and energy. There are, of course, no royal roads. Men have diverse gifts; and the discipline that frees and consolidates one talent may perplex and thwart another. Genius goes its own way; and the reason of its procedure can often only then be traced when glory is reflected back from a happy arrival.

Goethe said: "My investigations in natural science delight me very much. It seems strange, and yet it is natural that in the end a kind of subjective whole must be the result"<sup>1</sup>—so the modern lop-sided increase in knowledge will in time find its emotional equipoise, and a weightier soul be formed.

It may be that the plenitude of the future will

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondence between Schiller and Goethe*, translated by L. D. Schmitz, vol. i. p. 257.



be opened to us by those who, like Flaubert and Barye, avail themselves of the æsthetic opportunities offered by the scientific frame of thought. All so-called realists or impressionists, the duped students of objective and subjective accidents, could certainly only gain by adopting a similar method. Yet note that both the sculptor and the writer who lead the way were men of intense æsthetic individuality, such as, had they been willing to dilute it after the fashion of the common run of great geniuses, would have sufficed to dye an ocean gaudy.

## ART'S SOCIAL STATUS

THE social relation of art to life remains to be dealt with ; that is, the demand for autonomy, which at the lowest means security and leisure, at the highest deference and admiration. Poverty may be congenial to morality, which consists in the victory of temper over circumstances ; if, as Renan says, "To command and to enjoy make virtue more difficult."

Certain forms of æsthetic creativeness demand expensive materials, and imply long familiarity with exquisite conditions ; and most of its manifestations require a degree of leisure which in the commercial world is well-nigh beyond the reach of those who earn their living, be they never so energetic : while if once art prefers an outward demand to the inward its degradation is imminent,—or, in Flaubert's words, "Morality is but a part of æsthetic, yet is its fundamental condition."

Some qualities can only develop in wealth, others equally admirable ask for poverty. Unfortunately,

the man for whom wealth is a necessity starves ; another whom ease suffocates pines for hardship. Social freedom to exchange their estates, and such an education as would enable them to do so wisely, are ideal requirements. William Blake refused the post of drawing-master to the Royal Family, he so dreaded being not rich, but well-to-do. Gustave Flaubert, on the eve of old age, gave away his fortune, so that he was forced to seek employment in a library, yet for years he had enjoyed a generous competency, and for art's sake had desired more. In him the artist ruled, in Blake the saint.

Poverty must be discriminated from want : the latter can only be accepted, like death itself, as a last resource to preserve integrity in the ideal if no longer in the real world.

Mrs. Blake did not dare to tell her husband that want had crept into the cupboard, so much he grudged the time required to turn it out and secure poverty and freedom in the places of honour once more. Silently she set an empty dish before him. He understood, and turned to the drudge's task that the world would pay for, leaving that which it could not value till he had earned the pittance which freedom cost him.

The poverty which has been beautifully symbolised as a bride leaves a man freer than riches can.

Who felt most like the slave, Epictetus or Marcus Aurelius ?

This is the gravest difficulty in the way of Socialism and democracy : how will they provide a more fluid medium for the man of genius to rise in, not only than our makeshift, and in the main condemned, commercialism, but than any monarchy or republic of the past ? The examination system is perhaps already starving corporations and governments of superior intellects and characters. The future may be even more anxious than the present to discover a man, and even more incapable of recognising one.

Blake and Flaubert were as unlikely candidates for examinations as Bismarck himself. Such men do not strike athwart the beaten track through incapacity ; no, Nature has sent them to a better school, from which they must be truants were they to heed the professor's lesson. Later on they set themselves far more difficult tests, which they could hardly pass after following the routine preparation for a post.

For this reason the motive of art for art's sake seems more trustworthy than that of work for the State.

The individual must set himself the standard of attainment ; society cannot do this, cannot reward his doing it, except blindly. Why should not

smiths and carpenters, manufacturers, and railway companies refuse to provide the public with anything less than the best work, the best service, irrespective of reward? They could only do so when ruled by a free and noble will, such as has never yet existed save in an individual "self-schooled, self-scanned, self-honoured, self-secure."

Socialists might do well to regard the professions of religion, music, painting, and poetry as asylums for the over-sensitive, which to-day they practically are. Even the doll-like functions of dwelling in pretty houses and wearing fine clothes might prove worth more than they cost.

The crowd of unproductive failures fans and disperses enthusiasm; and, as a mirror in a schoolboy's hand flashes its round of light into the dingiest corners of the class-room,—nay, suddenly by inadvertence well-nigh blinds his master,—so prodigal sons have danced the glory of genius through conventionality's gloomiest retreats, and dazzled eyes that cared not a whit whether or no its sun were risen.

Untaxed centres of light and leaven might do much to mellow the strenuousness of a world at last aware of its more obvious duties and willing to grapple with them.







THE ANCIENT OF DAYS STRIKING THE FIRST CIRCLE OF THE EARTH



## EPILOGUE

*"Doch ihr, die echten Göttersöhne,  
Erfreut euch der lebendig reichen Schöne!  
Das Werdende, das ewig wirkt und lebt,  
Umfasz'euch mit der Liebe holden Schranken,  
Und was in schwankender Erscheinung schwebt,  
Befestiget mit dauernden Gedanken!"*

*"But ye, the pure-bred sons of God, rejoice  
In the profusion of life and beauty! Let  
What becomes, what ever works and lives, fold you  
In love's boon bands; and what, through changeful  
guise  
Hovers, stablish ye in enduring thoughts!"*

GOETHE, "FAUST," Prolog im Himmel, ll. 102-107

## EPILOGUE

THE idea that life might be beautiful, lovable, and intelligible perhaps results from so much of experience as combines the faculties harmoniously.

Those who are never attuned neither entertain it, nor taste the vigour and buoyancy which it promotes. Though sluggishness deprive most men of that pregnant poise which surely forbids the dread of a fortuitous or merely mechanical universe, a disordinate appetency for sensuous, for intellectual or for moral stimulus balks not a few.

A fine fusion of our energies foreshadows the universal symphony so insistently that the artist can but labour to perfect all his works.

Religious history may show a ghastly record of the greedy and fantastic exercitation of this mood : art collections and libraries seem drowned in the eccentricities of its partial and distempered expres-

sion, and the not-yet-included tyrannously menace all its purest manifestations.

We may not be able to see whence the expectation of comprehensive harmony is derived : and we may anxiously note that creative felicity is more easily promoted in narrow social frames, and in early manhood, since under these conditions fewer elements are viewed massed together as by distance, and a standpoint may more readily be found from which all things compose a perfect whole, falling into wise perspectives.

Nevertheless, notions of unity and proportion inhere through every organised structure. Nothing can be described as taking form or ripening to efficiency save as it assimilates to them. Their "henids" <sup>1</sup> prompt instinct, thought, and art, and we are quickened by every semblance of affinity with them in lifeless matter.

Because masses of men live and breed without enthusiasm for constructive excellence, can it no longer ensure the survival of the fittest ?

"Nature is in everything superfluous," and squanders a million germs that a few may develop.

Why should not our acquired taste and judgment have as necessary a relation to the future, as our animal appetites to the past and present ?

<sup>1</sup> See above, p. 36.

Origins loom through such remote speculations as make "the search for a cause anti-philosophic, anti-scientific": yet Goethe splendidly insisted on being the equal of his thought. While we admit the problem of a first cause to lie beyond the reach of science and philosophy, man's tendency to train his character into the full complement of his intellect impels us to suppose our efforts worthily derived, since they have achieved so many values in conduct, discernment, and art.

The mood in which intelligence and nobility come to poise is imaginatively fruitful. Who, tasting it, has not waxed strong and buoyant, like the two artists I have chosen as illustrations? To maintain it (or rather the staling recollection of it) by shutting our eyes on fresh experience, is to side with Blake against science and reason, too often without pursuing what he with whole heart undertook—the conquest of the natural man in respect of social disposition and emotional aspiration; while a maniac grapple with things hideous, hate-worthy, and insignificant, leads to lamentations over our imbecility and the extravagance of our needs, like those which desolated so many of Flaubert's heaviest hours.

Sympathise, see beauty, and understand inter-relations; only passion born of failure to obey that summons saves man from degradation. He knows

not whether the whole be lovable, beautiful, or intelligible, yet neither does he know that it is not; for still social effort reveals more goodness, art more beauty, science more order.

“The child whose eyes take light,  
 When thou dost near,  
 As oft would smile and bright  
 Wert thou not here,  
 But over-sea, or dead;  
 By others in thy stead  
 His joy were fed.

As on thy youth's top-hour  
 Noon shines to-day,  
 Where thine once kissed a flower  
 Lips as fond may;  
 Answers thy heart received  
 Had been as well believed  
 Hadst thou ne'er breathed.

Light did not wait for eyes;  
 Homeless love starts;  
 Suns o'er void worlds arise;  
 Live tend dead hearts:  
 Powers, by thee found kind,  
 Work also where thy mind  
 Gropes or is blind.

Leave better than for thee  
 Was ready found;  
 To toil 'mid hostility  
 Masters feel bound.

From beyond mammoth-time  
Our spirit draws its prime  
Strength, and may climb

Till it learn how that past  
Owned a control,  
Was willed, has prospered, last  
Sanctioned, is whole,—  
When, having striven through,  
Man who makes all things new  
Shall know and do.”





## APPENDICES



## APPENDIX I

(See p. 8)

**M**AXIME DU CAMP'S *Souvenirs littéraires* have been a principal source of error in respect to Flaubert's life and opinions. Fortunately, so many of his statements have been discredited, and such an animus revealed, that the conception he claimed to have formed of his friend now concerns his biographer rather than Flaubert's.

## APPENDIX II

(See pp. 21-26)

### WAS HE INTELLIGENT ?

“EVERYTHING seems to have been said about him and yet still to need saying, he suggests so many ideas, he raises so many problems. No doubt, he lacked the serene fecundity of sovran souls who are not *arrested by a critical faculty ceaselessly alert*; he possessed as an offset, through *this sureness of judgment*, the incomparable merit never to have produced a page which was not well-nigh perfect.”<sup>1</sup>

“Flaubert’s ideas are enough to drive any sensible man mad. They are absurd and so contradictory that he who should try to conciliate only three would soon be seen clasping his temples with both hands to keep his head from splitting. . . .”

“. . . The *unalterable beauty* which extends throughout the pages of *Madame Bovary* every day enchants me more. But the man who wrote that book so surely and with such infallible control, that man was an abyss of incertitudes and errors.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Maurice Spronck, *Les Artistes littéraires*, p. 296, 1889.

<sup>2</sup> Anatole France, *La Vie littéraire*, Série iii. pp. 301, 303, 1890.

"Flaubert was a thinker of rare breadth of mind, who assimilated with surety and ardour ever the same all that from near or far bore on literature and art. His critical insight was as great as his pictorial power. He leaves us not only masterpieces, but the example of a method of rigorous inquiry which we should follow, because it alone is efficacious, it alone is sound. Try to write and judge as he did. There is no fear that we shall have enough talent to lead us aside where he permitted himself to swerve. . . ."

"... His admirations were often extreme, but he knew how to admire everything, and nothing could discourage his faith, lower his standard of taste, or lessen the sureness of his critical sense, which was extraordinary."<sup>1</sup>

"Flaubert lacks the critical sense entirely, and does not like it in those who have it ; to possess it is enough to estrange him."

"Evidently the realm of ideas is absolutely closed for him, and an intelligent man seems to him an abnormal being and something of an evildoer."

"He cannot lay hold of or is wounded by *the intelligent*, the reasoners, the witty, the gracious, and the lovable: he turns away from them, or else insults them."<sup>2</sup>

"For a mind such as Flaubert's, nourished on Montaigne, can there be question of a system? It is enough if, like Montaigne, he holds a group of views which agree together. Flaubert's are sufficiently concordant, and he held them with remarkable

<sup>1</sup> Antoine Albalat, *Ouvriers et procédés*, pp. 278, 271, 1896.

<sup>2</sup> Émile Faguet, *Flaubert*, p. 31, 1899.

perseverance . . . he is distinguished by interest in a quantity of subjects about which for the most part men of letters in his day troubled little. He loved science for its own sake. . . . He did not prize history, like a merchant who furnishes rich hangings, as the romantic school were wont, but for itself. . . . He understood that modern methods were about to transform it. Lastly, he loved the great writers of antiquity, and, what is more rare, those of foreign literatures. *Don Quixote* had fascinated him in childhood, he returned to it all through life. He was at great pains to read Sophocles and Shakespeare in the original. He grasped the greatness of Goethe. . . . Flaubert thought it necessary to understand his own day in order to portray it. That he might be a novelist, he became an historian and a philosopher.”<sup>2</sup>

“Flaubert was an artist, nothing but an artist, one of those artists in whom two or three predominant, exclusive, absolute, tyrannical faculties shrivel up, absorb, and finish by literally annihilating all others. The result is that Flaubert understood nothing of the world and of life save so much as he could consume personally with profit, as he said.”<sup>2</sup>

“Binding fast with this prodigious literary effort the complete history of mentality and of the actions it suggests, Gustave Flaubert must have known unheard-of felicities. He must have passed miraculous hours intoxicated by the joys of knowledge.

<sup>2</sup> L. Lévy-Bruhl, “Flaubert philosophe,” *La Revue de Paris*, February 15, 1900, p. 851.

<sup>2</sup> Ferdinand Brunetière, *Histoire et littérature*, vol. ii. p. 130 February, 1884.

“He has dowered France with the emotion of thought which Æschylus offered to Greece, Lucretius to Rome, Dante to Italy, Shakespeare to England, Goethe to Germany.”<sup>1</sup>

It is M. Faguet's due to mention that, unlike M. France, whose statements are left in the air, he cites passages in which Flaubert expressed slight esteem for the acumen of Sainte-Beuve, Proudhon, Bossuet (*La Politique tirée de l'Écriture*), Thiers and Auguste Comte, and refrains from mentioning his admiration for Montaigne, Spinoza, Boileau, La Bruyère, Montesquieu, Buffon, Voltaire, Goethe, Michelet, Schopenhauer, Littré, Renan—all, one would suppose, reasoners, pre-eminently intelligent, many of them gracious, not a few witty. Unfortunately M. Brunetière can no longer tell me whether he ever *understood* anything that *he could not consume personally with profit*.

<sup>1</sup> Paul Adam, *La Mystère des foules*, Préface, p. xxv, 1895.

## APPENDIX III

(See pp. 21-26)

### WAS HE WARM-HEARTED ?

“HE had passed his life ‘writing harmonious sentences and avoiding assonances,’ but the power to live, which is the power to feel, had remained intact. . . .

“He truly had the right to say ‘I believe that the heart does not age; there are even some in whom it quickens as they grow older.’”<sup>1</sup>

“[Like his Saint Antony,] after he had accomplished one by one labours prodigious by reason of the sacrifices entailed, he experienced only an immense weariness and the vague horror of having been deceived. When death surprised him, nihilism was withering his intelligence and the blackest of pessimisms ravaging his heart. That intelligence was nevertheless worthy of the joys which comprehension brings, and that warm heart intended for loving.”<sup>2</sup>

“Now all that [Flaubert’s pessimism, &c.] flowed from a profound love of humanity. . . . His heart was

<sup>1</sup> Pierre Gauthiez, *Revue Bleu*, No. 22, tome xlvi. p. 696, 1890.

<sup>2</sup> Henry Laujol, *Revue Bleu*, No. 9, tome xlv. p. 269, 1890.



obliging, his hand open, he adored his friends. No one had more the spirit of family affection. A patriot bled in this *impassible* when the terrible year [1870] arrived. And this scorner of love had experienced it to the depths of his soul, although he had tried to stifle even the dream of it.”<sup>1</sup>

“‘If he had feeling,’ said Villiers (de l’Isle Adam) . . . ‘he would have everything.’”<sup>2</sup>

“I have always marvelled that the gift of sympathy should have been denied to Flaubert, because he did not with effrontery express his own, while this gift is supposed to characterise—shall we say?—the Englishwoman George Eliot. Never could Flaubert’s *lofty equity* have permitted him to indulge in the heavy raillery, with an unconscionable abundance of which Eliot overwhelms the simple folk of *The Mill on the Floss*. And for the humble poor whom she loves . . . her soul has the artificially Christian disposition of a philosophical and enlightened Protestant visiting the homes of his inferiors. At least, with Flaubert, there is no trace of this frightful condescension.”<sup>3</sup>

“M. Flaubert has no emotions, oh no! he has no judgment, at least none that is appreciable. Incessant and unwearable narrator, analyst who never feels uneasy, he describes even the most finikin subtlety, but himself listens to all he recounts like one deaf and dumb. With a lover’s scrupulousness he maintains indifference for all he portrays.”

<sup>1</sup> Félix Frank, *Gustave Flaubert d’après des documents inédits*, p. 13, 1887.

<sup>2</sup> Camille Mauclair, *L’Art en silence*, p. 49, 1901.

<sup>3</sup> Jules Lemaitre, *Les Contemporains*, Série vi. p. 245, 1896.

" . . . *It is repugnant to man's nature* to take a subject in hand and not regard it with love or hatred. This custom, which seems a law of human minds, is none for M. Flaubert. Still young for so much coldness, he begins where old Goethe ended." <sup>1</sup>

"What we know . . . enlightens us as to the condescension, the submissiveness, the timid charity, of this great child of whom advantage was taken right up to his death, and who underwent everything with good humour, consoling himself with his [art]-worship, in which he found at once torture and forgetfulness, showing an inexhaustible goodness, accepting the advice of Bouilhet, putting himself to great pains in order to direct Mme. Colet ; importuned by his relatives, lovable and without gall, even in seasons of suffering . . . the pessimist threw himself at the foot of the Cross.

"He did not perhaps believe in the sense usually given to the word, but his whole soul, his whole æsthetic and his whole ethic, concluded in an extremely powerful deism. From this point of view Flaubert's work yields but one consolation, but one lesson—*believe*. The victory of the Christian spirit dominates it throughout . . . his is an Hegelian metaphysic leading through the worship of beauty to a deism opposed to the scientific materialism of our epoch." <sup>2</sup>

"Absolute truth being the opposite of beauty, and scientific study of the real the irreconcilable antithesis of art's effort . . . the record of Flaubert's case is most precious. He who wished to live by passionate love

<sup>1</sup> Barbey d'Aureville, *xix<sup>e</sup> Siècle ; Les Œuvres et les hommes*, 4<sup>e</sup> Partie, pp. 63, 64, 1865.

<sup>2</sup> Camille Mauclair, *L'Art en silence*, p. 62, 1901.

for the beautiful alone, we see whither he was led, against his will, . . . the faculty of loving, like that of suffering or that of admiring, depends on a certain ignorance, or, to put it better, on a certain intimate illusion and a momentary forgetfulness of surroundings. . . . On the day when Flaubert should have proved able to love, he would have ceased to be himself : he would have lost that constant power of objective assimilation . . . to which he owed his most celebrated works.—One cannot say that he would have been greater, for he would have ceased to exist, to make room for another man.”<sup>1</sup>

Here the *mêlée* resolves itself into a question of information. MM. Barbey d’Aurevilly, Villiers de l’Isle Adam, Spronck, and Laujol did not know Flaubert, and were either wholly at the mercy of report or by it led to mistranslate insufficient documents.

<sup>1</sup> Maurice Spronck, *Les Artistes littéraires*, pp. 276, 279, 293, 296, 1889.

## APPENDIX IV

(See p. 31)

THE word "romantic" will rarely occur in this book. Flaubert has never been rightly called either "a romanticist" or "a realist." These words should not be applied to individuals save as representatives of a fashion. The youth whose enthusiasm read *Candide* twenty times and translated it into English<sup>1</sup> was not a type of the romantic frame of mind, just as the master whose chief preoccupation was beauty could never head any school of "realists" or "naturalists."

M. Faguet tried to discriminate.

"Now Flaubert has all romanticism in his soul except the very bottom of romanticism. . . .

"And thus was formed this singular realist-romantic which Flaubert was. And which of the two was the true bottom of the illustrious author? Verily, I know nothing about it, and does one ever know, in a complex man, where the bottom is? . . . If you want my intuition on this question, it seems to me that the bottom in Flaubert was romanticism. . . .

"Yes, the bottom is rather romantic."<sup>2</sup>

Scared by this awful example, I avoid the fallacious convenience of the above words.

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série i. p. 72.

<sup>2</sup> *Flaubert*, par Émile Faguet, pp. 28, 32, and 33.

## APPENDIX V

(See pp. 32-34)

### CONTRADICTIONS OVER "MADAME BOVARY"

#### I

"THE *poetry* of adultery is what the author shows you, and I ask you again whether these lascivious pages are not profoundly immoral?"<sup>1</sup>

"When Flaubert wrote *Madame Bovary*, I believe he thought chiefly of a somewhat morbid realism; and behold! the book turned in his hands into a masterpiece of appalling morality."<sup>2</sup>

#### II

"The treasures of compassion, tenderness, insight, which alone, amid such guilt and misery, can enable charm to subsist and to emerge, are wanting to Flaubert. He is cruel, with the cruelty of petrified feeling, to his poor heroine; he pursues her without

<sup>1</sup> E. Pinard, Speech for the prosecution when Flaubert was tried for offending public and religious morality in *Madame Bovary*. See *Œuvres complètes*, vol. i. p. 491.

<sup>2</sup> R. L. Stevenson, *Essays in the Art of Writing*, p. 66.

pity or pause, as with malignity ; he is harder upon her himself than any reader even, I think, will be inclined to be." <sup>1</sup>

"Do you not feel that Flaubert loves poor Emma? Vicious and silly, but so naïve at bottom, and so unhappy ! Oh, those home-comings in the omnibus ! Oh, the tipsy song of the blind beggar which drowns the prayers for the dead ! Who has said that this book lacked the bowels of compassion ?" <sup>2</sup>

### III

"A poor creature, in fine, the heroine of the volume, rebellious and romanesque without grandeur, disgusted with her prosaic home, but [in love with an ideal such as the reading of novelettes might nourish . . . lacks even the sinister poetry of absolute depravation." <sup>3</sup>

"To sum up, this woman is truly great ; she is above all to be pitied, and in spite of the systematic rigour of the author, who has made every effort not to be seen in his book and to perform the function of a marionette showman, all intellectual women will thank him for having raised the female to such high power, so far above the mere animal and so near to the ideal man, for having given her participation in that double character of calculation and reverie which constitute the perfect being." <sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Matthew Arnold, *Essays in Criticism*, Second Series, p. 276, 1887.

<sup>2</sup> Jules Lemaître, *Les Contemporains*, Série vi. p. 247, 1896.

<sup>3</sup> Maurice Spronck, *Les Artistes littéraires*, p. 281, 1889.

<sup>4</sup> Charles Baudelaire, *L'Art romantique* (Petite Bib. Lemerre), p. 373.

## APPENDIX VI

(See pp. 35-41)

### CONTRADICTIONS OVER "SALAMMBÔ"

#### I

"THE ancient world . . . will not allow us what is properly speaking the historical novel, for that supposes a complete familiarity and affinity with the subject. There is between it and us a breach of continuity, an abyss."

"How do you expect me to interest myself in this forgotten war? . . . What does the duel between Tunis and Carthage matter to me?"<sup>1</sup>

"Once again my blood has coursed furiously through the veins as it did when, a boy, *Ivanhoe's* magic pages first burst upon my enraptured sense. Now, as then, I know what power lies in a stirring book . . . the best of them is excelled as an historical romance by the wonderful *Salammbô*. . . . The marvellous realism of the pages is so very unusual; . . . we are in a sensuous atmosphere, where the senses are lulled into harmony with tropic scenes created for our enjoyment."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Sainte-Beuve, *Nouveaux lundis*, Série iv. pp. 80, 84, 1862.

<sup>2</sup> Sir H. M. Stanley, the African explorer, in a letter to M. French Sheldon, the first translator, quoted on the fly-leaf to the second

## II

"It is not worth the trouble it takes learning to trace reality as though against a window, laboriously studying how to set down in a word the slightest appearance of things, if this curious talent is only to be applied in describing the imaginary gardens of Hamilcar and the conjectural temples of Tanith or Baäl-Eschmoûn."<sup>1</sup>

"*Salammbô* must be regarded as Flaubert's masterpiece. It is the book in which his powers found freest scope, and in which he is at his best."<sup>2</sup>

## III

"*Salammbô* has fully satisfied no one but its author. . . . We are forced to repeat what a great seventeenth-century lady said of *La Pucelle*: 'It is beautiful, but boring.'

"The epoch should be sufficiently known to us beforehand; for, if it is not, an historical novel *instructs us too much to move us*."<sup>3</sup>

"Flaubert chose his antiquity wisely: a period of which we know too little to confuse us. . . . The illusion is perfect; these people may not be the real people of history, but at least they have no self-consciousness, no Christian tinge in their minds."<sup>4</sup>

edition; it is also recorded that *Salammbô* was one of the last books, if not the last, before Shakespeare and the Bible, thrown away to lighten his packs.

<sup>1</sup> Ferdinand Brunetière, *Le Roman naturaliste*, p. 52, 1877.

<sup>2</sup> J. S. Chartres, Preface to his translation of *Salammbô*, p. xi, 1888.

<sup>3</sup> Émile Faguet, *Flaubert*, p. 46, 1899.

<sup>4</sup> Arthur Symonds, *Introduction to "Salammbô"*, translated by J. W. Matthews, pp. ix, xii, 1901.



## IV

"All those rough epic heroes are not only like the limp bourgeois of *Madame Bovary*, more or less negligible, they are frankly disgusting. The human soul is everywhere portrayed in this cynical epic as cruel, perfidious, pitiless, depraved."<sup>1</sup>

"The exquisite humanity of all the central figures in this book, which would make an illustrious play, is here and there almost Shakespearean."

"There is a magic in the atmosphere, a truth in the delineation of passion, so abundant a sympathy in the accounts of the battles and the privations of the combatants, and such a simplicity and strength in the hundreds of *genre* pictures scattered through the book, that it must be accounted a masterpiece. . . . It awakens only noble thoughts, despite its sensuous setting. It is like an exquisite piece of Greek sculpture, mighty, yet too ethereal in its beauty for modern hands to create, set against a background flooded with sumptuous colour."<sup>2</sup>

Sainte-Beuve, Brunetière, Faguet, Lauvrière; unlike the echo, criticism repeating itself grows louder.

<sup>1</sup> Émile Lauvrière, *Salammbô: Oxford Higher French Classics*, p. xxvi, 1906. The peculiar felicity which dogs educationalists is well exemplified in the *docteur ès lettres* chosen to introduce this classic to the English schoolboy who might possess an enthusiastic translation or obtain one for a crib. Of course cordial hatred of the work and contempt for the author were not the only qualifications regarded when an expurgator was sent for. Yet an intelligent youngster could not fail to wonder why the book was chosen, if all that was said about it were true. Surely there are more edifying classics?

<sup>2</sup> Edward King, *Introduction to "Salammbô,"* Englished by M. French Sheldon, pp. xvii, xix, xx, 1885.

Parisian imaginations are not so hungry as those of explorers and schoolboys. The Goncourts had the courage to avow their dislike of the *Iliad*, which not all the professional critics dare, so that we are not surprised to read in their journal<sup>1</sup> :—

“Flaubert sees the East and the antique East in the guise of Algerian exhibition stalls. . . . As to a moral resuscitation, poor Flaubert is his own dupe, the sentiments of his characters are the most commonplace and general . . . his Mathô is only an opera tenor in a barbarous poem.”

## V

“Flaubert overflowed with invectives against the present. He deemed it commonplace. Here his philosophy seems to me at fault. For every epoch is commonplace for those who live in it; in whatever age a man may be born, there is no escape, an impression of vulgarity is disengaged from things in the midst of which he is belated.”<sup>2</sup>

“Was the *setting of the nightmare of life* worth much more in the so-called heroic ages than it is to-day . . . ? Would the *stupid ferocity* of the mercenaries who feasted in Hamilcar’s gardens have seemed less sickening to a noble spirit than the stupid coarseness of guests at the Bovary wedding or that of Frédéric’s supper-friends? . . . questions in answer to which Flaubert throws down the pages of his two epic poems of the ancient

<sup>1</sup> Tome I, p. 373.

<sup>2</sup> Anatole France, *La Vie littéraire*, Série ii, p. 22.

world, displaying an equal contempt for what was and what is." <sup>1</sup>

That change from the *setting of life* to its moral grossness is surprising, and may reveal the confusion underlying the contradiction between these clear critical minds.

<sup>1</sup> Paul Bourget, *Essais de Psychologie contemporaine: Œuvres complètes*, tome i. p. 115, 1882.

## APPENDIX VII

(See pp. 41-47)

### CONTRADICTIONS OVER "L'ÉDUCATION SENTIMENTALE"

#### I

"A NOVEL like *l'Éducation sentimentale* is outside the province of literary criticism. It has no real value save as evidence on an epoch of our contemporary history. . . ." <sup>1</sup>

"The mark of good books is that the oftener they are re-read the more excellent they seem. . . . I never re-read *l'Éducation* without judging it to be a little better. I am thus come almost to find that it no longer bores me. . . . I attach importance to this remark because it may cause *l'Éducation sentimentale* to be re-read, and it has this defect, that it does not invite you to re-read it. . . . To sum up, if Flaubert had not written *Madame Bovary* he would still have his masterpiece." <sup>2</sup>

#### II

"This disconcerting chronicle, voluntarily written in

<sup>1</sup> Ferdinand Brunetière, *Le Roman naturaliste*, p. 72, 1877.

<sup>2</sup> Émile Faguet, *Flaubert*, pp. 125, 126, 1899.

style as lax as that of *Salammbô* is braced, discourages the heart as much as the spirit.”<sup>1</sup>

“Of these processes (those which he has analysed in *Madame Bovary* and *Salammbô*) only the least artificial subsist in *l'Education sentimentale* . . . this concentration and the adroit choice of significant details border on the miraculous. . . . There are even passages which in the attempt to express indefinable soul movements, seem to have required powers beyond the reach of art.”<sup>2</sup>

### III

“He never approached the complicated character, in man or woman, or the really furnished, the finely civilised consciousness.”<sup>3</sup>

“The subject, in art, has no interest save for children and the unlettered. What is the subject of the most beautiful poem in the French language, of our *Odyssey*, *l'Education sentimentale* ?”<sup>4</sup>

### IV

“Before the multitude of our contemporaries who have treated love as a deception, Flaubert expressed in *l'Education sentimentale* how only those women remain lovable whom we never succeed in possessing. The

<sup>1</sup> Émile Lanvrière, *Salammbô: Oxford Higher French Classics*, 1906.

<sup>2</sup> Émile Hennequin, *Quelques écrivains français*, pp. 15, 20.

<sup>3</sup> Henry James, *Critical Introduction to "Madame Bovary,"* p. xxxiii, 1902.

<sup>4</sup> Remy de Gourmont, *Le Problème du Style*, p. 25, 1902.

revelation of Mme. Arnould (*sic*) was the symbol of this dogma denying love.”<sup>2</sup>

“‘I should have liked to make you happy’—though desire stronger than ever, furious, rabid, resurged within him, he abstained from her ‘in order not to degrade his ideal,’ his conception of love which he had preferred to love. This final avowal of genuine attraction by Mme. Arnoux accentuates the chimerical nature of Frédéric’s passion, powerless to seize a happiness which was so near him ; and the novel terminates on this impression of a great tenderness wasted.”<sup>3</sup>

If Frédéric’s love is preserved by his abstention, why on the death of Arnoux does he not prepare to marry his widow? If Mme. Arnoux feels what M. Gaultier implies, why should she have contemplated him “in happy wonder” when he refused what she offered? Why should she have cried, “How delicate of you! No one is like you—no one is like you”? Flaubert did not intend to illustrate a maxim of Neo-Christian mysticism, nor can the significance of the beauty he created be unravelled by the hasty application of a single formula by the “illusionist” philosopher.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Adam, *Le Mystère des Foules*, Préface, p. xxiv, 1895.

<sup>3</sup> Jules de Gaultier, *Le Bovarysme*, p. 42, 1892.

## APPENDIX VIII

(See pp. 47-52)

### CONTRADICTIONS OVER "LA TENTATION DE SAINT ANTOINE"

#### I

"THIS bizarre, wearisome, formless composition, *la Tentation de saint Antoine.*"<sup>1</sup>

"Reading this philosophic poem it is possible sometimes to admire, it stirs interest if not emotion here or there, and even sometimes sets one thinking.

". . . Aspiration after beauty . . . is felt . . . from one end to the other of the antique episode in the Second Part of *Faust*. It is almost the opposite, and at least a curious hunt, for the ugly, the mean, the burlesque, for all that disenchant, which is felt from one end to the other of *la Tentation de saint Antoine.*"<sup>2</sup>

"Heyday, you eminent professors! in what good taste, good sense, good order, morality, ideality you have your being, all that is what every honest well-read man can put into a book! I myself could do it did I

<sup>1</sup> Ferdinand Brunetière, *l'Érudition dans le roman*, 1877; *Le Roman naturaliste*, p. 52.

<sup>2</sup> Émile Faguet, *Flaubert*, pp. 63, 60.

want to! But the splendour, sound, overflowing songfulness, the profusion of dazzling images in *les Contemplations*; the strangeness, the plastic perfection in *la Tentation*, there is what only Hugo and Flaubert were capable of! They had better have added good taste and good sense; . . . those common qualities can indeed contribute to a book's perfection; but, by themselves, they figure poorly enough." <sup>1</sup>

## II

"Never has humanity received such a slap in the face. The discreet satire and hidden laughter of *Madame Bovary* and *l'Education sentimentale* are left far behind. It is no longer the stupidity of one society that Flaubert paints in order to revenge himself on it, but the stupidity of the world . . . vast spectacle, unprecedented picture of the continual fall of man and his religious conceptions into the unknown. Even when the saint returns to his prayers, this action, following upon the vision of a world void of gods, seems like an added irony; he bows his shoulders by force of habit, and inspires us only with an immense pity. All Gustave Flaubert is in that: . . . he yields to a need for negation, for absolute doubt, condemning all religions in the same degree. . . ." <sup>2</sup>

"What makes the poor, gross, ignorant, cenobite Antony all at once a sublime figure, the very image of man tempted by the infinite? It is faith. The very instant that, seized by the devil, he raises his eyes to

<sup>1</sup> Jules Lemaître, *Les Contemporains*, vol. i. pp. 241 and 242.

<sup>2</sup> Émile Zola, *Les Romanciers naturalistes*, pp. 158, 159.



heaven, he becomes a saint, and thereafter sees Luxury and Death, the Sphinx and the Chimæra, the confused and inferior forms of primitive materialisations, and the monads, without being troubled. In the centre of every atom he perceives God. The temptation has faded away in the unity and beauty of faith.”<sup>1</sup>

## III

“Keep your backgrounds; they are perfect; but turn them to account. Add a mere nothing; put, as in *Madame Bovary*, a flower on *these dunghills*. The good and the beautiful, like evil and ugliness, exist. You will know how to paint them admirably when you want to.”<sup>2</sup>

“In the master-work, *La Tentation de saint Antoine*, beauty and truth are fused . . . penetrated with significance and splendidly decorated, this work consigns in one last effort Flaubert’s whole spiritual and mystic wealth [to us his heirs].”<sup>3</sup>

## IV

“The traditional perspective in which Flaubert’s work is still regarded must be reversed, and *Madame Bovary* and *L’Education sentimentale* thrown into the background: they are nothing but two satires on middle-class decadence, and should remain on the outskirts of his true work. *Salammbô*, *la Tentation*,

<sup>1</sup> Camille Mauclair, *L’Art en silence*, p. 58.

<sup>2</sup> E. Renan, last paragraph of *Lettre à M. Gustave Flaubert sur la “Tentation de saint Antoine”*: *Feuilles détachées*, p. 354, 1874.

<sup>3</sup> Émile Hennequin, *Quelques écrivains français*, p. 20, 1890.

*Hérodias*, are the pure expression of what he wanted to do. But his true subject, the ideal subject which hovered above all his labour, is the East considered as the source of all life and of all beauty." <sup>1</sup>

MM. Mauclair and Zola must needs draw a conclusion. Each imposes his own. Flaubert carefully refrained from any.

"In *La Tentation de saint Antoine* . . . ought we not to see before all else the artist's exploitation of a new vein . . . that of abstract ideas, which also belong to the realm of his art since words can render them? . . . Without troubling about their intrinsic worth, he copies them because they exist. . . ." <sup>2</sup>

### *English Appreciations*

"I find I have no time for reading except times of fatigue, when I wish merely to relax myself. O—and I read over again for this purpose Flaubert's *Tentation de St. Antoine*; it struck me a good deal at first, but this second time it has fetched me immensely. I am but just done with it, so you will know the large proportion of salt to take with my present statement, that it's the finest thing I ever read! Of course, it isn't that, it's full of *longueurs* and is not quite 'redd up,' as we say in Scotland, not quite articulated; but there are splendid things in it." <sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Louis Bertrand, "Flaubert et l'Afrique," *Revue de Paris*, Jan. 4, 1900, p. 619.

<sup>2</sup> Jules de Gaultier, *Le Bovarysme*, pp. 7, 8, 1892.

<sup>3</sup> *Letters of R. L. Stevenson to his Family and Friends*, 1899, vol. i. p. 82; to Mrs. Sitwell, 1874.

“ He could be frankly noble in *Salammbô* and *Saint Antoine* ; whereas in *Bovary* and *l'Education* he could be but suggestively, but insidiously, so.”<sup>1</sup>

“ This *Temptation* is my own favourite among its author's books.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Henry James, *Introduction to the translation of "Madame Bovary,"* p. xxxi.

<sup>2</sup> G. E. B. Saintsbury, *Essays on French Novelists*, p. 364, 1891.

## APPENDIX IX

(See pp. 55-62)

### "BOUVARD ET PÉCUCHEZ"

#### *Contradiction over its Style*

**E**VEN the style of Flaubert's last work has been sadly called "literary Jansenism";<sup>1</sup> it "has neither flesh nor blood; nothing remains but the bone structure."<sup>2</sup>

"The amateur of style will not deny that *Bouvard et Pécuchet* is . . . a poem in the full sense of the word, a poem in which sonority employed by way of contrast to the flatness of the images achieves a peculiar comic effect."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Antoine Albalat, *L'Art d'écrire; Ouvriers et procédés*, p. 277.

<sup>2</sup> Antoine Albalat, *Travail du style*, p. 69.

<sup>3</sup> Camille Mauclair, *L'Art en silence*, pp. 59 and 60, 1901. Unfortunately M. Mauclair cites as an example a sentence, "*Il fut successivement épris d'une demoiselle*," &c., whereas, on p. 83, the text runs, "*s'étant tour à tour épris d'une danseuse*," &c. It is strange indeed that this study should have been reprinted in volume form without a correction of such paramount importance for the theory expounded. However, independent readers assure me that there is for French ears occasionally some such quality in the original.

*Appreciations*

In *La Tentation* "the cohort of religious and metaphysical systems refute one another by the simple fact of their confrontation. . . ."

In *Bouvard et Pécuchet* "the enterprise appears to us more rash, inasmuch as it tries to shake a belief of which the effect on men's minds is still actual. . . . Only a few superior spirits escape this yoke ; for the common run faith in science is absolute."<sup>1</sup>

"*Bouvard et Pécuchet* is the work which places Flaubert among the gods ; if he had never written that book he might have been classified as a writer of strong but clumsy romances ; a man of great genius, but somehow ineffective, a man who had never found the right form in which to deliver his message, or who had only found it in the form of three short stories ; but this book exactly suits his peculiar temperament ; . . . it is as individual and distinctive as *Faust* is of Goethe, *Frederick the Great* of Carlyle, *Henry IV.* of Shakespeare, *Don Quixote* of Cervantes, *Pantagruel* of Rabelais. . . . One of the chief merits of the work is that the reader has continually to exert his own acuteness in order to see where the satire is bearing ; and in this way its interest is maintained. . . . Bouvard not unfrequently says exactly the right thing. And this is perhaps an additional stroke of satire, that the right thing should be not infrequently said by a man whom the ordinary person writes down a fool."<sup>2</sup>

"Flaubert is our Homer as much as our Cervantes,—

<sup>1</sup> Jules de Gaultier, *Le Bovarysme*, pp. 47, 49, 1902.

<sup>2</sup> J. C. Tarver, *Life and Letters of Gustave Flaubert*, pp. 301, 358, 1895.

his work contains so much reality, poetry, philosophy, and such demonstration of the properties of manners."

"Those of Flaubert's books which are most admired to-day, *la Tentation* and *Salammbô*, though a dowry sufficient to crown two great writers with glory, are the least pure and the least beautiful. . . . What are the descriptions of *Salammbô* with their long cadenced periods when opposed to the brief indications and condensations of *Bouvard et Pécuchet*? That book can only be compared to *Don Quixote* and amuses us as Cervantes' novel amused the seventeenth century. . . ."

"*Madame Bovary, l'Education sentimentale, Bouvard et Pécuchet* must be read consecutively. Only in this last book is the work consummate, and the man's genius appears in all its transparent beauty."<sup>1</sup>

#### *Parallel Conclusions*

Guy de Maupassant published a selection of the ineptitudes which had been collected for quotation by Bouvard and Pécuchet. Under the title *Insults to great men*, we read:—

"Posterity, to whom Goethe has given his work for judgment, will do her duty. She will write on bronze tablets:—

" 'Goethe, born at Frankfort in 1749, died at Weimar in 1832, great writer, great poet, great artist.'

"And, when the fanatics of form for form's sake, of art for art's sake, of love at all costs, and of materialism, come and ask her to add:—

" 'Great man,' she will reply: 'No.'"<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Remy de Gourmont, *Le Problème du style*, pp. 99, 105, 1902.

<sup>2</sup> A. Dumas fils, July 23, 1873.

After which let me place this parallel :—

*Gustave Flaubert and Gustave Courbet*

“ I consider *Madame Bovary*, in its kind, very superior to *Casseurs de pierres* ; but both the master of *Croisset* and the master of *Ornans* were of the same order, and rearranging the famous line of *de Musset's* :—

‘ Artists, if you will, but great men, no ! ’

For it is not enough to make a great man, nor above all a great spirit, to have produced a masterpiece, two masterpieces, three masterpieces.”<sup>1</sup>

Again, under the same title, we read :—

(Buonaparte) “ is indeed a great winner of battles, but, beyond that, the least of generals is more skilful than he was.”<sup>2</sup>

After which let me place :—

“ We have here enough to humble our feeble wisdoms ; this man [Flaubert], who owned the secret of far-reaching words, was not intelligent.”<sup>3</sup>

Under what title, with what peers, would Flaubert have classed the following ?—

“ Evidently Flaubert drew inspiration for *la Tentation* from a picture by Breughel seen at Geneva (*sic* : Genoa ?) in 1845, since he says so, but much more from the Second Part of *Faust*, which made a profound im-

<sup>1</sup> Ferdinand Brunetière, *Histoire et littérature*, vol. ii. p. 147.

<sup>2</sup> Chateaubriand, *De Buonaparte et des Bourbons*.

<sup>3</sup> Anatole France, *La Vie littéraire*, Série iii. p. 299.

pression on him,<sup>1</sup> particularly by the episode entitled a *Classical Walpurgis night.*"<sup>2</sup>

The only mention of Goethe's *Faust* in *Souvenirs intimes* is on p. xxxvii, where ll. 384, 385, 391, 392, 409, and 410, from *Nacht* in the First Part are quoted. I believe no reference of Flaubert's to the Second Part has yet been published, and should be surprised if any exists that would in any degree lend colour to M. Faguet's statement: characteristically he has based the best part of a chapter on the supposed reference in *Souvenirs intimes*.

It pained Flaubert to set off "stupidities" from an author whom he loved like Chateaubriand: may I be credited with similar reluctance in the choice of these parallels?

<sup>1</sup> *Souvenirs intimes* de Caroline Commanville en avant propos de la *Correspondance* de Flaubert.

<sup>2</sup> Émile Faguet, *Flaubert*, p. 55.



## APPENDIX X

(See p. 63)

### DRAMATIC AND POSTHUMOUS WORKS

THE only work of Flaubert's which does not promise me increased pleasure when read again, is *Le Candidat*, a comedy in four acts given at the Paris Vaudeville in 1874, and withdrawn by the author after four performances. The main idea is genial, but vivacity, fun, and allusiveness are to seek. Flaubert's vein in comedy was poetical or extravagant, and not sober.

Besides *Bouvard et Pécuchet* his posthumous works include "that masterpiece of description called *Par les champs et par les grèves*."<sup>1</sup>

" . . . This narrative of a tour contains pages which can be classed and will remain among the greatest and most perfect of this rare writer."<sup>2</sup>

"It is the first thing I wrote with difficulty—painfully—laboriously (I don't know where this difficulty in finding the right word will stop, I am not inspired as much as is needed) ; but I am altogether with you as to

<sup>1</sup> A. Albalat, *Formation du style*, p. 126.

<sup>2</sup> A. Sabatier, *Journal de Genève*, Décembre 6, 1885.

the jokes, vulgarities, &c., they abound; the subject accounts for much; think what it means to write 'travels' with a predetermination to tell everything. . . . You don't think *La Bretagne* sufficiently exceptional to be shown to Gautier, and you want his first impression of my work to be violent. It is best to forego, you remind me, to be proud. Thank you." <sup>1</sup>

*Les Mémoires d'un fou*, an autobiography similar to *René* in form, written when he was eighteen or thereabouts, was published by the *La Revue Blanche*, 15 Décembre, 1900—1 Février, 1901.

*La Tentation de saint Antoine*, versions of 1849 and 1854, *La Revue de Paris*, February 15, March 1, March 15, April 1, 1908. They are most instructive as showing the cost at which the immense superiority of the final version was attained.

For what still remains unpublished, see E. W. Fischer (*Études sur Flaubert inédit*, Julius Zeitler, Éditeur, 76, Dresdenerstrasse, Leipzig, 1908), and René Descharmes, *Flaubert; sa vie, son caractère et ses idées avant 1857* (A. Ferroud, 127, Boulevard Saint-Germain, Paris, 1909), founded on a study of unpublished papers and MSS. I much regret that this book did not appear in time for mine to profit by the fresh information which it contains.

#### *Contradictions over the Value of his "Correspondance"*

"Outside his books . . . Flaubert interests very little; he is nothing but dregs." <sup>2</sup>

"Has Flaubert, by means of his life and death

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance*, vol. ii. p. 87.

<sup>2</sup> Remy de Gourmont, *Le Problème du style*, p. 107, 1902.

struggle with style, ever written anything more beautiful than this page [*Cor.* iii. 108], which all of a sudden gushed from his heart?"

"When I read certain pages of his *Correspondance*, I cannot help thinking that Flaubert never gave his full measure in his works" . . . [than these letters] "I do not know many published works of more sap and marrow, more exclusively and more passionately literary."<sup>1</sup>

"Greatness always astonishes. That of the vagaries which Flaubert heaped up in his letters and conversations is prodigious.

"On hearing him pay out in a terrible voice inept aphorisms and obscure theories that every line which he had written rose up and gave the lie to, one said to oneself, stupefied: Behold, the scapegoat of romantic follies, the chosen animal in whom go the sins of the whole tribe of geniuses."<sup>2</sup>

"A complete code might be extracted from his correspondence, such rules as a writer who devotes himself to the cult of that which has sometimes been called Art for Art's sake ought to follow. . . . If now, gentlemen, you pass from Flaubert's *Correspondance*, where, on almost every page, his ideas are expressed in this abstract and doctrinal fashion, to the work over which his patient and relentless labour was consumed, you will remark at once that his books are nothing but his ideas put into practice."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Auguste Sabatier, *Journal de Genève*, Avril 26, 1891.

<sup>2</sup> Anatole France, *La Vie littéraire*, vol. iii. pp. 302, 303, 1891.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Bourget, *Gustave Flaubert; Studies in European Literature* being the *Taylorian Lectures*, 1889-1899.

*Translation of passages quoted on pp. 70 and 71*

"Egypt! Egypt! the shoulders of thy great motionless gods are white with bird droppings, and the wind which scours the desert trundles the cinders of thy dead!"<sup>1</sup>

"Light from shop-windows, at intervals, lit up her pale profile; then darkness muffled it again; and, in the thick of carriages, of the crowd and noise, they passed on undistracted from themselves, hearing nothing, like those who walk together in the country over beds of dead leaves."<sup>2</sup>

"Setting out again, he goes, to stir the dust of the ancient world with his feet; to sit above Thermopylæ and cry, Leonidas! Leonidas! to course round the tomb of Achilles, seek for Lacedæmon, strip berries with his fingers from the clusters of Karoub-trees at Carthage, and, like the drowsy shepherd who lifts his head at the sound of a caravan, all those great landscapes wake up when he passes through their solitudes."<sup>3</sup>

"Undressed and in bed, they chatted some time, then fell asleep, Bouvard on his back, mouth open, bare-headed; Pécuchet on his right side, his knees under his chin, rigged out in a cotton night-cap; and both snored under the moonlight which slanted in through the windows."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Œuvres complètes*, tome v. p. 194.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, tome vi. p. 338.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, tome iv. p. 338.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, tome vii. p. 26.

## APPENDIX XI

(See p. 79)

### CONTRADICTIONS OVER IMPERSONAL ART

#### *Ferdinand Brunetière*

“Now it is quite certain—Flaubert is right here—that in this sense and, as mathematicians say, other things being equal, works take by so much the higher place in the heaven of art as they . . . avoid revealing what manner of man the artist was, and above all the history of his life and sentiments.”<sup>1</sup>

#### *Anatole France*

“Besides, he was stark mad about impersonal art. He said, ‘The artist should take such measures as will make posterity think he has never lived!’ This mania inspired him with sorry theories. But no great harm was done. It is all very fine to be on your guard; we have no news to tell save of ourselves, and our every work speaks of nothing else, for all that it knows is what we are. Flaubert cries in vain that he is absent from his work. He threw himself completely armed into it, as Decius (*sic*: Curtius?) did into the abyss.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Histoire et littérature*, vol. ii. p. 137, 1884.

<sup>2</sup> Anatole France, *Les Idées de Gustave Flaubert: La Vie littéraire*, Série iii. p. 306, 1891.

*Antoine Albalat*

"There is something grand about conceiving art as an objective and general representation . . . the study of past work lends authority to this lofty conclusion."

The most "beautiful works are impersonal; the author is lost sight of and never interferes—for example, the Gospels, the *Odyssey*, the *Iliad*, the *Oresteia*, the tragedies of Shakespeare, *Don Quixote*—to cite only the best. Nature, the supreme example of creation, is there to prove that the Creator has vanished from his work. Why should art have an end in view since Nature has none?"<sup>1</sup>

*Auguste Sabatier*

"His theory of objective art was false. . . . Never has idea held closer to sensation nor the brain kept in more intimate or more constant relation to the heart. His works sprang no less from his vitals for being impersonal, and it will be difficult to judge them well without knowing the man himself."<sup>2</sup>

*Jules de Gaultier*

"The pure love of form and the intentional suppression of the artist's opinions can produce, and can alone produce, work that suggests to the critical spirit quite new moral opinions, quite new psychological perceptions."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ouvriers et procédés*, p. 244, 1896.

<sup>2</sup> *Journal de Genève*, Mai 8, 1887.

<sup>3</sup> *Le Bovarysme*, p. 2, 1892.

*Remy de Gourmont*

“As though a great writer, as though a man of strong excessive domineering extravagant sensibility could be—what? the opposite of the only word which can define him! . . . mediocre productions are alone impersonal. . . . Flaubert incorporated his whole sensibility in his works; and by ‘sensibility’ I understand here, as everywhere, the general power of feeling, such as we find it variously developed in every human being . . . reason itself is only crystallised sensibility. . . . Far from its being his work which is impersonal, the rôles are here reversed: it is the man who is vague and a tissue of incoherences; it is the work which lives, breathes, suffers, and smiles nobly; . . . the true interest . . . begins when a personality has been so disengaged as to become peerless.”<sup>1</sup>

Words have been said to fit like gloves. M. Remy de Gourmont turns them inside out; he means what Flaubert said, only the seamy side is not so neat. In the sense which MM. France and Sabatier were pleased to alone consider, “the perfect writer”<sup>2</sup> had never supposed that books could be impersonal.

“Every work of art contains a particular element proper to the artist’s personality, which, quite apart from the execution, seduces or irritates us,”<sup>3</sup> he says in the first paragraph of the only literary criticism which he ever published.

<sup>1</sup> *Le Problème du style*, pp. 106 and 107, 1092.

<sup>2</sup> Anatole France, Preface to *Hérodiade*, 1892.

<sup>3</sup> *Œuvres complètes*, vol. vi. p. 157.

## APPENDIX XII

(See p. 105)

MANY more's nests have arisen round restrictions Flaubert is supposed to have formulated, such as that in regard to the double genitive; yet the de Goncourts, reporting Gautier on ideas of Flaubert's which he confessedly did not understand, have no indiscutable authority.<sup>1</sup> The phrase instanced, "*Une couronne de fleurs d'oranger*," does not occur, while "*d'un garçon de classe*" and "*d'une quinzaine d'années*" are found in the first fifteen lines of *Madame Bovary*, a proportion by no means exceptional for that or any other French classic. Flaubert, therefore, could not have been in despair merely because a single one had proved unavoidable. The modification of the articles according to gender and number makes double genitives less clogging in French than they would be, were it not for the possessive *s'* in English, just as the diversity of sound between *that*, *which*, and *who* mitigates for us the effect of neighbour relatives, while the number of letters in those words tends to annul this advantage. Zola as ridiculously censures the frequent but modest sound of the conjunction *et* by false analogy with the obviously objectionable *que* and *qui*.<sup>2</sup> Critics love to harp on these foolish mysteries because they have never examined the

<sup>1</sup> *Journal des Goncourt*, tome ii. p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> *Les romanciers naturalistes*, p. 215.



facts. M. Albalat has ably dissipated another wonder by explaining how Flaubert could say he had determined the fall of every period in some as yet unwritten pages.<sup>1</sup> Long passages were sketched and re-sketched in advance, while the closing cadence of each period must first be chosen before the effect of the whole could become a definite goal for attainment. As a map quickens and corrects the memory of an old explorer, so these skeleton pages enabled Flaubert to recapture and fulfil his inspiration. The approximate notion which most men prate of as *an idea* was for him but vague rumour or prophecy of *the idea* which would only exist when words it was equally delightful to utter and to hear brought it home to the mind.

Masterpieces produced intuitively are only made human by our recognition of their value, but for which a madman's ecstasy would be their exact parallel. Flaubert nursed his theme, but it fed itself, thanks to his methods, taking from his and adding to its own life. A classic continues to grow at large, nourished by the strength of all who love, admire, quote, or imitate it, till its significance may outstrip even the highest flight of its author's hope by establishing relations which for him were undreamable, so tardily was Time's revealing hand to open. This fact has vastly amused M. Anatole France, but perhaps he might just as well have laughed with the other side of his face; such amusement is often in itself funny. And Virgil's thought may have been more truly what his admirers imagine than it was that seed of its final significance which he himself could have described.

<sup>1</sup> *Journal des Goncourt*, tome ii. p. 14.

## APPENDIX XIII

(See p. 111)

### PARALLELS BETWEEN CLAUDE BERNARD AND G. FLAUBERT IN REGARD TO THE EXPERIMENTAL METHOD

“WHY try to explain incomprehensible things? To explain evil by original sin is to explain nothing at all. *Search for the cause is anti-philosophic, anti-scientific; and therein religions displease me yet more than philosophies, since they affirm that they know it. A need of the heart is it? Well and good. That need is respectable, not ephemeral dogmas.*”<sup>1</sup>

“The nature of our spirit prompts us to seek the essence or the *why* of things. In this we aim further than the mark which it is given us to attain; for experience soon teaches us that we cannot go beyond the *how*—that is to say, beyond the immediate cause or the conditions proper to the existence of phenomena.”<sup>2</sup>

“At first *sentiment*, overbearing reason single-handed, created the truths of faith—that is to say, theology. Reason or philosophy, winning the mastery later, gave

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série iii. p. 281.

<sup>2</sup> *Introduction à l'étude de la médecine expérimentale*, p. 126.

birth to scholasticism. At last experience—that is the study of natural phenomena—taught man that the truths of the external world are found ready formulated neither in sentiment nor in reason.”<sup>1</sup>

Closer and more disinterested examination must necessarily, then, transform both sentiment and reason. Thus art will have fresh and better material, and if the creative impulse remains as strong the results should be correspondingly grander.

“A fine book might be written on the literature which aims at proving ; *the moment that you prove, you lie. God knows man's beginning and end* ; the middle, art, like man himself in space, ought to remain suspended in infinity, complete in itself, independent of its producer.”<sup>2</sup>

“When discussions and experiments are undertaken . . . to prove a preconceived idea at all costs, the mind is no longer free, truth is no longer sought.”<sup>3</sup>

“Our intelligence is, indeed, so limited, that we cannot know either the beginning or the end of things ; but we can grasp the middle—that is to say, all that immediately surrounds us.”<sup>4</sup>

“That very fashionable phrase, *the social problem*, is repugnant to me. The day on which it shall be solved will be the last of this planet. Life is an eternal problem, and history also ; everything is.”<sup>5</sup>

“Certainly we shall never know the conditions which

<sup>1</sup> *Introduction à l'étude de la médecine expérimentale*, p. 47.

<sup>2</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série ii. p. 76, 1852.

<sup>3</sup> *Introduction à l'étude de la médecine expérimentale*, p. 81.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>5</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série iii. p. 87, 1857.

absolutely determine the existence of everything ; man could no longer exist." <sup>1</sup>

"That is the *beauty of the natural sciences* : they do not set out to *prove anything* : and look what stretches of facts, what an immensity open to thought ! We should treat of men as they do of mastodons and crocodiles ; are they angry about this one's horn or that one's jaw-bone ? Show them, stuff them, pickle them, that is enough, but judge them, no : who are you yourself, little frog ?" <sup>2</sup>

"In teaching man, experimental science has the effect of diminishing his pride, by proving every day that first causes, as well as the objective reality of things, will always be hidden from him, and that he can only know some inter-relations." <sup>3</sup>

"You complain that women are 'monotonous.' The remedy is very simple ; do without them. 'Events are not varied.' That is the realist's complaint ; and besides, what do you know ? They need examining more closely. Have you ever believed in the existence of things ? Is not everything an illusion ? Nothing is true save 'inter-relations'—that is to say, our mode of perceiving objects. 'Vices are petty,' but all is petty ! 'There are not enough turns of phrase !' Seek, you will find." <sup>4</sup>

"Henceforth truth will never appear to man's intelli-

<sup>1</sup> *Introduction à l'étude de la médecine expérimentale*, p. 223.

<sup>2</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série ii. p. 197, 1853.

<sup>3</sup> *Introduction à l'étude de la médecine expérimentale*, p. 46.

<sup>4</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série iv. p. 302, 1878. (By this date Flaubert is probably quoting from Claude Bernard.)

gence save under the form of a relation or an absolute and necessary inter-relation.”<sup>1</sup>

“Neither I nor anybody knows what those two words mean, soul and body—where one ends or the other begins. We feel forces, that is all. Materialism and spiritualism still too greatly oppress knowledge about man to allow of the impartial study of phenomena.”<sup>2</sup>

“Once the search for the conditions which determine phenomena is laid down as a fundamental principle of the experimental method, there is no longer any room for materialism or spiritualism, nor for matter, animate or inanimate ; there are only phenomena, the conditions of which—that is to say, the circumstances which in relation to those phenomena play the part of immediate causes—must be determined.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Introduction à l'étude de la médecine expérimentale*, p. 48.

<sup>2</sup> *Correspondance de G. Flaubert*, Série iii. p. 147, 1859.

<sup>3</sup> *Introduction à l'étude de la médecine expérimentale*, p. 348.



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