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FRENCH PORTRAITS

Catulle Mendès

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FRENCH PORTRAITS

Being Appreciations of the Writers of Young France *by*

VANCE THOMPSON

BOSTON
Richard G. Badger & Co.
1900

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TO MY FRIEND

JAMES GIBBONS HUNEKER

By Way of Preface

IT was Friday, June the 21st, 1872. Goncourt dined with Flaubert at the Café Riche, "in a private room, because Flaubert cannot endure noise, tolerates no one near him, and, when dining, likes to take off his coat and shoes."

A detail of this sort is worth pages of biography and exegesis. Not even the philosopher can be indifferent to the fact that Socrates sat rubbing his leg in prison, or that Aristotle wore a stomach-pad filled with hot oil. The ideas of great men, the fulhams of poetic fiction, the theories for which we fight, are the common patrimony of mankind: what the great man possesses is, in reality, only his eccentricities. That Milton trilled the letter "R" and that Shelley wore wool next to his skin, these are the true glosses on their poems. In these appreciations of the writers of young France I have not, I trust, laid undue stress upon what they have done, slighting what they are. I should like you to see — across these pages — Verlaine hobbling to his café in the Boul' Mich', Mallarme jogging by in his donkey-cart, Eekhoud fondling his rabbit, or, it may be, Signoret, impossibly young, promenading his pale soul in the autumnal alleys of Versailles.

For many years, now, the dear Lord has preserved me from the sin of inutile reading. Always, I hope, he will keep me from the dull mania of assigning ranks and distributing prizes — with that assured and peremptory

air of the village schoolmaster — to men of letters. Only this: During the last few years French literature has conquered a new territory, extending the frontiers of prose and verse. Certain men there were who marched in the van, beating the heady drums; and it is of them I have written. Two of them are dead, many are famous, a few are not yet condemned to public admiration. I have selected those who fought well or failed well, those who had some individual trick of sword-play. Now and then (for consistency is not a necessary evil), I have paused to gossip with Pym and Pistol, trailing raggedly in the rear.

It is an army that passes.

I can point out the leaders, indicate the plan of campaign, repeat the jests and songs heard at the bivouac-fire. Always the army passes; and, even as I write, on the far horizon is the smoke of a new battle. To-day is but the vestibule of to-morrow. In a few years the writers of young France will be dozing in the green fauteuils of the Academy; already the books that seemed so strenuous in revolt are in the way of becoming classic. Verlaine, who was once as improbable a man as Walt Whitman, is now an accomplice in the bright glory of France; and for Retté and many another the hour will come.

Here and there I have larded my book with the fat of others. To Marcel Schwob, to Rémy de Gourmont, to Ernest La Jeunesse, I owe a debt which they will recognize, but which I cannot repay.

VANCE THOMPSON.

Paris, October, 1899.

Contents

PAGE

INTRODUCTION xi

1. PAUL VERLAINE 1

2. STÉPHANE MALLARMÉ 11

3. THE BELGIAN RENASCENCE:
   - Camille Lemonnier 24
   - Maurice Maeterlinck 29
   - Émile Verhaeren 43
   - Georges Eekhoud 50
   - Georges Rodenbach 61
   - Max Elskamp and Fernand Severin . . . 69

4. THE LAST OF THE PARNASSIANS:
   - Catulle Mendès 73

5. JEAN MORÉAS AND HIS DISCIPLES . 91

6. THE NEW POETRY:
   - Free Verse 100
   - Adolphe Retté 105
   - Henri de Régnier, Stuart Merrill and Francis Vielé-Griffin 113
   - Emmanuel Signoret and Albert Samain . . 121

7. THE PAGANISM OF PIERRE LOUYS . 130

8. JEAN RICHEPIN AND THE VAGROM MAN 137

PAGE

9. THE CHRIST OF JEHAN RICTUS . . . 152

10. MAURICE BARRÈS AND EGOISM . . . 160

11. FABLES, BALLADS, PASTORALS:
 Jules Renard 168
 Paul Fort 176
 Francis Jammes 180

12. THE NEW ERASMUS:
 Marcel Schwob 184

13. NATURISM AND SAINT-GEORGES DE BOUHÉLIER 194

14. MEN OF LETTERS AND ANARCHY . 203

15. THE NEW CRITICISM:
 Ernest La Jeunesse 211

16. "IN THE GENTLEMANLY INTEREST":
 Hugues Rebell 219
 M. le Comte Robert de Montesquiou Fezensac 225

INDEX 231

List of Illustrations

Catulle Mendès . . . . *frontispiece*
Verlaine in the hospital . . . . page 1
A sketch of Verlaine by F. A. Cazals . . . . . . " 4
Verlaine reading . . . . " 5
"L'oubli qu'on cherche en des breuvages exécrés!" . " 6
Two heads of Paul Verlaine . . . . " 7
"This was the Rimbaud period of his life" . . . " 8
A portrait of Verlaine by Cazals . . . . " 9
Verlaine on his death-bed . . . . " 10
Stéphane Mallarmé by Vallaton . . . . " 11
Maupassant . . . . " 12
Villiers de l'Isle Adam . . . . " 13
Stéphane Mallarmé . . . . facing " 14
René Ghil . . . . " 16
Maeterlinck by Vallaton . . . . " 29
Maurice Maeterlinck . . . . facing " 30
Verhaeren by Vallaton . . . . " 43
Émile Verhaeren . . . . facing " 44
Georges Eekhoud . . . . " " 50
Sunday morning in a polder village . . . . . . " " 56
Bruges . . . . " 61
Georges Rodenbach . . . . facing " 62
A sketch of Rodenbach . . . . " 64
Fernand Severin . . . . facing " 70
Leconte de Lisle . . . . " 79
Jean Moréas by Vallaton . . . . " 92
Retté . . . . " 105
Adolphe Retté . . . . facing " 106

Henri de Régnier . . . . page 113
Two portraits of Francis Vielé-Griffin . . . . . . " 116
Stuart Merrill by Vallaton . . . . " 117
A portrait of Stuart Merrill . . . . facing " 118
Emmanuel Signoret . . . . " 121
A portrait of Signoret . . . . facing " 122
Albert Samain . . . . " 127
Pierre Louys . . . . " 130
Jean Richepin . . . . facing " 138
Jehan Rictus . . . . " 160
Barrès by Vallaton . . . . " 160
Maurice Barrès . . . . facing " 162
Jules Renard by Jean Veber . . . . " 168
Renard by Vallaton . . . . " 169
A portrait of Renard . . . . " 170
Paul Fort . . . . " 176
Francis Jammes . . . . " 180
Marcel Schwob . . . . " 184
Saint-Georges de Bouhélier . . . . " 194
A head of Saint-Georges de Bouhelier . . . . . . " 197
Maurice Le Blond . . . . " 199
Zo d'Axa by Vallaton . . . . " 203
Louise Michel . . . . " 204
Henri Mazel . . . . " 205
Pierre Quillard . . . . " 206
Zo d'Axa . . . . " 207
Paul Adam . . . . " 208
The portrait of a poet by Jossot . . . . " 211
Hugues Rebell by Vallaton . . . . " 219
Hugues Rebell . . . . " 222
Le Comte Robert de Montesquiou Fezensac . . . . " 225

FRENCH PORTRAITS

An Impression of Paul Verlaine

ONE night in the year' 84 — upon my word, I am getting old! I shall follow Prince Hal's advice, and, after certain reformations, live cleanly in gray hairs. Well, one can't always be young; and it's a devil of a thing to have been young once. Eh, golden lads? And now I abdicate. My reign of youth is over: to you is the sceptre, my dear fellow,— to you, who are young, a lover of women, a drunkard of rhymes. To me is the twilight, the writing-table, and the fireplace. You shall love and rule and kiss many women; and you shall dream golden, splendid rhymes. I, in the twilight, summon the ghosts of women who were kissed too much, and sing over the old rhymes, threadbare now. On the whole, I think it is quite as pleasant! But it is well to have known the heroic candors and have been ravished by the splendid banalities of youth. One's twilights are less tedious.

One night, in the autumn of '84, I say, certain folk gathered at a sort of Bohemian *cercle* held in an old house in the Rue de Rennes. In a big

naked room on the first floor these folk gathered weekly to drink beer and discuss æsthetics: those who drank absinthe discussed philosophy. Charles Cros, with his crisp, curly hair and face tawn as a Lascar's, was there. Already far gone in drink, he leaned with one elbow on the table, reciting in a hard, dry voice his last monologue,— one Coquelin had just made famous in drawing-rooms. His hands, already senile, trembled with alcoholic fever. I dare say he is dead now, this founder of a shadowy school of poets, this author of the "Coffret de Santal." The harsh voice ceased. His head fell on the table. From the dozen or more throats came howls of applause. Ah, what a crowd,— this company which now belongs to the twilights of the past! A half-dozen shirts in the crowd were fairly clean. The rest were Verlainesque. And what rhymes were shouted over the wine and beer,— the rhymes of young poets, in whose visions women are always undraped and disport an unusual luxury of *seins nacreux* and *hanches opulentes!*

Hark! Upon my word, as though it were yesterday I can hear that devil of a Gascon, Fernand Icres, intoning in a barbarous accent:—

Sa chevelure et sa poitrine
Faisaient monter à ma narine
   D'étranges parfums irritants.

Elle avait seize ans ; mais son buste,
Tout à la fois souple et robuste,
   En portait vingt en verité.

There were women there, too. One I remember vaguely through the smoke of innumerable twilights. This was Marie Krysinka, a Polish Jewess, who pounded melodramatic music out of the piano, and was a poetess whose peculiar passion was corpses and snow. She used to hold "Thursdays" in her little apartment up five pairs of stairs in the Rue Monge. I heard afterward that she married an archæologist — or was it a manufacturer of wooden toothpicks? Something of the sort.

In the corner Verlaine glowered over his fifth glass of absinthe, whispering to himself.

The Café du Chalet had its day.

Then the young poets of the day, led, if I remember, by Émile Goudeau, migrated to the Café de l'Avenir, in the Place St. Michel. The tavern is now known as the Tavern of the Golden Sun. There were famous Sunday nights in that *soussol — eheu, fugaces, anni labuntur* — a decade and more ago. We were all worshippers of Verlaine. We had read "Sagesse." We had lent the poet five-franc pieces, had bought him absinthe, had helped him up the hospital steps when his diseases were too many for him. It is something to be proud of; for in those days it was a distinction to appreciate the greatest of French poets,— this battered, old Verlaine. Anatole France, who since then has written a beautiful fable of which Verlaine is the hero, in those days did not dare to introduce

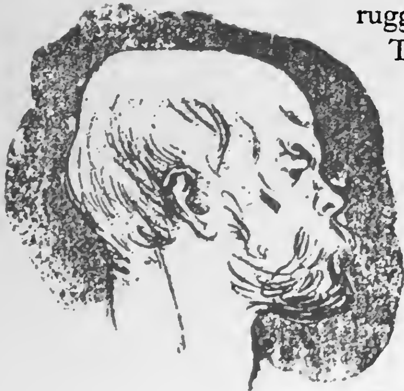
the name in his *bourgeois* articles. That sombre and vindictive Creole, Leconte de Lisle, had, a few years before, denounced Paul Verlaine as an employee of the Commune, in the gentle hope of getting him shot. Even Coppée, this gentlest of poets, sneered at him. George Moore, who had just gone to London, echoed these sentiments in a book he wrote about that time,— "The Confessions of a Young Man." Mr. Moore has since recanted. You cannot judge the George Moore of to-day by his opinions in that book.

Eh bien! some of us, however, carried the oriflamme of Verlaine. He sat among us there, this old man, with the dirty neckerchief and the ribald and unclean speech. And is it thus I remember him? No. I remember him best when, with his glowing eyes half closed, he recited some new sonnet or unforeseen verses,— splendid as golden coins.

* * * * * * * *

His face was like the mask of Socrates, with its high cheek-bones and simian mouth. The nose was flat, camous, broken; the great bald head covered with knobs, like a battered helmet; a draggled beard hung about the cheeks and chin; the ears were flat and large. The eyes, those deep-set, dreamy, intolerably vague eyes, glowered at one from beneath rugged, square-hewn brows.

This was Paul Verlaine, as you might have seen



him any day, slouching along the street or lounging over a marble-topped table in the Café François Premier. Or at other times you might have seen him sitting in his bed in some foul mansarde, an old man, grimy and drunk, in a greasy night-cap and abominable linen. George Moore saw him thus, once upon a time, blaspheming. Degas, the great painter, has recorded an impression of Verlaine in one of his most famous pictures, "The Absinthe Drinker." Verlaine is sitting at a table over an opalescent glass of absinthe. Near by sprawls a woman of the streets, wretched, tipsy, pitiable. It is well that this impression should be recorded. In this poor, great poet there was much of Walt Whitman's fine humanity. He, too, might have sung,—

The prostitute draggles her shawl, her bonnet bobs on her tipsy
and pimpled neck ;
The crowd laughs at her blackguard oaths, the men jeer and wink
at each other —
Miserable! I do not laugh at your oaths nor jeer you!

He was a very gentle poet, and in all the world's misery there was nothing alien to him.

* * * * * * * *

He had a face vizard-like, unchanging, made impudent with the use of evil deeds. But the eyes were those of the penitent thief turned toward Him on the middle cross.

* * * * * * * *

I would rather talk of his books. He was the greatest poet of this generation.

His life was a tragedy of passion: his work is a shadow of his life. Once I called him a Socratic Pierrot. Morice approved the phrase, and made it classic. There were two men in Verlaine,— Socrates and Pierrot, Saint Francis of Assisi and the Marquis de Sade. Even in age — when his pale soul was fatigued by the years — he was still, like the saint and the mountebank, a child. Life excited and irritated him. Then, fatigued, he wept like a tired child. The tears and laughter,— these are his poems. He had dreams, horribly beautiful, in which Bonus Angelus wrestled with Malus Angelus. These, too, are his poems.

He lived feverishly. He was a lover of life. Life as it is he loved,— the gust of pleasure and the fear of pain, the idolatry of appearances, the make-believe of virtue: he loved even life's mediocrities. He had a horror of sin even when he sinned. The defunct symbols of the Pardoner haunted him. The pendulum of his life swung between riot and renunciation, from the hair-cloth to the cloth of gold.

"How do you write?" I asked him.

"*En fièvre*," he said.

He recorded his impressions of life frankly, and, since he had an innate sense of harmony, musically. Dear Lord! how musically! Words lan-

guid, cajoling, tender, enervant; words that were caresses,— his art was at once subtle, refined, difficult, and inveterately young. His was the subtle simplicity of the Middle Ages. Huysmans, with fine clairvoyance, saw that he was sib to Villon. His individuality was dominant and insistent, as of some great soul of the fifteenth century. He had a profound, incurable, and salutary egotism.

In his youth he was seduced by the virtuosities of the Parnassians. The real Verlaine appeared in the "Romances sans Parole," in "Sagesse," and in certain miraculous poems of "Jadis et Naguère." The "Poèmes Saturniens," which appeared in 1867, are purely Parnassian. Fluent verse, ardent, sombre, mad, it was impeccably fashioned. But the chef-d'œuvre of this school — *du bois, du bois, et encore du bois* — is "Les Fêtes Galantes." Here is the dream of a pure poet. The verse is formal: it hints of pose and powder and the Pompadour. It is sceptical and frivolous, but very sincere. See, then, in a park de Watteau,— perhaps in Rubens's "Garden of Love,"— nonchalant girls lounge and whisper scandal, while overhead the new stars shine; stately ladies pass, insolently beautiful; the powdered marquis nods to the silken abbé,—

> L'abbé divague.— Et toi, marquis,
> Tu mets de travers ta perruque.
> — Ce vieux vin de Chypre est exquis.
> Moins, Camargo, que votre nuque.

— Ma flamme . . . — Do, mi, sol, la, si.
— L'abbé, ta noirceur se dévoile.
— Que je meure, mesdames, si
Je ne vous décroche une étoile.

— Je voudrais être petit chien !
— Embrassons nos bergères, l'une
Après l'autre.— Messieurs, eh bien ?
— Do, mi, sol.— Hé ! bonsoir, la lune !

* * * * * * * *

With the "Romances sans Paroles" he broke with the Impeccables.

This was the troubled period of his life, the Rimbaud period of his life, which ended in the penitentiary of Mons.

Il pleure dans mon cœur
Comme il pleut sur la ville —

But why should I quote the verses which you have known, which you have loved, which you have whispered in the impenetrable hours? After the "Romances" came his book of penitence, the triumphal book, the Wisdom of Paul Verlaine. Here, then, is "Sagesse," a white lily plucked out of the pashed mire of a dirty and inquiet life. Here, then, is "Sagesse," the most beautiful book of poetry written since "Les Fleurs du Mal."

Sin had lost its savor. He knelt at the altar he had despised, and prayed to the God he had mocked. He had speech with God, thus: —

Mon Dieu m'a dit : Mon fils, il faut m'aimer.

But the penitent cried: —

Je ne veux pas! Je suis indigne. Vous, la Rose
Immense des purs vents de l'Amour, ô Vous, tous
Les cœurs des saints, ô Vous qui fûtes le Jaloux
D'Israël, Vous la chaste abeille qui se pose

Sur la seule fleur d'une innocence mi-close,
Quoi, moi, moi pouvoir Vous aimer? Étes-vous fous,
Père, Fils, Esprit?

God said again: —

Il faut m'aimer. Je suis Ces Fous que tu nommais.

And then God makes plain the blessed mystery of the Church; and the poor wretch, full of trouble and hope, sees a vision.

Des Anges bleus et blancs portés sur des pavois.

* * * * * * * *

Verlaine was not a man of letters. At the end of his "Ars Poetica," after having laid down the laws of indecisive poetry, he says with divine disdain, "All the rest is literature."

His own precepts explain his art: —

Que ton vers soit la chose envolée
Qu'on sent qui fuit d'une âme en allée
Vers d'autres cieux à d'autres amours.

Que ton vers soit la bonne aventure
Éparse au vent crispé du matın
Qui va fleurant la menthe et le thym. . . .

C'est des beaux yeux derrière des voiles,
C'est le grand jour tremblant de midi.
C'est, par un ciel d'automne attiédi,
Le bleu fouillis des claires étoiles !

* * * * * * * *

Verlaine attempted the impossible. He strove all his life to reconcile the seven deadly sins and the three cardinal virtues. He wished to erect in the market-place of Gomorrah a statue of the blessed Virgin. A weak and futile man, he was eminently human. He was simple and intense. He was an exaltation, an exasperation of the modern man, at once mocking and mystic.

Now being dead,—and saved or damned,—he is an accomplice in the eternal mystery.

Priez pour le pauvre Gaspard !

Stéphane Mallarmé

TWENTY years ago, in the time of the Parnassians, there was a poet who published his incomprehensible verses in obscure journals over the name of Stéphane Mallarmé, —a name so apt that it rang like a pseudonym. For some reason or other his verses were to the critics as a red scarf to a bull. They dragged them from obscurity. They tossed and gored them. The poor poet fared little better. He was roared at as though he had been the beast of the Apocalypse. It became fashionable to gird at Mallarmé.

And all these years Mallarmé rowed lustily against the stream. He made no concessions to popularity. Indifferent as a faun, he went his mystic way. Little by little his work became known to those whom it was once the mode to call *cognoscenti.* In Germany, in Poland, in the United States, as in France, Mallarmé gained lovers and disciples. A few years ago he received a splendidly public recognition. It was in February, 1896. He was named *Poète des Poètes* by acclaim of all the poets of France. A regular election was held, at which almost every Frenchman of letters voted. Men as diverse in their literary appreciations as

Coppée and Retté agreed in their admiration for Mallarmé. I happen to know how sincerely Mallarmé appreciated this honor. He had faced the jibes and sneers with serene impassibility, but the praise of his contemporaries broke down his guard.

For over two years he lived in the full blaze of fame. Pilgrims to Paris visited him, as of old they visited Victor Hugo. He was the most discussed and the most conspicuous man of letters in France.

He died in 1898.

Mallarmé was a frugal and painful writer. He left no great bulk of work. No more than Botticelli, no more than Bach, will he ever be popular. And yet I do not believe that any one has had a greater — a more tyrannical — influence on the young artistic generation than has he. When naturalism was most triumphant, he stood out against it. Indeed, he was the incarnation of the literary revolt against the debasing realism that made Zola and destroyed Maupassant. He began with the Parnassians, but he went far beyond them. As patiently as Gautier, he chiselled his verses; but to each verse he gave — as it were — a second intention. It is not quite easy to get at the heart of his mystery; but his theory may, I think, be explained in this way. He held, then, that each verse should be at once a plastic image, the expression of a thought and a philosophic symbol; and it should be as well a musical phrase and a part, also, of the entire melody that made up the poem.

"Without a musical education," he said once, "you would not pretend to understand a Beethoven symphony or a Mozart sonata. Why, then, without any education in the technique of poetry, should one pretend to understand poetry?"

This remark, I think, gives a deeper insight into Mallarmé's theory of poetry than I could give by pages of exegesis. He made poetry music. If Euclid was the man of lines, Mallarmé was the man of verbal sonorities. His fervor for the word was such that he came to look upon objects merely for the beauty of the word that represented them. The music of vowels, the exquisite dissonances of diphthongs, fascinated him. He has always reminded me of the rhetors of Alexandria and dying Rome. Like Apollonius, like Callimachus, he was a lover of the naked word, the word that glistened and rustled. He would have understood the enthusiasm of the Scotch housewife for that blessed word "Mesopotamia."

As I have said, Mallarmé began among the Parnassians,— De Banville, Leconte de Lisle, Verlaine, Villiers de l'Isle Adam. His earlier verses are perfectly comprehensible, if, in fact, they are not banal. I have before me the "Hérodiade," with all its common rhythms, usual images, and sweet verbal music. Swinburne might have written it. (It is well to remember that Mallarmé, who was professor of English at the Collège Rollin, was a student of

Swinburne, though his main debt is due to two Americans,— Emerson and Poe.) The melody of this early verse recalls the juvenile phrases of Beethoven.

His perfect sonnets, that on the Tomb of Edgar Poe, that on Wagner, poems like "Les Fleurs" and "Éventail," and the eclogue I have mentioned, are sure of literary longevity. Yet I should not be surprised were his translation of Poe's poems his best prophylactic to oblivion. He has given an exact transcript of Poe's thought, and has echoed all his haunting music. Among his other prose works is an admirable essay on "Vathek," which Beckford claimed (though it is thought he lied) was originally written in French. Of his prose I think it may be said that it has all the vices. It is tortured and hectic and dark. It twists and turns upon itself like a wounded snake. It seems deep — often, I fear — merely because it is muddy.

His last prose work is "Variations sur un Sujet," in which he justifies his art and exults in his sterility. Not his least boast is that he has published so little.

Mallarmé's private life was very beautiful,— a contrast to the draggled, pathetic life of poor Verlaine. In one of his books Verlaine classes Mallarmé among the *poètes maudits*. He was anything but that,— this studious and reasonable gentleman. Into his life there came no tragic and vagabond fervors, as in his poetry there is neither anger nor dirt.

Stéphane Mallarmé

His poems are moral — or immoral — as a cloud or a singing stream.

He was born in Paris in 1842. His early manhood was spent in teaching English in provincial colleges. He came up to Paris about fifteen years ago, if I am not mistaken. His books brought him little money; and he lived on his collegiate stipend, modestly enough, in an apartment near the Luxembourg. His family consisted of a wife and daughter. It was his daughter who drove the famous donkey-cart,— the price of a poem that by some chance had been bought and paid for. Mallarmé lived very quietly. He made few acquaintances. It was as difficult to see him as any man in Paris. His opinion of the interviewer was Luther's opinion of the devil. And yet to those who had gained his friendship he was a rare friend, indulgent, stanch, and tender. Notwithstanding the intransigeance of his theories, no man was readier to recognize the talent of others. He was a friend of the Goncourts, he loved Daudet, he appreciated Zola, and the most magnificent tribute laid upon poor Villiers de l'Isle Adam's tomb was Mallarmé's funeral oration. In the days when in France it was a crime against patriotism to praise Wagner, Mallarmé not only defended his work, but defended it with the prescience of one who foresaw its tendency. He fought for Manet, Rodin, and Degas, when every man's hand was against them. He discovered Chéret. He introduced Maeterlinck to fame.

Americans will not willingly forget that it was due to Mallarmé that Whistler's masterpiece — the portrait of his mother — found a home in the Luxembourg.

* * * * * * * *

Mallarmé was the head and front of the symbolists.

Indeed, in writing of the symbolists, it is necessary only to mention Stéphane Mallarmé. I say this not without knowledge of René Ghil, whose books I read very faithfully once upon a time. Nor need it here be any question of Maurice Maeterlinck and his dark followers; nor of William Sharp, who is merely an inerudite translator. Ghil (like Verhaeren) is of Flemish origin, and claims Spanish blood. His work is, in a large measure, an euphuistic elaboration of Mallarmé. His euphuism led him to expand Rimbaud's famous theory of the color of the vowels,— A, black; E, white; I, red; U, green; O, blue. He found their tone equivalents. For him the organ is black, the harp white, the violins blue, the brasses red, and the flutes yellow. He went even further, and assigned to each consonant its hue and tone. All of which is inutile and fictive.

* * * * * * * *

I wish to give as clear an explanation as I can of the symbol as Mallarmé uses it. George Moore,

in his "Confessions of a Young Man," touches upon the matter, but darkly and inadequately. So far as I know, no helpful analysis has yet been made. Mr. Sharp is quite abroad, and Mr. Moore halts.

In the first place, one must get away from the antique meaning of the word "symbol"; for it is evident that all literature is symbolic. Indeed, in a wide sense of the word, Shakspere is an impenitent — and in the sonnets an immoral — symbolist.

Mallarmé has narrowed the meaning of the word. With him symbolism is at once a mode of thought and a form of expression.

His theory of poetry is a plain matter, an Hellenic commonplace. It is the duty of poetry — art of sounds and rhythms — to create emotions. Now the emotions, it is evident, are inseparable from their causes, from the ideas which evoke them. Pleasure nor grief exists abstractly: there are pleasant ideas or grievous ones. There must be a nice adjustment between the emotions and the syllables and rhythms chosen to evoke them. The emotions Mallarmé wishes to excite are those of intellectual joy, of subtile speculation, the extreme joy of thought about thought. The symbol is his *motif*, which he develops logically and inevitably, through premeditated syllables, evocative of certain emotions.

Take, for instance, his "Faune."

A faun in the glow of an antique afternoon saw light nymphs, loving and joyous. They fled. And the faun is sad: it was a dream,—gone forever. But he understands that all things seen are merely dreams of the soul. He summons again the mad and loving phantoms. He re-creates their forms. Their hot kisses stain his lips, He would fain clasp the fairest; and again the vision vanishes. But how vain would be regret! For, when he will, he may recall the riant nymphs, phantasies of the soul.

This is at once Mallarmé's philosophy and mode.

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Poetry is an art as complex, as subtile and difficult, as the art of music. For a man unlearned in the art of music to admire Beethoven is an affectation and impertinence. Why should the uninstructed person pretend to judge the equally elaborate art of poetry? It is absurd.

Mallarmé wrote for the *savant* in this beautiful art.

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Here and there a precise word, premeditated, logical, necessary for the development of the *motif;* for the rest, syllables purely musical.

* * * * * * * *

"A noble poet is dead. Regrets? But what, then, is the death of a man but the vanishing of

one of our dreams? Men, whom we believe real, are but the *triste opacité de leurs spectres futurs.* But the poet, beyond his vain physical existence, lives for us a high, imperishable life. The poet is a solemn agitation of words: the death of a poet purifies our fiction of him." He wrote this of Gautier.

Another symbol: —

"In a desolate cloister-cell an old monk transcribes patient writings. He has lived ignorant and chaste. He copies an ancient manuscript, it may be some *naïf* romance of Alexandria, in which two laughing children meet, and kiss timidly. And desire creeps into the empty, idle soul of the good monk. He summons the lovers to live for him their moods of tenderness and passion. And forthwith he himself comes to be this young and happy lover."

This is from the prose for "Des Esseintes." Is it a souvenir or a dream? Perhaps the fantastic hyperbole of a far-off recollection. The monk wishes in his cell to live the young and splendid life of love. And he lives it. He walks with the riant girl in familiar gardens. Touched with love, he sees a transfigured world. The flowers are larger — great lilies nod enchanted. He wanders in a radiant dream. Then love passes, and the miracle is finished. He dreams again that he is a poor old monk. Vainly he cries to the riant girl. He bends

again over his parchments, a phantom irked by an obscure destiny. He waits until this dream, too, shall be effaced, when the black pall falls and death is.

Mallarmé published this sonnet not long ago: —

> Surgi de la croupe et du bond
> D'une verrerie éphémère,
> Sans fleurir la veillée amère
> Le col ignoré s'interrompt.
>
> Je crois bien que deux bouches n'ont
> Bu, ni son amant ni ma mère
> Jamais à la même chimère
> Moi, sylphe, de ce froid plafond!
>
> Le pur vase d'aucun breuvage
> Que l'inexhaustible veuvage
> Agonise, mais ne consent,
>
> Naïf baiser des plus funèbres,
> À rien expirer annonçant
> Une rose dans les ténèbres.

It may be that in some such way as this he approached his symbol: There is on the table a vase, delicate, fragile, in which lately the flowers stood radiant. The poet perceives it. He considers its exquisite form, daintily turned; the shapely flanks which seem to throb. He observes the neck rising gracefully to end in sudden interruption. Sadly the poet muses that no flower is there to console his bitter vigil. And here, I take

it, is the point of poetical departure. Why, then, cannot he find in himself, the poet, this flower which he desires? Can he not by his sovereign will evoke one flower? No doubt by his very birth he is condemned to this inefficiency: an antique and hereditary inertia cumbers him. No doubt his parents neglected to dower him with this power of evocation, neglected to drink at the fecund spring of chimera; and now the spring is dry. The poet agonizes, and in vain. The vase is empty. For him there is only sad vacuity, empty; and his revolt is empty. He cannot summon the dead.

* * * * * * * *

And, finally, read this sonnet: —

Une dentelle s'abolit
Dans le doute du Jeu suprême
À n'entr'ouvrir, comme un blasphème,
Qu'absence éternelle de lit.

Cet unanime blanc conflit
D'une guirlande avec la même,
Enfui contre la vitre blême,
Flotte plus qu'il n'enselevit.

Mais chez qui du rêve se dore,
Tristement dort une mandore
Au creux néant musicien,

Telle que, vers quelque fenêtre,
Selon nul ventre que le sien,
Filial on aurait pu naître.

A lace curtain,— this is the subject, the symbol, the *motif*, the poet's point of departure. He sees the lace curtain hanging at his window. It suggests to him a nuptial couch. Then he perceives there is no bed under the swaying lace: this to him seems a blasphemy,— futile lace stretched across the pale and empty window. He watches the white, monotonous conflict of vague lines on the shadowy window-panes; but he cannot recover that fugitive impression of a nuptial couch. But now the Dream comes, and effaces his regret: because, in the soul of him who knows the Dream, a lute wakes eternally; because in the secret soul of him the magic mandora of phantasy wakes evermore. What matters, then, the absence of a bed under this lace? The poet conceives himself delivered of the Dream, child of this phantasy which dwells ever in the soul. The curving contour of the lute,— is it not the royal womb where grows, safe from the exasperations of daily existence, the intimate life, the patient immortal life of art?

And this lace, fluctuant, vague, is indeed the sumptuous curtain of a bed truly real,— bed where the poet himself is born.

* * * * * * * *

To turn one of Mallarmé's golden symbols into even barren and sodden prose is at once difficult and absurd. It is as though one were to write out in drab words a Chopin étude.

My whole attempt has been to expose, in a slight measure, Mallarmé's technique,— his method of using the symbol. The familiar object is his point of departure: he passes thence to its poetical intention. And, again, his thematic development is carried on by certain chosen, premeditated words; for the rest there is only syllabic color and syllabic tone.

Mallarmé was not the initiator of a new poetry, like Walt Whitman. He was the last and most perfect of an old school. He merely pushed to their extreme consequences the principles which all the great French poets since the Renascence had admitted, and, indeed, championed. He followed more closely what he called the "instinct of elusive rhythms": he discerned more plainly the occult, significant, and mysterious symbol *qui habite le commun;* and that is all.

The Belgian Renascence

Camille Lemonnier

"IN Flandres al byyonde the se," as Sir Thopas sang, there has grown up a new art. At first glance you are struck with its strange and profound melancholy. In the paintings of De Braekeler, in the grim etchings of Félicien Rops, in the pale legends of Maurice Maeterlinck, in the stormy verse of Émile Verhaeren, in the fervid prose of Georges Eekhoud, there broods this vague melancholy,— the perfume of dead lavender and faded flowers. With all this the old robust manner is not dead. This Verhaeren is a Berserker of verse. This Eekhoud has a grip of steel on life.

In this renascence the painters led the way. From the viewpoint of literature, Belgium was a desert before 1880. Camille Lemonnier, to be sure, had written three or four of his wonderful novels,— "Un Coin de Village," "Les Charniers," "Un Mâle"; but he was as one crying in the night. In the year I have mentioned there came up to Brussels (from Louvain and Ghent and Bruges and many an Old World town) a band of young men, who carried the flag of *la jeune Belgique.* They were defiantly young. They wore amaranthine waistcoats and flying scarves. They

had theories,— art for art, art for the beautiful. They founded a review. They fought for their ideas. They attacked the enemy,— this indifferent and dense public that is always the enemy of young poets. They were cruel, unjust, cynical, as only very young men can be. They entered literature like a band of Sioux. All this was well enough in its way, and was, indeed, inevitable. Belgian literature had become a dull trade for dull gazetteers and duller professors. Had this young Sibyl appeared without contortions, no one would have believed in her inspiration.

Among the founders of the new review were Max Waller and Iwan Gilkin. The former died when he was still very young M. Gilkin has degenerated into a disappointed and atrabilious critic, who gives his days and nights to throwing stones at those who were once his fellows. The others who took leading parts in this movement were Émile Verhaeren, Georges Eekhoud, Albert Giraud, and Georges Rodenbach. The *doyen* of the little band was Camille Lemonnier. In his name the first public revolt was organized. This was in 1883. At the end of every five years the State awards a prize of a few thousand francs to the author of the best book which has appeared during the half-decade. That year the jury decided that no book worthy of the distinction had been published. Young Belgium declared that this was an official

insult to M. Lemonnier, their *maréchal de lettres.* It denounced the insult at a public banquet. A great many fiery speeches were made. Perhaps nothing was accomplished; but, at all events, young Belgium had measured swords with the State, and had learned its own strength. In the days to come it was to win many a victory over the literary bureaucracy. In the mean time they published their books,— first-fruits of the renascence,— the "Kees Dornik" of Eekhoud, Verhaeren's "Les Flamandes," and Rodenbach's "Mer Élégante." The history of literary groups of this sort varies but slightly. They are born in vehemence and enthusiasm. They ride loyally out to attack the old modes and prejudices. They troop home with the spoils, singing. Then life in camp grows dull. Good friends rise at dawn to cross swords with each other,—*fer contre fer au spadassin.* In the end each goes his own way, leaving, perhaps, one or two of the faithful — those sad conservatives who, having once been young, are faithful always to youth — to guard the deserted camp. This was the history of the Parnassians. It was the history of *la jeune Belgique.* Verhaeren went his way. Eekhoud went his way. Even the *maréchal* of letters went his way. The old cry of art for art had become meaningless to them. Each of them, as best he could, engaged his art in the service of a cause. They entered into life. The old formulæ on which they

had whetted their swords were left in the rubbish of the camp. To me there is something not unpathetic in the picture of that deserted camp — the old flag hanging limp, the fires burned out — where Iwan Gilkin stands on guard, and challenges the empty night. More French than the French, he would fain hang all these deserters who fled from the old Parnassian standard.

It is, I believe, the unaggravated truth that every great artist rows against the stream. Even so essentially Philistine an artist as Sir Walter Scott turned his prow up stream now and then. To be sure, he apologized humbly enough (in a notable preface), and declared that never again would he be "pertinacious in defence of his errors against the voice of the public"; but that was in his time of unworthiness. The strong artist usually makes his own audience. A book very useful to young writers might be written on "How an Audience is made." It was Leopardi's subtle theory that the surest way for a man to acquire a reputation is to assert confidently and persistently that he has already acquired it. "Another way"— as Mr. Lang says Mrs. Glasse says in her cook book — is to select energetic disciples. This was the successful way of Camille Lemonnier. He is a man of vigorous intellect rather than great mind. He has written dainty tales in the manner of Droz and Halévy. He has painted enormous and sombre frescos of peas-

ant life. He has touched modern society at almost every point. His style is polymorphous. Take up his books one after another, the " Fin des Bourgeois " after " Happe-Chair," the " Faute de Mme. Charvet " after " Claudine Lamour," and you can hardly make yourself believe they were written by one hand. He is the victim of his own flexile and uncontrollable imagination. A brilliant writer, unquestionably; an accomplished and fecund novelist, beyond doubt. His chief importance, however, is that the Belgian renascence in literature dates from his first book.

Maurice Maeterlinck

The moon shines down upon Brussels.

You knock at the door of a house in the Rue du Marais. It is a small house, humble and reticent; but in the window of the first-pair-front there shines a light, like a human soul. To the little Walloon maid who comes to your knock you say, "M. Maurice Maeterlinck." Carelessly, indifferently as one points to a mile-stone, she points up the dark staircase. "First on your right, M'sieu," she says.

You tap on the panel. It is M. Maeterlinck who admits you. Though he makes his home in Ghent, he has this *pied-à-terre* in Brussels; for now and again he comes up to enjoy the distractions of a great city. It is a plain little apartment, grimly like your own *pied-à-terre* in the Rue du Prince Albert. There is the same acacia-wood furniture,— the bed, the table, the sofa, the chairs,— the vulgar rugs, the brass candlestick, the dusky mirror. The walls, however, are beneficed with engravings and photographs of Burne-Jones's pictures of "The Golden Stair," "Flamma Vestalis," and the "Mirror of Venus," and many others.

"He is the greatest of painters," says Maurice Maeterlinck; "and his soul is sib to my soul."

In a few weeks Burne-Jones is to die; but that hangs yet in the future, undreamed of.

Maurice Maeterlinck sits on the sofa, his long legs crossed. With his square shoulders, his brusque mustaches, his short, stiff blond hair, and his steady blue eyes, he has the air of a trooper out of a man's novel. You speak to him of Ghent, his ancient city.

"It is the soul of Flanders," he says, "at once venerable and young. In its streets the past and the present elbow each other."

And then he tells you of the changes that have taken place in the old city since last you were there: how the small shops that clung like limpets round the base of St. Nicolas are being chopped away; how the old Château des Comtes de Flandres is being put into fourteenth-century condition, even to the archers' turrets, scarps and counter-scarps; how the band of the Eleventh Foot plays in the Place d'Armes every Wednesday evening; and many other notable things.

The moon shines down upon Brussels town, and yet in the air are hints and instigations of rain. Maurice Maeterlinck clothes himself in a long gray mackintosh, and sets on his head a little round hat, — pitifully small and round. He leads the way into the street, and you follow. In the Rue du Marais he glances up at the moon, sombrely, as one who should say: —

Maurice Maeterlinck

It is not a large moon that shines down on Brussels. No, it is not a large moon that shines down upon the gas-lit streets and upon the gray towers of St. Gudule and upon the shadowy mannikin,— eternal and shadowy protest. It is a moon of mansuetude and poverty, mirroring itself in the lassitude of the canals and in the sweetness of the flowers and in the eyes of sad women. And it is a moon pale as an agonizing tree; and it is a moon all-weary, so old it is, a very old moon, a moon before Christ, a moon that saw the antique Pan die and Hylas die among the white nymphs in the fountain; and it is a moon of La Jeunesse. And the sky floats darkly; and it is small and blue, like the cloak of a poet.

A warm, thin rain falls; but the moon is not hid. At the Galeries St. Hubert, Maurice Maeterlinck says: "I rarely go to the theatre. When I go, I am always deceived." In the Galerie de la Reine, he adds: "What is there in these plays produced every year, here and in Paris and everywhere? Little jests about little intrigues, little people playing with little passions. Little sketches of the superficies of life,— little adulteries, little sins. Seen from the moon, how trivial it must seem!"

You are in the Rue de la Madeleine, and Maurice Maeterlinck looks up at the moon. His blue eyes beckon it. His yellow mustaches mime to it. Slowly you climb the hill, and he says: "Of what possible significance is it that a husband avenges

his honor or that a lover kills his mistress? The divine art of the stage, should it not have a nobler object?"

Thus he mocks at him whom he calls Dumafisse, and others of his kind, and pays out golden words to the Greek tragedies and the plays of Shakspere and his mighty contemporaries.

At the Rue St. Jean: "I enter a theatre only to be disappointed. I go in the hope of perceiving some fragment of life, of breaking the monotone of my humble, quotidian existence by a moment of beauty and grandeur, of touching, as it were, the hem of the eternal mystery. I am forced to listen to childish stories of silly people. I want to see men, and they show me heroes. We have not made a step. We are inferior to the poets of antiquity, who put on the stage the battle of man against the gods; that is to say, the problem of earthly destiny. These noble inquietudes have disappeared. The drama is dying in the hands of the vaudevillistes. It is the most retrograde of all the arts. The hour has come to regenerate it."

At the Place Royale the rain ceases. The moon shines down upon Brussels, faintly and incuriously. In front of the Comte's palace the guards pace diligently, rapping the pavement with their iron heels. The blue trams from the Bourse crawl up the hill behind four huge blown horses. Everywhere, as far as you can see, are the silhouettes of girls, their

gowns tossed by the wind; and overhead glooms the imperious statue of Godfrey de Bouillon. Maurice Maeterlinck looks at the statue. Then he draws his hand across the flame of his eyes, and says: —

"The strange and silent tragedy of being! Almost all our dramatic authors perceive only the violent life — its external adventures — or the life of other days. Our drama is an anachronism. Like sculpture, it is not of this age. Only the painters and musicians have been able to reproduce the hidden traits of to-day,— hidden, but not the less grave and astonishing. They have perceived that life has lost its surface decoration, only to gain in depth, in significance, and in spiritual gravity. A good painter would not paint the victory of Duke Godefroy or the assassination of the Duke of Guise, because the psychology of victory and of murder is elementary and exceptional. He would represent a house in the fields, a door opening from a corridor, a face or hands in repose: these simple images can add something to our consciousness of life. Our dramatic authors, like bad painters, place the interest of their works in the violence of the anecdote they reproduce,— always the Duke Godefroy is conquering or the Duke of Guise is being killed. They try to interest us in the acts that pleased the barbarians, who were part of these stormy adventures. Most of our vices have nothing to do with

blood and cries and swords: the very tears of men have become silent, invisible, spiritual."

Rue de Namur: "I admire Othello; but he does not appear to me to live the august quotidian life of a Hamlet, who has time to live because he does not act. It is not in the action, but in the words that the beauty and grandeur of grand and beautiful tragedies are found. And is the beauty and is the grandeur found only in the words that explain and accompany the action? On the contrary, only the words that seem inutile count in a work. In them is the soul of the work."

You perceive that Maurice Maeterlinck, in spite of generalizations, is speaking of himself and his own method. You have crossed the moonlit boulevard; you take a table inside the Café de l'Horloge; you drink bock and stare out at the fountain, tossing up a dust of chrysoprase into the blue night.

"The soul of a play is in its useless dialogue," you repeat.

And Maurice Maeterlinck goes further, and says: "A drama approaches beauty and truth in the measure in which the words that explain the action have been eliminated and have been replaced by words that do not explain. It is not what Solness says; it is not what Hilda says: it is what they do not say that reveals the 'sorcery' in them. There is a new movement in the drama. All but the blind

can see it. The soul awakes — as it woke in Solness, the Contractor. We are beginning to comprehend that over the vulgar, material life there is a higher life, the essence of which we cannot reach, but which is revealed to us by incontestable manifestations. A time will come — and it is at hand — when our souls shall perceive themselves without the mediation of our senses."

Maurice Maeterlinck stares unwinking at the fountain,— white dust of chrysoprase streaming up in the blue night; and he is Novalis and Plato, and he is Swedenborg, and he is Plotinus and Ruysbroeck, and he is Porphyry, and he is St. Denys the Areopagyte, and the neo-Platonists of Alexandria. Softly he speaks, and the voice is the voice of an efficacious and opportune mystic; and he says, "The soul is like a sleeper, locked in dreams, who strives to move arm or eyelid; but the soul shall wake."

"Garçon, deux demis," you say.

"Of your own plays" —

"Their importance has been exaggerated," Maurice Maeterlinck says. "I am experimenting: I do not know when I shall find my way. I am not satisfied with the 'Princesse Maleine,' or with 'L'Intruse,' or the 'Aveugles.' 'Tintagiles'? Yes, that answered my thought. But I do not care for my plays after they are written. I love them best when they are in my mind. The conception is a pure

delight. The execution is a torment. And, then, it is so difficult to find the precise expression, the word adequate to the thought. Always it is a little to this side or to that. Ah! it is not an easy art."

* * * * * * * *

Loukios in Lucian was changed into an ass, but regained his humanity by eating roses. It is a pretty fable. It is the fable of modern literature, of modern poetry, of the modern poetical drama. One by one the poets who bore the pack-saddle of realism and nibbled the thistles of naturalism have eaten of the ideal roses, and lost gray hide and pendulous ears. The new art is a protest against Zola and against Rodin and against Claude Monet. It is the art of those who have eaten of roses: it is the art of Maeterlinck.

We have eaten of roses, and over us the night is mysterious. Strange whispers come down to us from the stars. Patiently we mount the hill of Calvary. We beat against the iron doors: it is Sister Ygraine who beats at the iron door, and it is humanity. Of old, life was plain: men knew all that was necessary; they lived as men on a journey, who know at what inn they shall lie down at night. But we,—we do not know.

See, then —

Somewhere in stormy seas there is an island, and on the island there is a castle; and in the castle

there is a great hall, lit with a little lamp ; and in the faint light of the lamp there are people who wait. For what do they wait ? They do not know. They wait for the lamp to go out; they wait for a knock at the door,— fear they await, and death. They speak,— ay, they speak little futile words that trouble the silence for a little while. Then they listen again, leaving the words unfinished, the gestures unresolved; waiting. They listen. They wait. It may be she will not come ? Oh, she will come. Always she comes. It is late : she may not come until to-morrow. And the people gathered in the great hall under the little lamp smile sadly, and try to hope. Some one knocks —

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The rain has begun to fall again on Brussels. The moon is hid. Maurice Maeterlinck wraps himself in his mackintosh, and says, " Good-night," — calmly, impersonally, as one gives the sele of the night to a passing stranger. He is thinking of his soul. You watch his tall figure until a tram-car shuts it from your view. Then you say, " Garçon, un bock ! "

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" Create, artist ! " said Goethe : " do not perorate." I know it is good of Maurice Maeterlinck to give us his practical thoughts on " Wisdom and Destiny ";

but how much richer we had been, had he written another "Intérieur," another "Maleine"! "Sagesse et Destinée," to be sure; but Maeterlinck is still young, and a book of this sort should be left as a last will and testament to humanity, as Pascal did — or did not — leave his "Thoughts." That beautiful book, "The Treasure of the Humble," was the record of Maeterlinck's mental life a few years ago. But something has happened.

"Leo est in via," said Solomon.

He met Nietzsche in the way,— this monstrous Nietzsche, who brawls morally, brawls as a moral lion in the preserves of the daughters of the desert. Strange meeting of the Humble One and the Individualist,— as of the marriage of Sir Willoughby Patterne and the patient Grizel.

They met in a green and mystic jungle, Nietzsche and Maeterlinck, and the noise of their moral brawling went abroad; and it is this book,— Maeterlinck's book of "Wisdom and Destiny."

Maeterlinck has a marvellous appreciation of the beauty of humble and quotidian life. In one of his plays, in which troubled, little souls face the mystery of life, he says, "Even unhappiness is better than sleep." And in those six words is the root of his philosophy, and the flower. In another place he has said that, as we ourselves grow better, we meet better men,— a fine truth! — and that a being who is good irresistibly attracts events as good as him-

self, and that in a beautiful soul the saddest mischance turns into beauty. It is a serene and not unactive philosophy of life. For this poet Wisdom is not a marble goddess: she follows us even in our sins and errors. And for the wise man Destiny is not oppressive chance,—the tumbling of unlucky dice,—but is the development due to experience of fortune good or ill. It is a simple theory, if once you grasp it, and is withal practical and opportune:

> Wisdom does not consist in having no passions, but in learning to purify those one has.

And then listen to this,—the voice is that of the Belgian, but the hands are those of Marcus Aurelius:—

> To be wise is, above all, to learn to be happy, and to learn at the same time to attach less and less importance to happiness *en soi.*

This is opportune morality. Like Renan's God, it is created from day to day. It is absolutely individual because it depends upon no religious or philosophical formula. Be good, and you will be happy? Quite so; but it is not that simple question that three persons so cerebral as you and Maeterlinck and I have got together to discuss at present.

I take from Maeterlinck's new book, then, the two leading theories,—the poet's theory of science

and his theory of love. A poet's discussion of science is interesting and paradoxal. I once knew an elegiac shepherd who had been raped from his windy hills and set to sweep the gutters of Padua: he swept them better than any scavenger of them all. And Maeterlinck has put into words a thought that has haunted many a man and has never been so well expressed. Science is tumbling down the old structures of morality, justice, happiness. It is knocking out the underpinnings of the moral world. That we all know. It has dug away a little here and a little there. In spite of fanciful Drummonds, it has dealt destructive blows to the present theory of religion. But everything is not yet toppled over. Science is still swinging the pick-axe, and a great many of the foundation stones are still untouched.

In these circumstances how should one live?

As of old, says Maeterlinck, as if the house were not falling.

Let me give you his thought: No matter what happens, the time given up to the study of one's self will not be lost. No matter in what way we may have to look upon the world of which we are part, there will always be more sentiments, passions, secrets, in the human soul than there are mysteries unveiled by science. Science maps the heavens; but there are undiscovered stars in the soul of man, for which science has no telescope. And, if in time

it be shown that all our hopes are vain, their very entertainment will have been an education. In other words, Maeterlinck believes in collaborating with Science, no matter what ultimate solution it may have to offer. And his hope in science is not purely rationalistic:

> To be wise is not to adore reason, nor is it to have accustomed reason to triumph over the lower instincts. Reason opens the door to wisdom.

True wisdom knows many things that reason does not approve or accept.

The first of these is love.

Maeterlinck's view of love is not that of the chilled scientist or of the simple Tolstoï. The scientist says grimly that love is an invention of the poets. (At all events, a beautiful invention,— one would give steam and electrical machinery and even self-playing-pianos-for-music-critics for it!) Tolstoï's love is a sort of systematic sacrifice of one's self to some one else. There is a certain moral nonchalance in this theory of love. It's an almost cowardly way of neglecting one's Nietzschean duty to one's self. Simply because I love some glorious woman — a creature with secular eyes and hair splendidly red — is no reason why I should not love myself, even though I be a negligible, bearded person. My duty is to myself. If my love does not make me happy, I owe it nothing. The inflexible

Spaniard who threw the women he loved out of the window because he felt they were not good for his soul was quite right. One's duty to one's self is more important than all the beneficent Tolstoïan sacrifice. It may be good now and then to forgive one's enemies, but only the weak man sacrifices himself to this conception of love. The duty of taking vengeance on an enemy has also its claims to be heard. There are moral Santiagos. One's moral force may be more vitally hurt by over-indulgence in abnegation, resignation, and sacrifice than by occasional vices and casual crimes.

Will you hear the new gospel?

It was born in the jungle, where Nietzsche brawled morally and the pale Belgian pulled up his soul by the roots, that he might see how it was growing; and it is —

Better than loving thy neighbor AS thyself it is to love him IN thyself.

This is a book of beautiful thoughts,— a poet's philosophy. And what a poet! You may see him going about Ghent or Brussels, a plump little attorney, with realistic trousers. Ah, well! not the white vesture and the shaven beard make the servant of Isis.

Émile Verhaeren

No matter how closely one may have questioned Verhaeren's genius, it is difficult to give the English reader any exact idea of his work. The man is so complex! To-day he is the greatest of French poets. Yet his genius is essentially Flemish. Across all his verse you see the gray landscapes of the north,— the yellow Scheldt, the sails and ships and dikes; over the sombre meadows you see the windmills flapping like evil, monstrous birds; you see the rain dropping from low clouds and the sea-fog coiling landward. Though he writes in French, though he is the greatest of living French poets, Verhaeren is of the north: only the voice is that of Esau.

He was born at Saint-Armand, near Antwerp, in 1855. He studied at the Collège Sainte-Barbe, at Ghent, and afterward entered the university at Louvain. It is an old town, Louvain, monkish and gray. Its university is darkly clerical. It was thence, you may remember, Father Damien went to die among the unsaved lepers. Once I talked with one of the professors. He was a gelid philologian, but he thawed as we sat over our bock in the Café Rubens. I asked him about Verhaeren.

"He was here from 1877 to 1881," my friend

said; "and even then he was a poet. He was a bit of a *révolutionnaire* as well. He and another student, Van Dyck"—

"The tenor?"

"Even he. These two founded a journal called *The Week*. It attacked everything,—Church and State, poetry and philology, the past and the future. We had to suppress it."

Verhaeren went to Brussels to study law; but (like Van Dyck) he soon wearied of it, and gave himself up to literature. His first volume of verse, "Les Flamandes," appeared in 1883. To-day he has published thirteen volumes of poetry and two books of criticism. This, as you see, is no slight prophylactic against oblivion. He has known ill-health. The marks of it are cut deep in his strong, rugged face. Withal, at forty-three, he has kept much of the ardor and frankness of youth. He is modest and gentle. He will chat with you of this and that, of poetry and socialism, of other men's work. Of himself he will say nothing.

"Why should I talk of myself?" he asked: "the best of me—and it may be the worst—is in my books."

In Verhaeren's early work there was an intimation of Victor Hugo, a hint of red romance, a touch of the hidalgo. In "Les Débâcles," even, you find the stress and color, the purple and passion, of

Émile Verhaeren

Goya and Zurbaran; and, indeed, there is Iberian blood in his veins. But little by little he got closer to life, closer to the soil, closer to the men of his race. In the splendid phrase of Ezekiel, he hunted the souls of his people. He has become a realist, — like Walt Whitman in his sincerity, like Rudyard Kipling in his vehemence.

In "Les Flamandes" he went to the people. He saw their life, and said it. It was a life not without vulgarity, it may be; but it was the vulgarity of the men of the soil, a vulgarity loyal, sane, healthy, and tender. The robust figures live, as they labor in the fields or riot in the kermesses. These are pictures that Jordaens might have painted, that Teniers did paint. There is no poetical artifice. You feel the authenticity of it all: the swans sailing the canals, the gold of evening and the straw of the farm-yard, tulips and pigs and peasants,— all are real.

Then came "The Monks." This was in 1886. At Forges, in the "black country" of Belgium, there is a monastery of Trappist monks, maintained by the Prince de Chimay. Verhaeren dwelt there for a time. A very beautiful book is the result. I have called it beautiful, and that is the one word to describe it. "Les Flamandes," you might have imagined, was forged in the reek of a smithy, amid flame and flying sparks and the clamor of iron beaten on the anvil: "Les Moines," on the other

hand, is formally beautiful, clear, strong, and, even in its strength, calm and equable. To pass from one book to the other is like going out of a stormy night into the gray peace of the cloister.

In these dumb monks he saw a marvellous heroism. He looked upon them as warriors, fighting impiety, fighting the world, fighting themselves, for God : —

> Abatteurs d'hérésie à larges coups de croix,
> Géants chargés d'orgueil que Rome immortalise.

Verhaeren gave five years to the composition of his trilogy,—the three volumes, "Les Soirs," "Les Débâcles," and "Les Flambeaux Noirs." I should call these poems a study in self-martyrdom, that most dolorous flower of modern civilization. Here all is dark and sinister. The sky is iron, and the earth is shadow. In the shadows of the earth there are cries and oaths and hideous red hands lifted; murder is done, and foul desires slink by like wolves; and the mind of man is as a charnel-house. Then there is a hint of day,—this is the second part of the trilogy,—a stormy, tormented dawn,—a "red dawn crucified on the horizon." And the man who has lost his faith finds hope : —

> Hamlet rirait peut-être, hélas ! mais Parsifal ?
> O Parsifal, bénin et clair, comprendrait certes.

In the third part, day has come : life takes on its wonted aspect. There is sunshine on the green

fields and yellow roads; the sweet air is made gladsome by the sun; and the man stands, haggard as a ghost out of Dante's hell, *seul avec son âme.*

This, in a way, is the scheme of the trilogy; but I can give you no idea of the strength and fervor of the verse. It is tumultuous and disordered, barbaric as the clangor of brazen pans; and yet it is Titanic in its magnificence; as George Moore says that Flaubert said, "C'est gigantesque."

In this sketch I can touch only upon Verhaeren's more important works. His masterpiece is the second trilogy: "Les Campagnes Hallucinées," "Les Villages Illusoires," and "Les Villes Tentaculaires." These three are the most important poems given to the world since "Leaves of Grass."

Often the poet's voice is high and harsh, for he is telling the tale of his people's misery; but in the main the verse is distinguished for sober magnificence and grim power.

Until Kipling wrote "McAndrew's Hymn," poetry disdained the engine-room of the sea-going tramp. Verhaeren's subject has hitherto belonged to the sociologist. His heroic trilogy is built on the disquieting fact that the country is being deserted, while the cities are growing monstrously. Unquestionably, this is the most important social event of the age. Doubtless it is a natural movement, necessary and inevitable, as the change from the old nomadic life to that of camps and settle-

ments. To the philosopher it is a reasonable phenomenon, marking the beginning of a new civilization: to the poet it is an epic and a tragedy. The poet sees the naked, black, abandoned fields; the deserted homes, doorless and windowless; and along the highways lean, hopeless, interminable caravans journeying to the crowded cities. He walks abroad in his deserted country. The sea is stealing back the disregarded fields. The tattered windmills sprawl like monstrous spiders. The stagnant canals are green with poison. No cattle come there to drink. The very flowers are dead. Birds of prey fly shrieking overhead. Mankind has fled to the apocalyptic cities of refuge. Huge and grim, they lie along the horizon, under flags of smoke and carbon flame.

Here and there, however, a few villages have survived. Are they real or things of fantasy, these "Villages Illusoires"? In the rotting houses the old laborers rot: life drifts down to hideous idiocy.

But in the cities? In the "Villes Tentaculaires"? Life riots there among the swollen shops and bazaars and palaces and temples. And here the voice of the Belgian poet is as the voice of Ezekiel prophesying the destruction of Tyre and Sidon and the city of Gog.

Verhaeren has rhythm.

You remember the prelude of "Siegfried," — this insistence and iteration from the forge of Nibelheim? It is in Verhaeren's verse. Yes, he has

rhythm, virile as Walt Whitman, lyric as Kipling, varied as Hugo. He has color,— of blood and gold and night, of metal and flame. His verse has rare splendor. No poet, I think, has in such a degree the Rembrandt gift of light and shade. He knows how to cut an absolute black with a virginal white. But I have no desire to discuss the technical side of his verse at this moment. My only purpose is to give you a general idea of his complex genius. At times he is purple, violent, hidalgic; his voice is brocade. At other times, and especially in his later poems, his style is direct, brief, strict, hard; his metaphors are realistic, popular, vulgar, common and yet unforeseen, so modern they are. He does not believe that it is the duty of a poet to close his eyes to the common and the modern — to dock and canal, bridge and tunnel, steam-engine and trolley. He has the faculty of disengaging the poetical significance of the commonplace object and fact.

It is the faculty that has distinguished every great poet from Homer to Whitman.

In France there are scores of busy, little men, tinkering verses and soldering rhymes; but the great French poet of this day is Émile Verhaeren — and he is a Fleming.

I do not praise all he has written (not all of Wagner's music is admirable and Shakspere may have written "Titus Andronicus," after all), but even of his early, tempestuous work there is little that I would willingly let die.

Georges Eekhoud

Eastward from Antwerp stretches the Campine, a land of sandy dunes and cold mists, inhabited by a primal, half-savage race of peasants. It is Georges Eekhoud's country. He has made it his own — as Hardy took Wessex — by right of literary conquest. At present he lives in Brussels, brightest and most coquettish of modern capitals; but in a truer sense his home is there by the gray sea, under the cold mists. His youth was passed in Switzerland. He spent many years there among the shining peaks and the green plains of the Aar; it was exile. Sometimes there is no sadness in exile. Ovid drank mare's milk under the leather tents of the Sarmatians and sang like a nightingale. But Georges Eekhoud knew *le mal du pays* from which Sacher Masoch suffered. Over his life and dreams there brooded always the dark and savage Campine. And when he came to write, his subjects were taken from this old corner of old Flanders.

"Semi-paganus sum," said Persius; it is the legend I have written under the picture of Georges Eekhoud that hangs over my writing-table. His is the stormiest soul in modern literature. The little revolts of Adolphe Retté, the poetical indignation of Émile Verhaeren, are but mint and cumin and

Georges Eekhoud

Bruxelles
28 juillet 1898

anise to the strenuous and violent rebellion of this outlaw of letters.

I have called him an outlaw, but the word needs a gloss. He is a bandit, like José Maria, the chivalrous Castilian, whom high dames loved. The bandit — he alone preserves the precious traditions of the customs, passions and original traits of his race. He is the last representative of the life that was once the common property of all his countrymen. The European palette is uniform and gray. You cannot distinguish the Swedish diplomat from the Roumanian *chargé d'affaires* — yonder as they sit over their cigars — but who would ever mistake Fra Diavolo for a Palicare of Epirus? Georges Eekhoud is the loyal and audacious son of his own stormy lowlands. He is sib to the hardy mariners and those fierce peasants who, in their lusty games and savage love-making, preserve some of the old barbaric worship of the gods of the sea and the land. He is the last representative of the pagan lovers. To be sure he has made this country of his merely, his *pointe du départ;* through the mouths of his peasants he has proclaimed the solidarity of mankind; he has measured the present organization of society — what is called civilization — with the free life of his chosen country and — but he has left the reader to draw his own conclusions. They are poor, these peasants; they are humiliated and driven — for even into their poor villages the mili-

tary law reaches; but they know the great passions — to know the great passions, my civilized brother, think what it is!

The American reader can find no better introduction to Georges Eekhoud's books than a little story by Stanley Waterloo,—"A Tragedy of the Forest." The hero of Mr. Waterloo is a man who has known the soul of the gray wolf, and has hunted the fleeting deer in the pines. Between these two great writers — the Belgian and the American — there is the common link of Berserker blood. They have not lost communion — as most of us, tamed and saddened by civilization, have — with the primal instincts. They can brood with the heron and hunt with the wolf. By a sort of victorious anachronism they can live the old life of wood and cave.

There is in Georges Eekhoud's work a little of Nietzsche; he, too, might have said: "For the superfluous the State was invented." In the false, excited life of the cities he sees only that "slow suicide called life"; he has Nietzsche's splendid contempt for the artificialities of civilization and all the jargon of official and timid virtue. And if one is to get at Georges Eekhoud in this way, it should be added, that he is not without a touch of Meredithian reverence for the earth itself — for the renewing soil and obliterating sea, these eternal protests against civilization.

An angry and turbulent soul — in fiction Eek-

houd stands for that philosophical revolt against the smug and equalitarian organization of life, which in Nietzsche found its prophet and in Verhaeren its poet.

In "Kees Doorik," in the first and second series of the "Kermesses," in the "Milices de Saint-François," you will find this side of Eekhoud's thought developed with rare power. Only one word can describe them; they are monstrous books — monstrous in power. Hoarse and frenetic laughter echoes through them. These peasants, as Verhaeren finely said, "tower, angular and savage, as old statues of wood." And the light the author throws upon them is like that of torches, blown and red. He admits their prejudices. He glorifies their ignorance. He shares their sullen hatred of the city. He emphasizes, if he does not aggravate, the savagery of their passions. I should do but scant justice to my author were I to leave with you the thought that he is only a rebel, waving a torch and scattering fire-brands. Unquestionably, the first impression you gain from reading these novels is one of revolt,— there are cries of violence, love snarls in sylvan moods, hate is swift and summary. But behind this, above it and round it, like an atmosphere, there is a vague element of tenderness and faith, which is felt rather than seen. His peasants have the frank, notable vices of the bandit; but they are sincere and valiant, true to each other;

their love is sweet and naïve; they are grave and honorable — as wolves that hunt in pack. They are rich in the pagan qualities of paternal and filial love.

"Kees Doorik" and "Kermesses" (especially the first series) represent Georges Eekhoud's first period. They are his "Lara" and his "Giaour." The "Nouvelle Carthage" was a book of transition. In my sketch of Verhaeren I have pointed out the importance which the question of the city has assumed in old-world literature. You see it darkly across Zola's patiently dull pages. In Verhaeren's heroic trilogy it takes on epic proportions. Nowhere, however, has the subject been treated with greater power than in the "Nouvelle Carthage." It is a wonderful synthesis of the grandeur and shame of the city — with its ports and shops and banks and theatres — "cities where the cowardly and indifferent rich torture implacably the souls of artists and artisans." The same thought runs through the "Nouvelles Kermesses." This book is a magnificent paraphrase of Story's hymn to the conquered — may I not say a paraphrase of the teachings of that first Democrat? There is a class of men, made up of those who struggle, who resist — and succumb; and beneath them is a lower class of those to whom even the struggle is an impossibility — the classless, life's outcasts, the vagrom men. These are the eternal victims of civilization; they who cannot rise. With a sympathy, that is in the

way of being genius, Georges Eekhoud has captured the secret of these vagrom men. How well he knows the outcast soul you may see in "Le Cycle Patibulaire" and "Mes Communions"— his masterpieces.

M. André Fontainas has described a visit Eekhoud made to an old seigneurial castle in the most desolate region of his Campine, that

> Misty, mid-region of Weir.

It was a ruined old castle and had long been given over to the vagrom men. And for these *las d'aller*, as he called them, Georges Eekhoud was taken with a great compassion; but when he knew them better, compassion became sympathy; and he said:

"Yes, most of them are indolent, savage; they are dazed and lost; their eyes are humid and visionary; they understand nothing of life, the world, the code, morals; they do not know what they have to do on this earth; dragged on by this gaffe or that, the feeble, the have-no-chance, sheep always shorn, the passive, the exploited, the dupes who have remained candid as children; vitiated, but not vicious — the eternal *souffre-douleurs*." These are not the *chemineaux* of Jean Richepin. They do not know the Dream. They are the great protagonists of civilization — they whose unhappy destiny it is to kill the chiefs of empire — they with Caserio's heart and the hand of Luccheni. They haunt the city

and the forest. In the great capitals they have their own sure and secret domain. They live without law. They die on the barricades or in the gutter.

Georges Eekhoud went down among these vagrom men — with Walt Whitman's formidable courage, he lived with them *en frère et en égal.* He came to understand their pride, their passion, their strange tenderness, at once defiant and ashamed. With them he discerned the eternal justice that lies behind the fashionable laws of this civilization or that. He studied the vagrom men — without gloating sentimentalism, with hardly a hint of that restless and sensitive compassion, which Macaulay thought characteristic of our day. Eekhoud does not reprove; he does not weep; he does not beat his breast. He sees things and says them — that sublime privilege of genius. He saw that human nature is above and beyond all artifices of law; and he said that it is by prohibitions, by moral and legal constraints that man has created the necessity of crime, but that he alone is culpable who has so humiliated his nature that he can submit without revolt. Here it is, he reaches the point whence Zarathustra set out.

This is not meat for little people or for fools.

I have spoken more of the philosophical contents of Eekhoud's work than of its form. The chief characteristic of his style is its vehemence and forth-

Sunday morning in a Polder village where Eekhoud lived for many years

rightness — its essentially dramatic qualities. There is a very fine illustration of what I mean in "Le Comte de la Digue"— Eekhoud's latest novel. The development of the young Dykgrave's character is in the manner of the old English dramatists, of Marlowe and Webster, perhaps, rather than Shakspere. Life, for this young rebel, sweeps a great circle, through pain and passion to an end as sad and inevitable as that of "The Atrides." It is a psychological drama. Indeed, I would say that "Le Comte de la Digue" is a singularly fine example of that old implex drama which Aristotle defined as the "purgation of the passions." Like the Greeks, Eekhoud has seized the double rôle of pity and terror in human life; and the end of the story is the peace which comes when these passions are in perfect counterpoise. Such an art is neither moral nor immoral. Once you have accepted the psychological scenario, you have accepted the *dénouement*. "Le Comte de la Digue" is not a book for bachelors and maids; it is a book only for the unusual reader, who can see, across the stormy play of passions, the fixed and immobile idea. In modern French prose I know of no pages so terrible as those which describe the *fête* of the women of Smaragdis — a fierce, mænadic riot, to which the carousals of the Lapithæ were pallid and slight. Shrieking Bacchantes "with their souls of wine"— with shameless, secular eyes and wind-blown hair —

rage through the gray forest, in savage and atavistic moods, the true daughters of those blond beasts, who howled to Thor and Odin. The sombre splendor of Eekhoud's style — its warmth and music and color — its strenuousness and exaltation are eminently Elizabethan.

I have in mind an afternoon in Brussels; out of doors the April air, warm and soft with unshed rain; within a flutter of women, and men lolling — and Eekhoud erect, impassioned, reading aloud that wonderful scene in the forest, from Beaumont and Fletcher's "Philaster, or Love Lies A' Bleeding." And in a way it is typical, for Eekhoud has brought back to an age, weary of analysis — weary of pulling up its soul to see how the roots are spreading — the old Elizabethan fervor and forthrightness. His heroes would have been at home with Sidney, Drake, Surrey, Marlowe, Webster, Shakspere. They are heroic figures and he drapes them — this master of vital prose — in garments splendid, flashing, opulent.

Terror and pity, I have said —

On the whole, I believe that pity is the leading *motif* of Georges Eekhoud's work. Camille Lemonnier — a Belgian writer whom I should like to praise in a flight of silver phrases — speaks of Eekhoud as *l'ami des taciturnes* — "He confesses them, he consoles them, he draws them to him with all the magnetism of his misericordial heart. These mute

souls are to him like the sick who know not why they suffer, nor for what fault they are punished. He lies by them on their beds of pain; he bathes his eyes in their nostalgia; he washes their sores and gives them the kiss that St. Julian l'Hospitalier laid upon the mouth of the leper." And this is very true; Eekhoud's work is built upon the *motif* of infinite pity. His bitterness, his revolts, his stormy and sombre splendors, are all protests against the unhappiness of unhappy men.

Georges Eekhoud is a man as improbable as Edgar Allan Poe — as exceptional as Walt Whitman. He is of this age and he is ageless. Better than any one he has discerned the psychological tragedy that lies behind the social evils of our inadequate civilization; and that tragedy he has written in a half-dozen books — books so powerful and personal, that I cannot believe the world will willingly let them die.

Not long ago at a dinner given, in Brussels, to Georges Eekhoud, Émile Verhaeren read this poem:

> Dans cet œuvre que tous, avec toute notre âme,
> Au long des jours ingrats, rayés parfois de flamme,
> Impatients d'éveil, graves de souvenir,
> Nous bâtissons — depuis quinze ans — vers l'avenir,
> Ton art àtoi, ton art séditieux de force,
> Ton art rude et crispe se dresse comme un torse,
> Non pas d'onyx parfait, non pas de marbre pur,
> Non pas correct et blanc sur fond banal d'azur,

Mais de sève angoissée et de chair énergique
Où s'ouvre — entaille au clair — la pourpre, fleur tragique.

En ce torse large et vivant, tu l'as planté
Ce cœur, le tien, où tout amour a fermenté :
La passion elle est vissée en toi ; tu l'aimes
En ces cris torturés et ses gestes suprêmes.
Tu choisis tiens parmi les coins de ton pays,
Les bourgs les plus lointains, les sols les plus transis ;
Au fond des yeux de ceux que repousse le monde,
Tu recueilles, pieux, l'affre la plus profonde.

Le plus haut de nous tous, tu l'es, par cette foi
Que les battus et les chassés ont mise en toi ;
Tes vœux, depuis longtemps, font la croisière humaine
Par à travers les mers des pleurs et de la peine,
N'ayant crainte jamais que les vents arrogants
N'accrochent à ton mat l'aile des ouragans,
Ni que s'égare au loin ton courage erratique
Parti pour un grand port de pitié frénétique.

Aussi, chaque fois qu'un de tes livres s'en vient
Te prouver tel : fiévreux de l'art, fiévreux du bien,
Uniquement mordu par ton travail, vorace
D'émotion extrême et rouge où bout ta race,
Loyal à tous et bon et de zéle affermi
Quand la bétise autour de nos bouquins aboie,
Te magnifions-nous avec ferveur et joie
Comme maître écrivain et comme maître ami.

Is it not true that there is a Belgian renascence in art and letters — think, then : Maeterlinck, Verhaeren and Eekhoud, this trinity ; Félicien Rops, Peter Benoit and Jan Blockx ; a new pleiad.

Georges Rodenbach

A gentle poet is dead.

Do you remember Raffaelli's portrait of Georges Rodenbach? It is etched with rare precision and intelligence and gives you, better than words, the air with which this poet braved life. Tall and slim and pale, with gold hair that curled, and a drooping mustache, with dreamy eyes and delicate hands, Rodenbach was a romantic-looking dandy — the sort of man at whom women look regardfully. A handsome man, accomplished in the modish insolence of the day — Parisian to the finger-tips — he was at heart as dreamy and mystic as the dead city of his love. Always he had the air of one who had come out of the North — that North of misty winters and sombre skies, of gray seas and snowy lowlands. He was born in Bruges. His youth was passed there, amid the dead canals and the fading streets. He studied in a priestly college. At twenty he went to Paris — stepping at once from the cloister to the Quartier Latin. He wrote verses and plays and tales. Some of them were published. All of them were futile. They were the imitations, the parodies and pompous attempts through which every young man passes on his way to a knowledge of his own thought and his own style. He knew

the writers and artists of the day. All about him Paris glittered and tinkled —

Bruges called to him.

And he felt that he was an exile ; inquiet and athirst for solitude and silence, for the cloisters and quays and sleeping waters, for the anæmic sun of the North and the gray dreams, he went back to the city of his birth to become its poet and elegist.

Over Bruges stand three towers — Notre-Dame, Saint-Sauveur and the Belfry — dark and austere as monks. Day and night the bells ring and the music falls flakily — as the sunlight slips from leaf to leaf of the gray poplars — over the city. And round the city and through it, like the silver of a spider's web, are stretched the lean canals. The old houses with the old roofs and the old windows look down on the lethargic waters of the canals. The waters, too, are old and still. You may stand upon them and stare down into them as into a blue mirror. The trees are mirrored there and the old houses with the old windows. In the depths of the waters — beneath the white lilies that dream on the surface — you can see a shadowy city, which is at once the phantom and the soul of Bruges. See — this is the real Bruges, there in the waters, the ancient city with monkish towers and walls eloquent of mediæval war — and, see, here sails a swan, serenely beautiful, and the vision is broken. The most indifferent cheap-tripper may know Bruges,

J.F. RAFFAËLLI

the upper city of tramcars and new quays, but only one man has known the soul of Bruges — Georges Rodenbach.

I do not know how long he remained in Bruges — a number of years it may be — but his sojourn was long enough to teach him his way in literature. In later days I used to see him in Paris — at the old Théâtre-Libre, at the Œuvre, at the opera on Wagner nights — a gallant, mocking, ironic figure of a man. And yet this dandy, with his tall gray hat, his white waistcoat and pallid scarf, was but a simulacrum. The soul of Georges Rodenbach was in Bruges.

Rodenbach was influenced, but not to his undoing, by the Goncourts; he had a little of their ambition to make a paint-brush of his pen. His work is that of a cerebral, aristocratic man. His style is delicate, subtle, veiled. For every author whom one loves one finds sooner or later a concrete symbol. Georges Rodenbach always summons for me a picture of a white Beguin nun passing through some dark mediæval street on a white errand. I said he was the poet of Bruges — he is the poet of windy belfries, of incense and candles and dim altars, the poet of linen veils and old chambers and old mirrors, wherein troop the ghosts of dead desires; the poet of rain and silence, of white and gray. Have you read "La Jeunesse Blanche"? Or that best of all his books, "Règne du Silence"?

After all, there is nothing quite so wonderful as silence. To one who listens, as Rodenbach did, silence is haunted with faint, mystic sounds, echoes from the *au-delà*, even as he who watches may see in blackness ripples and blushes of color. This poet heard the carillons of silence. He knew the silence of the dead city. He sings thereof in muted rhymes. Here, for instance, is an old, old chamber, with faded tapestries and dim mirrors, impregnated with the past: —

> Rien n'a changé ; les glaces seules
> Sont tristes d'avoir recueilli
> Le visage un peu plus vieilli
> Des mélancholiques aïeules.

And since the book is before me let me quote a few of those verses in which he has told the life of the bells: —

> Les chants du carillon, tombant du beffroi fier,
> S'effeuillaient dans le vent comme des fleurs de fer.
>
> * * * * * * *
>
> Et voici que soudain les cloches agitées
> Ébranlent le beffroi debout dans son orgueil,
> Et leurs sons, lourds d'airain, sur la ville au cercueil
> Descendent lentement comme des pelletées.

That first couplet has haunted me for years: —

> The songs of the bells fall from the haughty towers,
> Go fluttering down the wind like iron flowers.

Georges Rodenbach is one of those poets who take their pleasures sadly. He hymns the gray things of life. Perhaps it is impossible that there should not be a certain degree of monotony in his works. It is all perfect, all silver-gray, all melancholy; and it is all Bruges. One is half tempted to wish that he would desert Bruges for a while, were it only for a cheap-tripper's jaunt to Antwerp. And yet I do not know. In the dozen books he has left, Rodenbach has preserved — in amber of golden prose and verse — this fragment of old-world life and art. He has done one thing well. He has painted only one picture — but that a masterpiece. He has interpreted the soul of Bruges — this city of the past — and it is rather uncritical to arraign him for not having capered on the house-tops of Paris. Bruges is almost the last of the cities of the Netherlands which have withstood the onset of the Seven-headed Beast of commerce. On its sleepy canals only the swans sail. And Bruges will go the way of all the other cities of refuge — whither you and I fled from the rusty noises of commerce. Last spring when I was there they told me of some monstrous scheme for making it a manufacturing town. Soon all its immemorial beauty will live only in the books of Georges Rodenbach. Doubtless the historians have rifled the old archives. Doubtless they will write all sorts of inutile and ponderous histories. But it is to Rodenbach alone that Bruges has told

her secret. He has known the soul of the old city. And that you may know it, you have but to read the "Règne du Silence," the "Vies Encloses," the "Vocation," the "Musée de Béguines," and "Bruges-la-Morte."

The "Carillonneur" is, I believe, his last book. It is the story of the soul of a woman and the soul of the bells in the belfries at Bruges.

I still remember the curiosity that was excited a few years ago — in 1894, I think — when it was announced that a play by Georges Rodenbach would be exposed at the Comédie-Française. Rodenbach was a declared enemy of all the dramatic modes of the day. The corrosive pessimism of Becque, the brutal observation of the naturalists and Théâtre-Librists were as far from his approbation as the mean little clowneries of Pailleron or the rancid jests of Bisson *et id omnes.* Now "Le Voile" was not a success. Perhaps it was not a play at all, but in any case it was poetry — fanciful, sweet, subtle, and original. Of course the scene was in Bruges — the costumes were those of Bruges — and all through the play the bells of Bruges rang, faint and sacerdotal. It was an atmosphere, an environment that Rodenbach gave us, rather than a play. The story was simple to the vanishing point.

Jean has lived for many years in a quiet home with his old aunt. She has fallen ill and a Beguin nun has been called in to attend her. This is the

situation when the little drama begins. Dreamy and meditative Jean has watched this veiled girl come and go in his tranquil house, and he has thought of her as one who is young and fair — or perhaps he has thought of her only as a veiled mystery. It may be he has learned to love this mystery — this silent Gudule, concealed beneath her white garments. But his love is faint and visionary, a dream rather than a reality. Little by little, however, he wakens to a stronger interest in her. Across the veil he catches a glimpse of her white face; but her hair? What color is her hair? It becomes a passion, an obsession. He feels that life is worth nothing if he cannot know the color of her hidden hair. At last he tells her of his love — is it love or merely the fantasy of a grave and lonely man? Gudule makes no reply. All this is so far from her quotidian life that she does not even understand it. Then Jean takes courage and asks her to tell him the color of her hair. And the veiled Beguin nun replies: "I do not know, because when I clothe myself it is not yet day, and when I lay aside my veil it is already dark." And when he presses her for an answer she speaks a few cold words and goes away. The old aunt is very ill, and when she dies Jean knows that Sister Gudule will leave his house. He dreams of marrying her. Why not? The Beguin nuns do not take perpetual vows; they are free to go again into the world. And then he would know —

At that moment the old aunt dies, and Sister Gudule, wakened by the servant, rushes in — she has had no time to put on her veil. And Jean seeing her, cries : "She — it is no longer she." He does not love her; what he loved was the mystery of her hair. He parts from her with a cold farewell. And over all you hear the rhythmic clamor of the bells of Bruges.

"Le Voile" is not a drama, as I have said; but it is an exquisite poem, and the symbol is subtle and full of beauty. There are few men, even the most matter-of-fact, who have not loved the hidden hair of Gudule.

Georges Rodenbach wrote like a man who had an orchid in his buttonhole and the fear of God in his heart. His work is at once aristocratic, delicate, chiselled, and as well informed with great tenderness and a melancholy peculiarly his own.

Max Elskamp and Fernand Severin

> . . . un vieil homme de cent ans
> Qui dit selon la chair, Flandre et le sang:
> Souvenez-vous-en, souvenez-vous-en,
> En ouvrant son cœur de ses doigts tremblants
>
> Pour montrer à tous sa vie comme un livre,
> Et, dans sa joie comme en ses oraisons,
> Tout un genre humain occupé à vivre
> En ses vies près d'hommes et d'enfants.

In these verses — they are from "Enluminures" — I have always thought that Max Elskamp summed up his poetry. He is the poet of a happy Flanders, where the bells ring carillons of hope and faith and joy. He is naïf and mystic. In order to enter the kingdom of heaven he has made himself as a little child. For him angels walk the old Flemish streets at night; there are daily miracles in the ancient cathedrals. He looks upon life with the eyes of the contemporaries of Memmling and Van Eyck. He sings litanies to the Virgin — to Mary of the Sun and Rain, Mary of Ineffable Things — and his verses have the simplicity of folk-songs. He sings of the poor man and the joys of labor in the fields. He makes a little book of emblems in the fashion that was dear to Gabriel Harvey and Edmund Spenser. In each emblem he

incarnates a passion, an idea, a virtue. He is a belated monk.

In almost all the verse of the neo-Christians there is a hint of insincerity. Perhaps Verlaine is the only profoundly religious poet of our day. Elskamp's love for the old religion seems to be largely poetical — love for the altar and the candles and the bells, love for the slim angels in the painted windows. His love for the Virgin is compounded of love for illumined missals and love of race. The Virgin he worships is the Virgin of Flanders, smiling comfortably from some old canvas: —

> Marie de mes beaux navires,
> Marie étoile de la mer,
> me voici triste et bien amer
> d'avoir si mal tenté vous dire.

Max Elskamp has recovered an old, fresh view of life. He has brought back to literature the frank simplicity of the old faith, and he has hymned it in verses of chaste and exquisite beauty. The chief distinction of his verse is its music. Not even Gustave Kahn has bent free verse so victoriously to the musical mood.

* * * * * * * *

Of the young Belgians Fernand Severin is the only poet of note who proclaims his devotion to the austere rules of the old prosody. His poetry is

Fernand Severin

beautiful in spite of his dogged deference to abolished canons. His verse has the polish and artifice that Baudelaire made the mode of his day; his thought is not without souvenirs of the gloating sentimentalism that had its awful end in Coppée. One might say truly enough that Severin was born with souvenirs. The old dreams haunt his imagination. He lives among the old flowers and the old ideals. His thoughts go out on the old crusades. He wanders in gardens "bathed in silence and the moon," and sees in nature the "beauty of a dream." He is sweet, contained, accomplished — a pale grandson of Lamartine strolling through a Corot landscape. He does not raise his voice. He does not gesticulate. There is a charm, discreet and exceptional, in his lyric gentleness. He is the last of the classic poets — this sweet poet of "Le Lys," of "Un Chant dans l'Ombre," of the "Don d'Enfance." He is the last poet who dares sing of the muses and the lyre: —

> Si ton sang a rougi les chemins de l'erreur,
> Ah ! qu'importe ? Un Léthé d'ineffable langueur
> Baigne les vallons bleus où t'ont pleuré les Muses.
>
> Que cherchais-tu, dis-nous, parmi le peuple vain ?
> La Lyre t'a bercé dans un calme divin ;
> Là-bas gronde à jamais la vie aux voix confuses!
>
> Mais toi chanteur paisible, à l'ombre de tes bois,
> Silencieux pour tous, pour toi peuplés de voix,
> En quel bienheureux songe, enfant, tu te recueilles!

Reviens nous! Et, fidèle au rêve familier,
Ravis le bois céleste où grandit ton laurier
D'un chant simple et nouveau comme le bruit des feuilles.

Are they not charming verses? Were you to ask me to define their charm, I should say, I fancy, that it lies in the delicious purity of expression. Once after a stormy Wagner night I went into Schiller's room in Weimar town. I sent away the old caretaker, and sat down at Schiller's harpsichord and played in the darkness — played, very gently, little tinkling sonatas of Scarlatti and faded Italian minuets.

And now, when I read Severin's verses, that night comes back to me, with all its faded artifice and faded charm.

The Last of the Parnassians

Catulle Mendès

'Twas the soul of Catulle Mendès,
   Faded and blond and fat,
Wandered by night through Paris,
   Dreaming of this and that ;
It dreamed of gray Judea,
   Of Parsifal and gnomes,
And passing the gates of Judith,
   It dreamed of — Augusta Holmes.
Where the sad lights of Montmartre
   Shine, pitifully red,
The soul of Catulle Mendès
   Paused waiting for the dead.
And small pale girls came trooping
   With hot, incessant eyes,
They beckoned and whimpered and nodded
   With laughter and little cries.
And women of rose and amber
   Streamed past him like blown clouds,
But the soul of Mendès shuddered,
   For the women walked in shrouds.
All dead and damned they walked there —
   They were sand and wind and flame —
And the soul of Mendès softened,
   And called them name by name.

*   *   *   *   *   *

It was strange there on Montmartre,
(The lights morose and red),
To hear the soul of Mendès
Talk with the sheeted dead.

BELIEVE me, it was very strange. Hour after hour we had walked the silent streets, the streets immitigably gray. It was not Hugo's Paris — city of light — it was a sad Paris, a Paris neither splendid nor horrible, a Paris inert and monstrous under linen cloths of fog. We wandered. At my side, step for step, went the Soul of Catulle Mendès. It spread its arms abroad and cried aloud — to the winter air and the gray night. And the voice was as the voice of Job what time he sat upon a dunghill and scratched himself wi' a broken pot.

"I am old," cried the Soul of Mendès, "and faded and fat. For others are the songs that came unbidden, the gracile girls who were eager for kisses, the flowers and laughter of life! Ah! the old skies and the lust of life, men and the nostrils of women, the verses of Michael Angelo, lilies and the little breasts of Mary Magdalene, the music of silver flutes, the ankles of Herodias and the roses of Elizabeth of Hungary, the sighs of Cordelia and the sighs of Desdemona, the purple splendor of the robe of Marcus Aurelius and the robe of Louis of Bavaria. Oh! vale of Tempe, lake of Starnberg! — white swan of Lohengrin, lilies and candor and elohim, eternity!"

And the days when Catulle Mendès was "the wickedest man in Paris" have passed forever. (One cannot be at once fat and wicked; growth of the waist-line is coincident with increase in virtue and Daniel Lambert is the good man's ideal.) Youth passes; and for Catulle Mendès — as for the rest of us — all that is left is a little flirting with the ghosts of old days, a little visionary mourning for dead sins and faded sensations. He is old and fat and the flagons of life reek with stale beer.

Once — then he was a poet.

He had long, golden hair and a blond beard, like a young rabbi. He had youth and beauty and subtle talent. He was so sleek, so gentle, so bright and gay and cynical, this Catulle Mendès. He wrote rare rhymes, ecstatic, voluptuous, deliriously wicked — for there was in him a brutal streak of original sin; he wrote in strange metres, in old rhythms culled from Ronsard; he wrote Lesbian sonnets, with interlacing rhymes; he foreshadowed the mysticism, obscure and pagan, of the poets of to-day. He sang of kisses, and breasts — always kisses, as one might read a bill of fare instead of dining!

The literary eunuchs, to whom decadence is as impossible as growth, talk smugly of the decadents and much folly is said and printed; but the young Catulle Mendès was the true decadent, as Callimachus was, as Claudian was and Luxorius. All

the beauty of the formal, the external, was at his beck and call. And this damned him — he sold his soul for the beautiful phrase. But what cleverness was his, immense, amazing, diabolical!

He imitated Heine's little songs so perfectly that one might fancy one were reading the "Intermezzo"; he wrote "Hesperus," and the voice was the voice of Catulle, the son of Tibulle Mendès, but the hands were those of Leconte de Lisle. He wrote "Contes Épiques," and the thunder was that of Hugo, pealing grandiosely in the "Légende des Siècles."

How completely he had the trick of literature!

He juggled so expertly that he almost persuaded one generation that literature was all sleight of hand. Have you read "Pour Lire au Bain" and "Pour Lire au Couvent"? Then you know him, full of science and artifice, with wise graces, a martyr to the sophisticated sensuality of phrase.

He was handsome in those days, with that blond, pathetic head of Christ — the irony of it! — and those calm, piercing eyes, the red, feminine mouth smiling contemptuously through the yellow beard. He had little Hebraic gestures; he was restless as a panther; he would stroke your coat-sleeve as he whispered in your ear Satanic things, witty, impossible, nocturnal things. It was Baudelaire, the professor emeritus of literary corruption, who said of him: "I love this young man — he has all the

vices." And Sainte-Beuve, shocked and pleased, passed judgment upon him, saying: "Honey and poison."

Let me tell you the story, decorously and with no undue impertinence, of two poets, who loved right royally and were married for a little while. I shall not tell you why they quarrelled; perhaps neither was to blame; it was incompatibility of rhyme. (You remember that Daudet wrote very wisely of artists' wives and deduced the lesson that the man of talent should never marry a woman of talent. The ideal wife for the painter, the musician or the man of letters is the matter-of-fact woman. She should be a trifle dull, a trifle heavy. She should have an animal-like somnolence and stolidity in which he might rest as in a mental feather bed. The artist is more or less irresponsible; he is full of irritancies. His work demands of him a certain intensity, which when the strain is over, lapses into peevishness, or at all events, into weakness. In these moments he does not want the counter-irritant of a woman's brilliancy. He wants a mental feather bed.)

The poets of whom I write are Catulle Mendès and Judith Gautier. She is — do you recall Goncourt's "There are no women of genius; women of genius are men"? — she is, in spite of all epigrams, a woman of genius — a sad little genius full of whims and morbid fantasies, but genius at bottom.

And in those days Judith Gautier was very beautiful, beautiful as one of her father's poems, in perfection of line and haunting grace. "Face of the moon and lotus eyes"—*hélas! hélas! les jours d'autrefois.* Her profile was that of a Greek cameo. It was as though in her white and stately grace she had stepped down from the Parthenon frieze. Withal, there was something savage in her strange, yellow eyes—something barbarous, untamed. And in her attitudes there was the indolence of an Eastern slave. She was half-cat and half-goddess.

And the world bored her.

She wrote poems in prose and verse—charming little poems, filled with the innocence of dreams and the sadness of the young girl. She amused herself with the sciences, for these things are but a poet's recreation. She played with the lizards, blue and gold. And she was bored. The world's old ennui took her, as it took Byron among his books and mistresses, as it takes the caged lions and sets them yawning.

Then a poet came and Judith, tired of her lizards, married him.

It is now over a quarter of a century ago that he came from Bordeaux to conquer Paris. And fame came to him easily. At first it was only the fame of the cafés and creameries of the Latin Quarter. At first it was only the adulation of the young poets, the young students, who met in his shabby

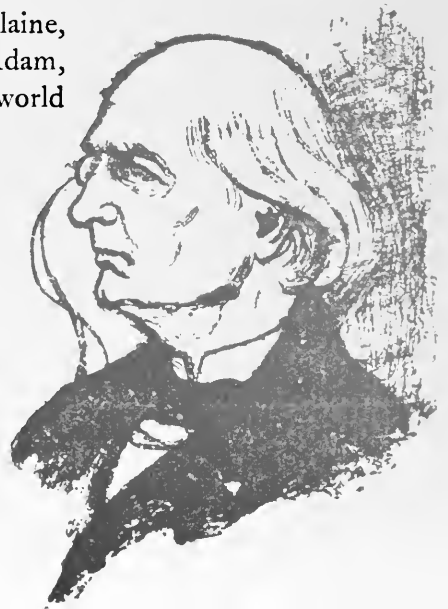
mansarde. But the noise of him went out into the world. He had created a new Parnassus.

Voici Dierx et d'Hervilly,
Armand Renaud, François Coppée,
Glatigny rêveur et pâli ;
Voici Dierx et d'Hervilly.
Pour guérir un siècle vieilli
Ils cherchent la pharmacopée.
Voici Dierx et d'Hervilly,
Armand Renaud, François Coppée,

Sully Prudhomme et Cazalis
Se tiennent près de Lafenestre,
Theuriet compare à des lys
Sully Prudhomme et Cazalis.
Cazalis venant de Tiflis
Serre la main d'Armand Silvestre.
Sully Prudhomme et Cazalis
Se tiennent près de Lafenestre.

On y rencontre aussi Mendès
À qui nul rythme ne résiste,
Qu'il chante l'Olympe ou l'Adès ;
On y rencontre aussi Mendès.
Des Essarts venant de Rhodez
Lui lit un sonnet fantaisiste.
On y rencontre aussi Mendès
À qui nul rythme ne résiste.

Many others, too, gathered in those rooms in the Rue de Douai,—José de Maria-Hérédia, Verlaine, Leconte de Lisle, Mallarmé, Villiers de l'Isle Adam, Théodore de Banville ; others of whom the world



has never heard, nature's failures, poor devils made in derision.

Mendès would run his white, long fingers through his golden hair.

"Do you not think the word Friday is violet?" he would ask.

One discussed it pro and con. All words had their colors in the Rue de Douai, years ago, when we had young blood full of iron and alcohol and heads full of dreams. Brave theories, not yet laughed down. The vowels had colors. "A," the broad "a," was black; "e" equalled white; "i" was blue; "o" was red and "u" was yellow. Brave theories. The sound of the harp was white, the violin blue, the trumpet red.

Mendès was king of this theorizing, dreaming world, made up of youngsters drunk with youth and rhyme. He, indeed, was not all a dreamer. He inherited from his father, Tibulle Mendès, a speculative Israelite not without guile, a certain sense of affairs. It was not strong enough to kill the poet in him, but it made him a perpetual founder of magazines, journals, newspapers. In twenty years he has founded twenty papers, no one of which has survived. I have a few old volumes now, worth their weight in silver — "The Fantastic Review," "The Contemporary Parnassus," "The Republic of Letters," "L'Assomoir" (M. Zola's novel was new in the days when that was founded), "The Review of To-morrow."

And that marriage of poets —

On the table at my elbow is an old, French newspaper in which is an "Avis" to the public by M. Mendès. It is a piece of exquisite workmanship, delicate and impeccable literature, but it is brutal as a blow of the fist. It is full of sneering, triumphant avowals of his infidelity. As I read it again after all these years I see him come into the *entresol* of that old house in the Boul' Mich', which was the *entresol du Parnasse*, a smile in his watchful eyes and a sneer on his red, sensual mouth.

"Here is Mme. Mendès' opportunity," he said, and threw the paper on the wine-stained table.

She took advantage of the opportunity. A decree of separation was pronounced in her favor. She went back to the little house in Neuilly, to the little garden looking out on the Seine, where Théophile Gautier, drunk with haschisch, dreamed away his life. There was a bust of Wagner in the little salon; there were Japanese screens and curtains — which had not yet been vulgarized into the atmosphere of the modern flat. She modelled jolly little figures in clay — squat Chinese idols, dainty Japanese maidens, Pans and satyrs, young Bacchus, over-fat from wine, slender Greek girls. And she wrote poems in prose and verse; queer little songs of faded leaves and rainy islands. Then she discovered the Orient. A little, yellow, slant-eyed man, whose queue hung to the hem of his purple

blouse, Tin-Tun-Ling, taught her Chinese. At night the desolate heathen composed hieroglyphic verses in honor of her eyebrows. To-day she is *savante.* She has made the East her own. The streets of Pekin, the blue hills of Japan are as familiar to her as the lengths of her shining hair. You will read her books and then you will know her — those marvellous Eastern books, haunted with strangely magnificent figures, Chinese and Japanese, full of heroic candors, of pure and ardent passion, chivalrous, tender — there you shall see the white soul, the proud heart, the chaste word.

In time she found another poet; and Mendès married again — Augusta Holmès and many others.

* * * * * * * *

Jules Lemaître, speaking in the loose manner of the popular preacher, said of Mendès: "Were I a Christian, I would vehemently curse his works and pray God, the while, for his soul; and were I a legislator I would banish him beyond the frontiers of the Republic, crowned with the faded roses of his last nocturnal debauch." To the critic who never had M. Lemaître's opportunity of studying literature while birching the unthinking end of boys, these pretty antitheses are quite unmeaning. Catulle Mendès has published sixty volumes of verse, romance, drama, criticism; he has played a very important rôle — if not the most important — in the

French literature of the last twenty-five years; he created a mode that attracted and influenced all the poets of his generation; he is the most accomplished man of letters living — master of all the artifices and secrets of literature; and in all his books there are only a half-dozen pages that the world will not willingly let die. And his failure — splendid, elaborate, multiform — is due to a defect which may be racial. He has no faith in himself. His talent is not self-centred; it does not revolve on its own pivot. He is never triumphantly himself. His very theory of poetry is impersonal. In the elaboration of the jewelled line and carven phrase, there must be a sense of aloofness — the artist must stand back from his work. Mendès has been unwisely compared to Walter Pater, this sensitive artist, who carried the pale flag of idealism into the grimy streets and roaring shops of modern English literature. Now Walter Pater's chief note is that of sincerity. It is his intellectual sincerity that makes the worth of his appreciations, whether he writes of the diffident beauty of a Botticelli, the sculptured stones of Chartres, the windows of Le Mans, a fugue-like thought of Wordsworth, pointed architecture or the chansons of Bellay. Catulle Mendès has touched almost every phase of life. He has sung of the flowers and the birds in the white of the air; of the blue sky and the boudoir; of blond barbarians and antique Greece; of beggars

and fairies; he has sung everything and said everything — all with the air of one who quotes from an anthology. Little cantharides of verse that have the savor of Parny; strophes that ring stormily empty, like Hugo's lines; prose as impeccable as Flaubert's — you search vainly through it all to find a man; there is only a man of letters. You sense, now and then, something perverse, malign, subtly impure, sceptical, and this, for want of anything more definite, you call the soul of Catulle Mendès; but it is only the ghost of a soul — the wraith of Torrentius.

To me Catulle Mendès' life is very tragic; it is the eternal tragedy of the talent that would fain be genius. I turn over the pages of his books — volume after volume — and wonder at the immense labor that ends in nothing. The mountain travails and there is born a negligible madrigal. Here are his plays,—"Justice," which would be Hugo; "Les Mères Ennemies," with its famous apology of the Pole who committed treason: "*Jésus peut-être avait humilié Judas*"; "Medée" — for has not every one written a Medea? They are all made of potter's clay, and in none of them is the breath of life. He is the chameleon of letters, and he is all colors and colorless. And to be the chameleon is, for the poet, the great tragedy. Not to be able to be one's self — upon my word, of all tragedies it is the ghastliest.

Unhappy poet, he has known art, but has never known the dream.

* * * * * * * *

Do you know those little tales *pour lire au couvent?* Shall we read one of them together, not in their French beauty, which is the opalescent beauty of mother-of-pearl, but in paler English? This is the story:

Once upon a time, as I lay dreaming, a form appeared to me. And as this form resembled a young girl dressed for a ball — her wings were imitations of puffed satin sleeves — I knew at once it was an angel.

"Beautiful Angel," I said, "what have I done to merit this visit? The blue hours of the night are in my chamber; all about me are the ghosts of perfumed tresses and shadows of weary kisses; an odor of sin is mixed with the patchouli, shaken from my troubled curtains. Beautiful Angel, are these worth the blue incense of Heaven which rises from the unseen censers swung by the eleven thousand virgins? Do not, I beg, go near my writing-table, where perchance you may see the picture of some dancing girl, clothed only in the souvenir of a frock and the regret of a bodice. And my books — do not look at them! You will find only sombre and bitter poems, which I read with laughter, or gay, mad tales, which I read with melancholy."

The Angel replied:

"Spare me your warnings. When I, or those who are like unto me, enter the homes of the living, we know what we shall find. Ask not the reason of my visit. To us belongs the divine caprice of showing mercy to those who deserve it not. It is the fad of Omnipotence."

I made no answer. I could not contradict an apparition which looked so much like a young woman dressed for a ball.

"I have come," the Angel went on, "to ask you to ascend to Heaven forthwith, without waiting for the barren formalities of death and funeral."

"Let us set out at once," I made answer, "for I have always had a fervent desire to contemplate the august splendors of Paradise." Hardly had I spoken the word when a cloud, rose-hued, balloon-shaped, descended through the open ceiling; the basket, large enough for two, was made of woven star-beams. When we were seated, the Angel and I, the Angel gave the word to invisible servitors:

"Let go!"

We shot into the blue and sombre solitude of the night.

The dwellings of men hid in the shadows; the dwindling mountains were lost to sight; there was only the blue rush of illimitable night.

"Beautiful Angel," I asked, "is Paradise in truth as magnificent as the Paradise of our dreams?

Speak to me, my divine guide! Tell me of the marvels I shall see, the joys my soul shall know!"

The Angel deigned to make answer, saying: "No word of human speech, which alone you can understand, can express the everlasting wonder of Heavenly sojourn. Should you picture to yourself the miracle of a garden-close, where the earth was bright and transparent as summer sunlight, where all the flowers were virgins more ingenuous than lilies, where the air was made of vaporized pearls — your dream would be as far from the divine reality as a black night o' winter from April's noontide."

"Let us hasten," I cried, "let us hasten."

But I perceived that the balloon — we had already passed the first stars — hung motionless in immensity.

"What has happened?" I cried.

"I see what is the matter," said the Angel, "you are too heavy."

As I had not taken time to clothe myself for the voyage, I had not even the resource of throwing overboard my clothing.

"Besides," said the Angel, who read my thought, "that would not serve. The weight which stays our ascent is not material. If you wish to ascend you must cast away your ambitions, your dreams of wealth and glory, which weigh you toward the earth."

Ah, it was no easy task! What poet does not

hold dear his dreams — dreams of cities loud with acclaim, of crowds swayed by the pomp of his verse, and, in palaces marble and gold, the throngs of young poetesses, who chant the praises of his triumphant rhyme? But Paradise? Down, down into the blue darkness beneath, I dropped them one by one toward the earth I disdained — my hopes, my pride, my dreams of fame and riches. And the balloon, rose-hued, shot far beyond all stars.

Although we were still far from our high goal, a white and gentle light was round about us. We had passed from the violet shadows which hint of earth. In a brightness which seemed made of fluid silver, great white ghosts passed silently — the blown wind from their wings stirred in my hair. The delight of dawning Heaven smote upon me; already I felt —

The balloon hung motionless.

"I see what is the matter," said the Angel, "you are still too heavy."

"Have I not cast away ambition, dreams of opulence and glory?"

"But deep in you are the memories of earthly loves — you have not forgotten the teasing laughter, the kisses of joyous, sinful women. These tender regrets weigh you down to earth."

What, you, too, reminiscences of bright and subtle loves; souvenirs of diffident kisses and fra-

grant, dishevelled hair; memories of murmuring midnights and haggard dawns — I must lose you all! But Paradise? Down, down into dusk forgetfulness, the recollection of rose lips and pallid throats —

The balloon rose, rose into a splendor that was not of light, but of Heaven.

The gates are diamond sheen. And the flame of all, more terrible than the naked lightning, is softer than white rose petal. And through the gates ajar I see the diaphanous glades, where flowers are stars, and two by two the gentle Angels walk in love, singing. Gentle ones! The ecstasy of seraphic marriage, the everlasting kiss of lips always pure, these also I shall know, even I. I shall enter the august city of eternal delight —

Near the threshold the balloon hung motionless. I was seized with bitter despair.

"Have I not cast all away!" I cried; "ambitions, vanities, sinful luxuries —"

"You are still too heavy," said the Angel, "because there remains —"

"What, then!" I cried.

"In the deepest, hidden chamber of your heart, deeper than ambition, deeper than sin, there dwells the memory of a child — she is not beautiful, scarcely pretty — who turns away her lips from yours; it is evening in the twilight of a rose garden, and you are a boy. This weight, as the others —

cast it away! See, the splendors of Paradise are —"

But I said "No."

And I fell. I fell, through lights and clouds, stars and worlds, to the black earth so far from Paradise, so far! Stunned, broken, dying, it may be — happy that I kept the memory of that pale child, so small, so shy, who refused me her lips one evening when I was sixteen, and the rose leaves whispered to us in the garden-close.

* * * * * * * *

And that is a story of Catulle Mendès; not as he would wish you to read it in savorsome French words, but as you and I fashion it, this morning in the convent. We chant it to the matin bells. Shut up here in our gray and melancholy loneliness we shall dream all day of the glades which are fairer than fields of whitening rice, and of the shining trees beneath which angels pace sweetly, in holy joy, together always. All day, until the vesper bells have rung. But at night, when our thoughts go away from us in sleep, and we are led into temptation, we shall remember a garden-close and youth and roses and lips we never kissed.

Jean Moréas and his Disciples

CLOUDS of tobacco smoke, the clatter of dominos, the rustling of newspapers and the scratching of pens, glasses that clink and sing, the flick of cards and money ringing on the marble-topped tables, the shuffling of waiters and the babble of voices — a babel of voices — it is the Café François 1er in the Boulevard Saint-Michel.

Yonder is the corner in which Paul Verlaine used to sit, stirring his rum and water and blinking at the shining suits of armor. Over the doorway there — as you go down to the kitchens — hangs one of his old clay-pipes. But Verlaine is dead and worms have eaten him. In his place are scores of little men, without glory and without genius — his successors. They toss their locks of vagrom hair; they sip the pale milky absinthe; they recite their verses — pale, milky verses. One of them takes courage. He is a little blond man with eyeglasses and pimples. In a shrill little voice he recites a poem.

"*C'est idiot*," the other little poets growl; and here and there and everywhere under the clouds of smoke echo pert criticisms, fragments of verse, cries of "*un bock!*" The big white clock records the hour of midnight. Then the Master enters — the king-bee in this little world of buzzing poets.

It is Jean Moréas.

He wears a long, monkish great-coat reaching to his heels, a silk hat tipped over his eyebrows. His mustache is twisted up truculently. He has the air of Bobadil, of Drawcansir — of a pirate of the Spanish Main. Across his face runs a sneer like a sabre-cut. He stalks in sombrely, a monocle glued in his right eye — which is absurd — and takes a seat in Verlaine's old corner.

"*Rhum à l'eau!*" he cries to the waiter; it is as though he were giving the order for the storming of a convent.

"Of all poets," he adds benignly, "only I and Verlaine have found inspiration in rum and water."

He draws off one of his gloves and with a hand, white and slight as a woman's, caresses his piratical mustache. Opposite him is a mirror and he catches his reflection in it. For a long time he stares at it as though in an ecstasy of satisfaction.

Suddenly in his gruff, funereal voice, he cries aloud: "*Je suis beau! Je suis beau!*" and drinks his rum and water. No one speaks. One and all, with the mien of little dogs, his disciples watch him in silent admiration. Ah, my dear friends, it is a great thing to be a poet — in the Latin Quarter.

I watch him, not without admiration. He belonged to a past that was other than mine; there are few places where our paths cross in the present; and yet I know Jean Moréas, and — I have said it

— I admire him. I admire his colossal vanity, his mirthless egotism, his profound lack of humor — oh, abysmally deep! — but more than all I admire him for the seriousness with which he takes himself and his business of being a poet. It is so rare, this quality. Our generation is so levelled up to the commonplace and proper that there is little picturesqueness left. We all wear hodden gray. And to my mind there is something infinitely attractive in Moréas' flaunting of the purple rags of poetry. You may remember Joly, the keeper of the cock-pit, of whom Lavengro has written. He held that dog-fighting — "and when I talks of dog-fighting, I of course mean rat-catching and badger-baiting, ay, and bull-baiting — " was an immeasurably finer occupation than any other. It is in much the same way that Jean Moréas looks upon poetry. He has the true autolatry of the old poets; he can conceive genius only under a literary form; he entertains the obsolete prejudice that poetry is something so hugely superior to everything else that it confers a sort of sacred character — such as used to attach to idiots and kings. And it is for this wholesome artistic seriousness, this salutary artistic egotism that I admire Jean Moréas. He says, "I am a poet," as calmly as other men announce that they are green-grocers or journalists, or manufacturers of wooden toothpicks.

I draw up my chair to the table at which Moréas

sits — superb over his rum and water. We shake hands limply and doff our hats.

"When did you arrive?" he asks.

"The other day."

"Have you heard the news?"

"Upon my word I don't know; what news?"

"The great news — I have abolished the symbolists."

It was grandly said; thus might Napoleon have spoken of Marengo or Austerlitz.

"It was I who invented symbolism; I, it was I who applied the term to my school; and I defended it, I, in a pamphlet which is not yet forgotten I believe," said Moréas.

A murmur of assent came from his disciples; it was not forgotten.

"And now I abolish it; the decree has gone forth — there is no symbolism more. It did well enough in its day. It expressed well enough the quality of our art and, indeed, of art in general; but it has been debased and transformed; it has become the gonfalon of a sect; it has become common. Nowadays everyone is on the lookout for symbols — the surest way not to find them. The poet is a symbolist, but he does not proclaim it."

Through the clouds of smoke rumble gasps of approval and sneering cries of "*Des Symbolistes!*" applausive cries of "*Maître!*" "*Chef!*" "*Porte-lyre!*" Jean Moréas is in the vein; his voice

sounds and resounds through the smoky room; he intones, he chants.

"Symbolists," he says, "you see them in the shops with pens behind their ears. You meet bookkeepers and clerks who call themselves mystics — mystics! These shopboys! No, I can think of a mystic only as one who stands like the saint, on top of a lofty pillar, naked, drenched by the rain, flogged by the hail, burned by the suns of the desert."

"And Maeterlinck?" I suggest.

"This Dutch attorney-at-law — has he ever stood like a saint on top of a —" etc.

I cannot imagine Maeterlinck in that posture; I shift the conversation.

"You have destroyed symbolism," I say, "even as you created it — what will your poetry be in the future?"

"It will be — as it has been in the past — poetry," Jean Moréas retorts, and then, falling into a grandiose sing-song, he goes on: "I have found another name for my school, and now my poetry is the *poésie Romane.* That name expresses my intention. It covers the art of the Midi of Europe — that art which has reached its highest development in the French literature. To-day my culture has attained such a height that I can comprehend this development from beginning to end; there is no line marking off the Middle Age from the Renaissance;

there is no hiatus between the folk-lore of the land of Romanie, and my poetry, which is the perfection of art; they are of the same race and family; thus it is I bring back the *poésie Romane.* I do not refer to my early prose works; I have never taken them seriously. I speak of my poetry — *les Syrtes, les Cantilènes, le Pèlerin Passionne, de Ériphyle.*

"*Je ne suis pas un ignorant dont les Muses ont ri.*"

"I suppose Shakspere's 'Passionate Pilgrim' suggested the title for *le Pèlerin Passionne,*" I remarked.

"I do not know English," the poet replies, "and then the title was a commonplace of mediæval literature."

Out of the smoke comes a chirping, as of the four-and-twenty blackbirds baked in a pie; it is the chirping of the half-baked poets and the fledgling poets, and they chirp: "*Maître! Maître!* Tell us of yourself, tell us of yourself!"

And Jean Moréas says: "Ah! you are good, little creatures, but you weary me. You hunt me. You follow me like hounds. You cry, 'Here is a man of genius — view, halloo!' and fall upon me. You fawn. You steal my hours. You do not understand that the man of genius must be left alone — alone with his genius; that he must be neither admired nor imitated. Youth — ah, how marvellous is youth, how morbid, difficult and eternal! I think of my own youth. How marvellous it was that even in infancy I sought the ideal — even

when I was a child, scarcely able to speak, although I was uncommonly intelligent for my years, I led a revolt against the real, against the actual, against the base and petty exactitude of life.

"Yes, my children, I have always been a rebel. The fierce blood of the Klepht is in my veins. I am a Greek — a true Greek — in fact I believe I am the last representative of the true Greek race — the last descendant of Pindar and Plato and Meleager and the three hundred of Thermopylæ — I, Jean Moréas. My family is of Epirus. It is illustrious. It is called Papadiamantopoulos. It is a long name; almost ridiculous to little minds. It signifies merely diamond, *papa* indicating that there was a priest among my ancestors, and *poulos* being equivalent to the Irish *O*, the Scotch *Mac* or the Slavonic *ski* or *vitch*. Thus I am Son-of-a-Diamond-in-whose-Family-was-a-Priest. My family emigrated early in the century to the Peloponnesus — Moréa — whence my name. My grandfather, my great-uncle fought in the war for independence. My race engenders heroes. My father lived at Athens, at the court of King Otto — the Bavarian! He wished to send me to Germany to school. I revolted. I wished to see France. In my childish heart was the nostalgia for Paris. Twice I ran away from home — at last I reached Paris. Destiny pointed the way — my star led me — to become the greatest of French poets. I suffered horribly. I knew hunger,

thirst and homelessness. But always I held myself erect — my hour came. It is here. The time of youth and folly is past; the time has come for a lofty conception of art and life.

"Here are my pupils, Monsieur; ask them — ask them if I do not always preach morality to them — by word and example."

He empties his tumbler of rum and water — gracefully, impersonally, as though he were presenting a rose to an utter stranger.

"Sing to us, Master," the little poets cry; they do not ask him to recite.

And Jean Moréas sings the famous *Sylve*, which is the fifteenth. It was the Denys of Halicarnassus who maintained that the elevation of tone in the acute accent and the lowering of tone in the grave were one-fifth; thus the prosodic accent was musical, especially in the circumflex, where the voice, after having risen a fifth, descended a fifth again on the same syllable. It is in this manner that Jean Moréas recites his verses — with a Greek prosodic accent. Once he said: "The chief beauty of the French language is the mute *e*." You should hear the "*noble et douce beautè des e mouets*" when Moréas intones a "*poèmè*." His eyeglass glitters; with that white, feminine hand Jean Moréas taps his breast; his mustaches rise and fall in an ardor of poesy; haughtily he chants: —

Moi que la noble Athène a nourri,
Moi l'élu des Nymphes de la Seine,
Je ne suis pas un ignorant dont les Muses ont ri.

L'intègre élément de ma voix
Suscite le harpeur, honneur du Vendômois ;
Et le comte Thibaut n'eut pas de plainte plus douce
Que les lays amoureux qui naissent sous mon pouce.

L'Hymne et la Parthénie, en mon âme sereine,
Seront les chars vainqueurs qui courent dans l'arène ;
Et je ferai qui la Chanson.
Soupire d'un tant ! courtois son,
Et pareille au ramier quand la saison le presse.
Car par le rite que je sais,
Sur de nouvelles fleurs, les abeilles de Grèce
Butineront un miel Français.

Jean Moréas gives me his hand ; there is something hierarchal in the gesture ; it is as though the Pope were bestowing a benediction ; and he says : "You have talent — you appreciate my poetry ; you know me — I have a double soul."

Yes, *mes amis*, a double soul ! It was Tartarin of Tarascon — was it not ? — who had double muscles, but what are double muscles to a double soul ! Ah ! Jean Moréas, Jean Moréas, 'tis a pretty fancy, like Uncle Toby's theory of noses, but not philosophical.

The New Poetry

Free Verse

DO you remember the parrot in the old Spanish fable? He had been taught to sit by the sun-dial and cry the hours. It was a picturesque arrangement and, so long as the sun shone, answered quite as well as a clock. But at night, when the shadows fell, and by day, when the sky was overcast with clouds, the parrot sat dumb by the blank dial. In much the same way the old versification — that of the T-square and rule — served admirably when all was clear and bright, but in storm and stress its inefficiency was conspicuous. A great deal of French poetry — perhaps nine-tenths of it — is merely cadenced and T-squared prose. And against these rules there has always been a little minority, that "brandished the Idea and sounded the revolt." The *vers brisé* of Victor Hugo, that stormy anthropomorph, was merely a forerunner of the *vers libre*, of to-day. In one of his letters he writes: "This famous *vers brisé* has been taken for the negation of Art; it is, on the contrary, Art's complement. Broken verse has a thousand

resources, as it has a thousand secrets. . . . Broken verse is a trifle harder to make than the other verse. . . . There is a multitude of rules in this pretended violation of rule."

Adolphe Retté might have written these words — or de Régnier, or Vielé-Griffin.

A new art-form should always be the expression of a new spirit. In French poetry the new spirit is rebellious; it waves the "warlike flag of the great Ideal" — to use Walt Whitman's fine phrase. In addition it is emphatically individualistic. It is opposed to schools and systems. It aims at attaining the maximum of personal intensity. It does not decry the well-built and knowingly rhymed poem — the *chef d'œuvre* of T-squared verse. There is a place for the elaborated sonnet. There are times when the old formal verse is aptest and best. When the sun shines, who would not listen to the parrot crying the hours? At other times, however, the exigencies of recurrent rhyme — the necessity of a certain uniform number of syllables — at once clog the thought and hamper the free expansion of rhythm.

It was Edgar Allan Poe, who first proclaimed the truth that a long poem is a contradiction in terms; that "Paradise Lost" is merely a succession of short poems, drearily linked by stretches of negligible prose. I have often thought that — going a step further — one might prove that there is no

perfect poem of the old formal sort. The demands of rhyme and metre drag in, every now and then, lines and phrases which are mere padding. They are the poet's concessions to the old rules. The masterpiece may be defined as perfect beauty of sentiment joined to perfect beauty of form. Wordsworth's "Sonnet composed upon Westminster Bridge," Poe's "Haunted Palace," and Verlaine's "Le ciel est, par-dessus le toit," are notable examples. But how many of Wordsworth's sonnets, for instance, are in the way of being masterpieces? Almost always this art-form not only hampered his thought, but, as well, destroyed all its mobility and all its complexity. The day when that rebel of genius, Verlaine, turned the sonnet upside down — stood it on its head, as it were — was memorable in the history of art. Only those who work in verse will appreciate the daring of this assault upon the T-square. Adolphe Retté, in one of his brilliant prefaces — since Dryden no one has written such prefaces — dates the downfall of the Parnassians from the appearance of this sonnet, which stands, defiant and eternal, on its head. "Some of the Parnassians were petrified," he says, "and the others went into journalism."

In my appreciation of Mallarmé I have said that verse, like music, is an art which the technically ignorant person cannot understand. The æsthetic satisfaction one derives from an art is in exact pro-

portion to one's knowledge of that art's technique. Poetry which has not a formal beauty is inconceivable. (Of course I am speaking of poetry and not of jingle; the man who rhymes away at a good jog-trot of such evident matters as fifes and drums, imperialism or old wooden buckets that hang in the well, may be an interesting person and is likely to be popular, but he is no more a poet than a sign-painter is an artist.)

There is then no such thing as formless verse; if it be formless it is prose — and bad prose. What is called free verse is merely verse that obeys a larger law than that of uniform syllables and ordered rhyme. The great, brawling strophes of Whitman are based upon a well-reasoned law of verse. And just as Poe created modern French prose, Whitman re-created modern French verse.

What, then, is the law of the versification of "The Leaves of Grass," of "L'Archipel en Fleurs," of "Aréthuse" and of "Eurythmie"?

It is this: That the essential unity is the strophe and the only guide for the poet is the rhythm — not a rhythm learned by rote, not a rhythm garrotted by a thousand rules which others have invented — but that personal rhythm which is inveterately the poet's own.

Whitman's verse is free because it is personal; who else could have written:

The last scud of day holds back for me,
It flings my likeness after the rest and true as any on the shadow'd wilds,
It coaxes me to the vapor and the dusk.

The theory of the *vers-libristes*, then, is that the strophe is the poetic unity and that the rhythm should be a personal creation; and free verse, far from being lawless, is the expression of a new law. In its broader sense the theory might be stated in Retté's words — *tu feras ce que tu voudras.* It is the oriflamme of the anarchist and the poet. Make any kind of verses you please, my dear poet, so long as they be beautiful verses. For each age there is a different beauty. Old forms and old perfections wither. Every age must curl its metaphors afresh. Out of the old symbols the color fades day by day and it is the poet's business to create new ones.

Adolphe Retté

"God gave his soul brave wings," said the old church poet — a verse that seems to have been written solely that one might apply it to Adolphe Retté. He is not only a great poet, rich, abundant, multiform; as well, he has a singularly strong and attractive personality. He is sincere. He has a fresh and personal sense of life. He is

> As one who hath gone down into the springs
> Of his existence and there bathed, and come,
> Regenerate, up into the world again.

In many ways he will remind you of the young Shelley. The trees are his boon companions and the secrets of the moon his knowledge. He knows the wind —

> Il est le rythme, il est la joie, il est la vie,
> Il est la rêve de la terre —

and he sings the ballad of the wind that passes. He has much of Shelley's love for humanity — that terrible altruism that is neither to bind nor to loose. The "Similitudes" are his "Song of Islam." The central figure of this symbolic drama is the Rebel. The author calls him "*le Pauvre*," but he is not the haggard creature of Jehan Rictus'

book; he is not the formidable vagrom man of Jean Richepin's songs; he is not the intellectual rebel, the lover of the Ideal; he is not the youth of the Psalms who scattered firebrands, crying, "Am I not in sport?" No; the rebel of Retté's drama is merely a man who wishes to live and love according to the great, natural laws. He is a primitive. He is ignorant and good. He is dowered with all the frank gifts of childhood. He has known nothing and seen nothing; his brain is haunted neither by envy, nor by ambition, nor by hate; in the huge artifice of civilization he sees only derision. One thing and only one he knows: That earth is rich enough to furnish him with all the elements necessary to life. The stars shine upon him; the night-birds call to him in fellowship; and he sets out on his way of life — *le Pauvre!* Need I recite to you the stations of his Calvary? Knowing nothing, he dares all; fearing neither menaces nor blasphemies, he speaks the broad democratic word — the cry of joy and fraternity — and he journeys on. The rebel becomes the martyr.

He sees how men live — most of them unhappy, slaves of dark prejudices, suffering from their powerlessness to seize and know the recompense due to their efforts and their servility. A mad world, my masters, a world of comedies — the grotesque rivalries of castes and classes, *buffo* parades of ribboned rogues, swarms of rhetors, speaking fine words and

août
1894

saying nothing, scientists who know nothing, inventors of iniquity, who prattle of progress and massacre their fellow-men,— in a word, all the cavalcade of human hypocrisy, cruelty, cowardice, luxury and baseness.

And *le Pauvre*, in his simplicity, made no attempt to conceal his bitterness. He went among the imbeciles who wear the yoke and cried aloud their misery and folly; and he proved to them that they were hardy and strong, the only true men, and he bade them rise and take their own. All this he said to them quite simply and they heard and understood and it was the beginning of—

He died, *le Pauvre*, under the stones of Pharisees and his death-cry was one long cry of love; and even as he died the dawn crept up — somewhere the red cock hailed the sun —

* * * * * * * *

Retté made his début in letters at a time when French poetry was the prey of a turbulent confusion. Symbolism existed, though Jean Moréas had not yet invented its name. The Parnassians had worked out to a futile end their dogmatic theories and had sunk into journalism or anonymity. Paul Verlaine had already stood the sonnet on its head. Jules Laforgue had strung his cabalistic beads of rhyme. Théodore de Banville's treaty of versification had been burned with pomp

and circumstance. René Ghil had proclaimed his grim, little Draconian laws of verse. Then from somewhere or other — perhaps Vielé-Griffin deduced it from Walt Whitman, perhaps Marie Kryzinska brought it from Poland — the theory of free verse appeared. It was an æsthetic revolution and the end of it is not yet. Retté was the first to analyze the movement and determine its causes. In an age that questions all written codes, all ethical and political dogmas, he saw that free expression was as natural as free thought. The first principle — for the free, new man — is to acquire an autonomous and personal mode of feeling and thinking; and the second is that he should find an adequate and personal fashion of expressing himself. The poet must choose his instrument. If he have only the old songs to sing, the old forms will suit him well enough — odes and elegies, sonnets and ballads, pantoums and villanelles; but if he have anything special to say, he must find for himself a special and unique instrument. The only criterion is beauty.

Another of Retté's theories, and one that is quite as important, is that a volume of poems should be an idealogic suite. "Une Belle Dame passa," for instance, is a book of pathetic *motifs*. "La Forêt Bruissante" is the book of that unhappy man, who is the eternal martyr.

He must have been haunted by Wagner's

"Waldweben" in the "Siegfried," when he wrote this book of the rustling forest. It is a purely symphonic poem. It is a pantheistic hymn — a verbal transposition of the song of nature. And yet through it, insistent and terrible, there rings the cry of man's suffering. The forest says:

> Je suis l'Illusion, la Crainte, la Chimère,
> Je suis la région où règnent les fantômes.

But the men say — I quote from "L'Archipel en Fleurs" —

> Viens à nous, disaient-ils, nous allons conquérir
> Les grands bois ocellés d'or tendre et d'ombre errante,
> Nous aussi nous quittons la cité languissante
> Où nos frères courbés ne savent que souffrir.
> Là-bas ne règnent pas les marchands à faux poids,
> Ni les spectres des dieux engloutis au Léthé
> Ni les rois insolents huchés sur des pavois,
> Ni la loi qui soumet le Pauvre épouvanté —
> L'avenir nous promet des victoires nouvelles
> * * * * * *
> Car nous avons ouï, parmi l'ombre et les rêves,
> La Forêt bruissante au fond de l'horizon.

* * * * * * * *

I have said that Retté's talent is abundant and multiform. His genius has many modes and moods. He is idyllic, lyric, dramatic. He has sung some of the sweetest love-songs of latter days. He is an adventurer in time and space — like the

hero of one of his prologues — and "*une belle dame passa*" and he sings:

Dame des lys amoureux et pâmés,
Dame des lys languissants et fanés,
  Triste aux yeux de belladone —

Dame d'un rêve de roses royales,
Dame des sombres roses nuptiales,
  Frêle comme une madone —

Dame de ciel et de ravissement,
Dame d'extase et de renoncement,
  Chaste étoile très-lointaine —

Dame d'enfer, ton sourire farouche,
Dame du diable, un baiser de ta bouche,
C'est le feu des mauvaises fontaines
  Et je brûle si je te touche.

It is hard to resist the temptation to quote Retté's verses; even to transcribe them is a pleasure; this *chanson du Pauvre:*

Thulé des Brumes, par tes grèves,
C'est un Pauvre qui chante et rêve :

Un soir léger bleuit sous les sapins
Pareils à des Vieux taciturnes ;
Voici passer, portant des urnes,
Les vierges noires du Destin.
Quelqu'une suit, aux yeux trop doux,
Qui cueillit les fruits défendus
Gardés par des monstres jaloux :
La Folle des chemins perdus.

C'était naguère et c'est encor ce soir,
Une impératrice exilée.
— Voyez flotter par les allées
Des vapeurs vagues d'encensoirs.—
Cheveux où saignent des corolles,
Yeux trop purs, lèvres sans paroles,
Gestes d'une qui ne sait plus :
La Folle des chemins perdus.

Le soir frissonne sous les branches —
Elle erre pâle, en robe blanche,
Et les lis baisent ses pieds nus. . . .
Yeux trop noirs, ô trop belle Dame,
C'est mon âme, dis-je, mon âme :
La Folle des chemins perdus.

* * * * * * * *

M. Henri Degron, an excellent critic, said once that Retté was the most marvellously endowed poet of this generation. I do not quarrel with that statement. Retté's work is only begun — his first book dates from 1889. I would, however, supplement M. Degron's praise by saying that no poet is so much a man of his generation, so intimately a part of the intellectual life of the day. He is the poet and the soldier of the Ideal :

Je ris, je suis l'éphèbe et le prince de Mai,
Je cueille des glaïeuls, des fraises ou des lèvres,
J'étoile de mes vers l'ombre et le sein pâmé
De la Belle par qui, brûlé des bonnes fièvres,
Je goûte le Printemps comme un fruit parfumé.

Puis encor, m'amusant d'une flûte assourdie,
Je longe la rivière où les roseaux jaseurs
M'accueillent d'un murmure câlin ; je dédie
Une ode à la naïade et, lui jetant des fleurs,
Je la nomme ma sœur — et la prends pour amie.

Songe charmant : ma nuit en est tout occupée . . .
Quand l'aurore, pareille à des brasiers de roses,
Embrase mes rideaux et luit sur mon épée,
Je m'arme : soulevé contre les sots moroses
Qui radotent de règle ou de lois qu'on impose,
Je sonne la révolte et je brandis l'Idée
Pour la libre bataille et la libre épopée ! . . .

He has touched every side of life and explored every line of thought. His culture is broad and deep. He is indifferent to no æsthetic mode. It is true that he has been mainly influenced by Whitman and Wagner — these giants of the century. And here I might say that Wagner's influence on French literature has been very great. It is from him that Retté took the thematic repetitions — those Homeric recurrences of *motifs* and epithets — that bind his poems into one splendid and varied whole. There are many other influences, more essentially Latin, that one may trace in his work. He has carried the red flag with Jean Grave. He has the Latin love for joy, beauty, wisdom and revolt.

God has given your soul brave wings, my poet.

Henri de Régnier, Stuart Merrill and Vielé-Griffin

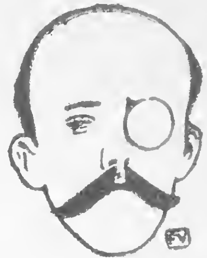
Il est debout, épée au flanc et fleur aux doigts ;
Les chausses de satin étroites au plus juste
Moulent la jambe fine et la cuisse robuste
À la mode du siècle et des seconds Valois.

Joyeux des crocs d'Amboise et des gibets de Blois,
Nourrisson de Pétrone et client de Locuste !
Le court manteau plissé accroît l'ampleur du buste
Et la cuirasse aiguë est en cosse de pois.

Une fraise à godrons l'engonce. Il vous regarde
D'un œil fourbe, et sa bouche amoureuse, que farde
Un onguent, va sourire ou mordre ou minauder,

Et deux perles de lait, l'une à l'autre pareille,
Semblent, tirant le lobe et prêtes à tomber,
Une goutte d'amour qui pend à chaque oreille.

In this little sonnet one might fancy that Henri de Régnier had sketched his own portrait, for he is a suckling of Petronius and has a simpering mouth. His verse is pretty, academic, pompous, even distinguished. The poet of gold and death, Rémy de Gourmont has called him; the poet, one might add, of gold curiously carved and of death in a perfumed chamber of the old régime. You may read



his poems by the hour. They are pearls cunningly strung on a silver thread. They are daintily and knowingly made. They recall all that is most charming in the anthologies of seventeenth century verse. They have a pretty and disdainful negligence for the natural emotion.

> ("And still he smiled and talked;
> And as the soldiers bore dead bodies by,
> He called them untaught knaves, unmannerly,
> To bring a slovenly, unhandsome corse
> Betwixt the wind and his nobility.")

There is no lyric autobiography in his poems; there is only a fanciful dilettantism that plays with the antique and accepted emotions and rhymes again the faded rhymes of the old poets. At once coquettish and erudite, M. de Régnier is a type of the poet who is made. He is a poet as he might have been a courtier or a gentleman-rider. In giving way to his feelings — in crying aloud — in paltering with those mad jades, the emotions — he would see a measure of ill-breeding. He is so habitually well-bred that he would never dream of obtruding a slovenly, unhandsome corse upon anyone. And so, with perfect self-possession and the modish society accent, he sings of dawn, and sad waters, of dusk and scented ladies and asphodels, of *or* and *mort*. And with what an air he takes life! He and not Axel might have said: "Live? Our lackeys will do that for us!"

And how comes it, you ask, that this pretty creature finds himself among the *vers-libristes?* It is entirely a matter of good manners. He is far too accomplished a man of the world to contradict anyone. When Mallarmé wove his broidered subtleties, M. de Régnier set to work immediately on the symbolic loom. It reminds one of the courteous French duke, who salted his chocolate — to put a blundering guest at his ease. And when Villiers de l'Isle Adam made romantic irony the mode, M. de Régnier was politely romantic, genteelly ironic. José-Maria de Hérédia — the last of the great French-negro writers — taught him to love Greece and Rome and M. de Régnier wrote the "Bosquet de Psyché" and antique sonnets — and married Mlle. de Hérédia. It was all sheer courtesy. And when Walt Whitman's stormy American æstheticism swept over France, M. de Régnier loosed a genteel imitation of that "barbarous yawp." Will you read this little fragment of "L'Homme et la Sirène," from "Aréthuse"?

> Mais moi, je sais la Mer !
> Elle est douce, aujourd'hui sous les étoiles
> Qui déclinent et les agrès geignant tout bas,
> Le long des voiles ;
> Le vent est tombé et le navire est las
> Et tous dorment et tout est calme
> Et celui qui connaît le vent et la marée
> A prédit la nuit belle à la nef ancrée

Et c'est en chantant qu'on a levé les rames ;
Car l'homme qui connaît la face des nuages
A fait signe en riant à qui barre à la proue.
Fou donc qui veille, et qui dort, sage ?
Et moi seul je veille et j'écoute
Debout à la proue et moi seul
À travers mes songes j'y vois clair,
Et moi seul
Je sais la mer.
Toute la mer,
Et qu'il y a des Sirènes sur la mer !

So gently may he, who sang "the sea-ship and the whistling winds," pipe through the painted lips of a really well-bred poet. In M. de Régnier there is a future Immortal — at least, the fortieth part of immortality.

* * * * * * * *

At a time when French verse was largely a creation of the uitlanders — of de Hérédia, the negroid Cuban, of Gustave Kahn, the Hebrew, of Jean Moréas, the Greek, and of many Belgians and one stray Algerian — it was the good fortune of Vielé-Griffin to be an American in France. He is a son of General Vielé, of New York. He went to Paris, as Poe did or did not, go to Greece. Stuart Merrill had preceded him ; had been captivated by the facility with which French verse may be written by an accomplished amateur ; had sung of doubt and autumn rain, of thyrses and sceptres and torches, of

Parsifal and the Walkyries ; had made himself master of his poetic instrument. If you would know how blithely Stuart Merrill rhymes, read these verses, which he wrote, I believe, for Edgar Saltus : —

Airs ailés de Lulli,
Gavottes et pavanes !
Iris et frangipanes
Du doux temps de Lulli.

* * *

Hautbois, flûtes et luths,
Cris et trilles de rire,
Dentelles qu'on déchire,
Bassons, flûtes et luths !

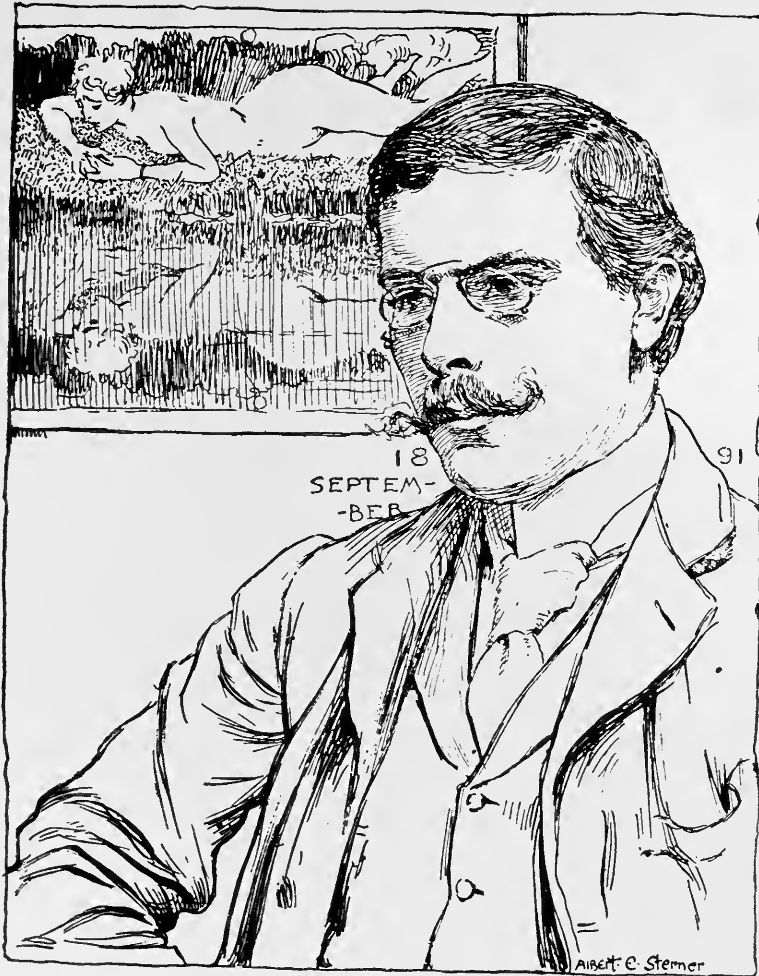
Des voix par la terrasse,
Des froufrous en la nuit,
Et des fuites sans bruit
Le long de la terrasse.

Silence ! au bord de l'eau
L'effroi blanc des toilettes
En les escarpolettes
Qui volètent sur l'eau.

Puis au clair de la lune
Éventails en émoi :
" M'aimes-tu ? — aime-moi !"
Et la lune ! et la lune !

O doux temps de Lulli !
Iris et frangipanes !
Gavottes et pavanes !
Airs ailés de Lulli !

It is just what one might expect from him who wrote French verse as amateurs play billiards; and one is tempted to praise him not only for his hits, but for his clever misses. In addition to composing all kinds of verse — most of it curiously like real poetry — Stuart Merrill prepared the way for his young countryman. When Vielé-Griffin made his début in 1886 with "Cueille d'Avril" he was taken seriously. It was an example and he followed it. He has explained and defended himself. He has justified himself. He has called himself "le petit-fils de Walt Whitman." Now Vielé-Griffin has talent, not large, to be sure, but delicate and sensitive. He has a suave, almost feminine preciosity. He lisps in numbers — not only because the numbers come, but because they come in a language that is not radically his own. His French has a pretty air of bewilderment — like Susannah among the elders. He plays with strange rhythms and odd ornaments. He is quite as foreign as those little, tawny girls — Vakiem and Tarninch and Sariem — who startled Paris with the unusual music of Javanese hammers, banging the copper vases. And yet Vielé-Griffin, for all his odd noises, is the calmest of poets. Life is pleasant; why should one shout? Love is sweet — and he drapes the calm child in a toga of modest strophes. All's for the best in this best of all worlds — and he lisps a pæan to the cheerful days. It is the op-



Stuart Merrill

timism — crass, monstrous, babbling — of Pippa, who passed and piped, "God's in his heaven, all's right with the world." And, oh! if you would know how candied life is, give your days and nights to this happy optimist. Dear Lord! does not the dew fall soothingly on the grass? The pretty sun gilds the hawthorn hedge. There flies a sparrow, twittering "all's right with the world." Twilight comes, with melancholy hints and instigations, and the poet whispers,

> Pleurer est doux par-dessus toute chose;

and when night falls, he dries his pensive tears and cries:

> Il n'est pas de nuit sous les astres,
> Et toute l'ombre est en toi.

Since Kant we are all of us a trifle suspicious of the objective existence of the world. For Vielé-Griffin nature is an allegory of his soul — May is, as it were, a facet of his heart. And so he celebrates himself in nature. It is this personal note — veiled and faint as it is — that separates his poetry from the purely artificial verse of de Régnier. Neither in his sensitive idealism nor in his optimism — at once smug and prudish — is there anything new to French poetry. Vielé-Griffin's air of originality comes, I think, from his lisp — his aloofness to the national tradition, his American habit of mind. This little grandson of Walt Whitman is

far more akin to Longfellow — he strikes the natty Longfellow attitude and lisps commonplaces with all the old professor's solemnity. Vielé-Griffin is a calm poet with theories — it is a contradiction in terms. I believe, however, that he brought into French versification the great Whitman strophe and made possible the new movement of which Retté is the splendid climax — all of which should be accounted to him for righteousness.

Emmanuel Signoret and Albert Samain

If to think that one has talent is to have it, Signoret is the happiest of poets. He has made autolatry a religion. A few years ago he almost proved the truth of Disraeli's saying that youth is genius. He was twenty, and he published the "Vers Dorés." To and fro he paced the gardens of Versailles — a slim, gilt figure of a poet, with shining eyes and feathery hair — and he said: "Youth — I am twenty — and I am in full possession of my soul. The light of my youth and my genius renews the face of the world. Truly the universe is too beautiful. The forests are too profound. The mountains are immeasurable. The sweetness of the sea is ineffable"; and he added: "I palpitate with all the emotion of the ages, I incorporate in myself all human thought. My heart sings. I sing the glory of love and my own glory. I sing

Du feu de deux couchants je fis une aube éclore,
Rallumant notre sang éteint, nos yeux ternis:
Sur mes conques d'azur je viens dans cette aurore
Ceint d'oliviers d'Athène et de Gethsemani.

L'éclat des ostensoirs s'unit dans mes prunelles
Au resplendissement du casque de Pallas!"

Thus with suave hands Signoret plucks for himself the laurel.

"Listen," he said again, "to these verses:

> La terre merveilleuse où ta proue aspira
> Et que tu ne conquis qu'en chantant dans les voiles,
> Nous l'avons fait surgir des mers que consacra
> L'immersion d'un flot magnifique d'étoiles.

Do you not hear in them the noise of the mighty winds that drove Vasco da Gama sea-ward? Would you not say that in them sang the soul of all mariners?"

And I said: "My poet, you have not bowed the knee to the 'misbegotten, strange new Gods of song.'"

And he said: "The great forms of Racine, Chénier and Lamartine are too vast for the little souls of to-day. The little, barbarous writers employ frail and barbaric rhythms. I have come bearing the proud and ample harmonies of old; I speak in the great rich accent of the masters. I bear the lyre. Once I stood and listened to the others — to Verlaine and Vielé-Griffin and Moréas; but my heart beat too high and broke their rhythms. I saw Régnier coquetting with his pallid beliefs. I saw Retté rushing like a madman toward what vacillating dawns! I heard Maeterlinck repeat the indecisive words that are stammered it may be on the other side of life. I raised my lyre and sang. I chanted

Emmanuel Signoret

the new light for which Pascal died, for which Spinoza suffered humbly and which dazzled Nietzsche on some fabulous road to Damascus. In a word, I have understood that it is beautiful to be a man, since in his own breast man bears the destinies of the universe and can collaborate with these destinies. I have chanted the hymn of joy."

And so in words that glisten and rustle the young poet proclaimed his mission. It is easy to laugh, *mes amis;* always it is easy to laugh — Zeuxis died of laughter upon seeing the picture of an old woman, and Philemon (unless Valerius belies him) laughed himself to death at the spectacle of an ass eating figs — and the young poet has always been fair game for the average, sceptical person. (The youngster talks of tears and white feet, of golden lyres and love and his soul — was there ever anything more ridiculous! Never — since zygomatic muscles were first stretched. He acknowledges he is a poet — upon my word it is funnier than seeing a stout gentleman sit down where there is no chair.)

Marcel Schwob in one of his accomplished essays points out that laughter is dying out in the world; life is not nearly so laughable as it was; the humor has gone out of bent pins; the dialogue which Æsop imagined between a fox and a player's mask is not comic now; there is only gloom in Shakspere's clowneries and King Jamie's puns; but hilarious and eternal rings the laughter

round the young poet. What droll fun the smart journalist pokes at him! How the lean professor — he with the dandruff on his coat-collar — chuckles at him! Next to the martyr the work-a-day world finds nothing quite so ridiculous as the young poet, who takes his business of being a poet with unwinking seriousness. I do not know that a little careless laughter does the young poet any harm. If he have the right stuff in him neither squibs nor paper bullets will turn him from his humor. My young poet, Signoret, went on his way quite unabashed by the cackle of those inclined to Philistinism. A few years later, when he had attained the dignity of twenty-four, he published "Daphné." In this book he forsook the reactionary heroic verse for the free Alexandrine.

And he said: "You are interested in the development of my artistic thought? Then, this suite of twelve poems will startle you — like twelve white Nymphs, rushing swiftly from secret forests and bounding — their tresses in the wind — toward the harmonious horizon. You will remember that in my 'Vers Dorés' I expressed the heroic period of the Idea. Here the Idea has attained its nuptial period. The colors are softened. The forms have taken on more indecision. For the magnificent affirmation of my personality, I have substituted the voluptuous plaints of desire. Often indeed I have kept silent and let things themselves speak.

I have assisted at the birth of spring in the antique park of Versailles. New blood ran in my joyous veins. The world dwelt in me. My soul was cradled in the harmony of my verses. The woodlands gave back to me my natal splendor:

> Et puis j'ai rencontré la Forêt vagabonde
> Qui, pour ressusciter le vieux dieu que je fus,
> M'a tendu ses deux seins qui s'enflaient comme une onde
> Et m'a mordu le cou, dans un rire confus !

"To celebrate these amorous solemnities I thought it my duty to employ only Alexandrine verse, but a free Alexandrine, supple, varying, flexile. Careful as usual of the quality and *éclat* of my rhymes, I have not used all the liberties which lesser poets take. Mallarmé wished that the Alexandrine should be reserved exclusively for great circumstances. But what is there that merits the honors of this king-verse more than the august coming of spring, the universal song of nature, the pulsations of happiness in the heart of the flowers, the heart of the streams, the heart of men and the heart of the turtle-doves?"

And piously as one tells his beads, the young poet chanted:

> Les troupeaux, sur les monts, broutent la nuit des herbes,
> La hache luit aux feux d'astres pour égorger
> Les noirs sapins noyés de sève ; et sur tes gerbes
> Voltige, ô blanc jasmin, l'étoile du berger !

* * * * * * *

L'oiseau vole vers l'astre ; et la grotte plaintive
Gronde. La fleur se tresse aux gemmes sur nos mâts !
Ma bien-aimée, abandonnons la sombre rive,
Voguons chercher la vague même où tu m'aimas !

Sur la face du lac pudique et de l'étoile
Morte d'amour, monte un effroi délicieux,
Et la face du lac, de ses jasmins se voile ! —
— Elle chanta :
"Le vin d'amour coule à mes yeux.

— Épuise aussi ma lèvre où ruisselle la sève
De toute fleur, et dors sur mon nocturne sein :
Voici l'éternité des astres qui se lève,
O roi sauvage, égale aux astres tes desseins.

Nous ressusciterons dans le charme de l'heure
Que tu m'as ménagée au bercement des nuits.
Tu passes sur ta barque et ta lueur demeure
Au front des peuples ! Te penchant au bleu des puits,

Poète, en tes seaux d'or, tu puises la sagesse !"
Je répondis ; — "Les hameaux verts sont assoupis,
De la treille jaillit la grappe avec largesse,
Aux gorges la lavande effeuille ses épis !"

Pensive, elle chanta : "Du vieux feu de la terre,
Je t'aime ! Oh ! par les fleurs des jasmins ! baise aussi
Mes seins frais, jusqu'à la jeune heure solitaire
Où le disque d'or neuf du soleil s'épaissit !"

And it is all very young, you say; shining rhetoric and ringing cymbals — merely youth and youth's fervor and fluency? I shall not disagree with you, but even for the *feu d'artifice* of youth

there is room in literature. Were it not that Signoret were young his books would not interest me very much. I should have glanced them over in the mood of Heine's hero who cried (thrice), "Tirily, tirily, tirily," and, having tirilied, spun round on his heel and went his way. But youth — especially when it is joined to profound, austere and majestic autolatry — is infinite in its possibilities.

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From this sketch of the new poetry in France I have omitted many poets — Saint-Pol-Roux-le-Magnifique; Pierre Quillard of the violet moons and brief roses; Hérold, who loves jewelled queens and faded saints in free verse; Tailhade, the rhetor; Bataille and Charbonnel, the monk; Fontainas and many others — not because they have not written beautiful poems, but solely because it was my purpose to select certain typical poets. It would be impossible, however, to omit Albert Samain, who represents the Verlainian spirit in literature. His early work is Parnassian. One might say of it — for it is pleasant, now and then, to drive three adjectives tandem — that it is grandiloquent, beautiful, empty. His later work, however, is very simple. It is sincere. It is exquisitely delicate, full of hints and veiled suggestions. And, above all, it has that haunting, indecisive music of which Verlaine was the impeccable master. In these, his latter, better

days Samain has taken Verlaine's advice and "wrung the neck of eloquence," and he has become a poet truly Verlainian. He has described his poetic creed in these verses, wherein he dreams:

De vers blonds où le sens fluide se délie
Comme sous l'eau la chevelure d'Ophélie,

De vers silencieux, et sans rythme et sans trame,
Où la rime sans bruit glisse comme une rame,

De vers d'une ancienne étoffe exténuée,
Impalpable comme le son et la nuée,

De vers de soirs d'automne ensorcelant les heures
Au rite féminin des syllabes mineures,

De vers de soirs d'amours énervés de verveine,
Où l'âme sente, exquise, une caresse à peine.

Notwithstanding his deep influence on contemporary poetry, Verlaine left few disciples. It is not unpleasant to see the old mastery waken again in such a sonnet as this:

Lentement, doucement, de peur qu'elle se brise,
Prendre une âme ; écouter ses plus secrets aveux,
En silence, comme on caresse des cheveux ;
Atteindre à la douceur fluide de la brise ;

Dans l'ombre, un soir d'orage, où la chair s'électrise,
Promener des doigts d'or sur le clavier nerveux ;
Baisser l'éclat des voix ; calmer l'ardeur des feux ;
Exalter la couleur rose à la couleur grise.

Essayer des accords de mots mystérieux
Doux comme le baiser de la paupière aux yeux ;
Faire ondoyer des chairs d'or pâle dans des brumes,

Et, dans l'âme que gonfle un immense soupir,
Laisser, en s'en allant, comme le souvenir
D'un grand cygne de neige aux longues, longues plumes.

The Paganism of Pierre Louys

DO you remember the notable discussion in Voltaire's novel?

"What was this world made for anyway?" Candide asks bitterly, and out of the depth of wisdom Martin replies: "*Pour nous faire enrager.*"

Life is at once too dirty and too sad. Even war can hardly make it splendid. More than one young thinker — for after all only young men have that fresh view of life which is thought — has been of Martin's way of thinking. Life is not pretty. In certain ages it has seemed especially sullied and sinister. "Soldiers! let us fight, conquer and die for the safety of our railway systems!" does not strenuously appeal to the young imagination. At such times the mind turns back, lightly as a bird, to the old ideals — quite as sterile, perhaps, quite as sad and dirty, it may be, as the ideals of to-day, but beautiful because they are alien and afar and impossible. Always there have been those for whom Greece was an ivory tower. Pierre Louys is not the first young man to whom Greek life was a mirage; but in this century he was the first who set

himself the task of making the dream come true. I would not have you think that he prays to the old gods. He does not take symbols for realities. When he exalts Zeus and Apollo and Aphrodite he is celebrating only the antique effigies of Power and Art and Beauty. Yet he is at once the apologist and apostle of the antique modes of life. He would fain be a Greek of Athens — walking the gas-lit streets of Paris, he dreams of the divine Plato. Athens, or Alexandria? The Greece he loves is not the amaranthine land, wherein the stately white figures passed, talking of beauty and the soul. It is the later Greece of the "free morality." Indeed, M. Louys has fled thither to escape Calvin. He has taken refuge there from the law of Geneva.

Once he wrote: "The learned Prodicos of Ceos, who flourished toward the end of the fifth century B.C., is the author of the celebrated apologue, which Saint Basil recommended to the meditations of Christians: 'Hêracles, between Virtue and Pleasure.' We know that Hêracles chose the former, which permitted him to accomplish a certain number of crimes against the Hinds, the Amazons, the Apples of Gold and the Giants. Had Prodicos stopped there he had merely written a fable of simple symbolism; but he was a good philosopher, and his collection of tales 'The Hours,' divided into three parts, presents the moral truths under the diverse aspects they wear according to the three

ages of life. To little children he gave, as an example, the austere choice of Hêracles; without doubt to the young he counselled the voluptuous choice of Paris; and I fancy that to men of ripe years he talked in this fashion:

"Odysseus, wandering one day in the chase among the foot-hills of Delphos, met two virgins, hand in hand. One had violet-colored hair and transparent eyes and grave lips, and she said: 'I am Arêtê.' The other had faint eyelids and delicate hands and tender breasts; she said to him: 'I am Tryphê.' And both said: 'Choose between us!' But the subtle Odysseus wisely answered: 'How can I choose? You are inseparable. One of you without the other is but a sterile shade. Even as sincere virtue may not deprive itself of the eternal joys of voluptuousness, so love itself is weak without a certain grandeur of soul. I will follow both of you. Show me the way.' No sooner had he spoken than the two figures melted into one, and Odysseus knew that he had spoken to the great goddess Aphrodite."

In this fable of a fable Pierre Louys gives you a large measure of his thought. He is a neo-pagan, who loves pleasure, he avers, that he may know virtue. He repeats the old Greek saying that love is the most virtuous of all sentiments, and he means love in all its moods and tenses. He dreams of a world where the passions may walk in beautiful un-

conscious nudity. "Among certain barbarous peoples," said the astounded Herodotus, "it is considered shameful to go naked." Louys would gladly recapture this fresh, sublime wonder of the historian. He would strip off the Genevan robe in which modern society hides itself. He longs for the frank love that dwelt unabashed under the blithe old skies, before Judaism had invented a new sin and a new virtue. He says: "Modern morality is mistaken; love and nudity are proper objects of contemplation." He traces the modern invasion of hideousness to the protestant cult that made the body disgraceful and love a shameful thing, to be hid and denied. His neo-paganism is a sort of faith at once materialistic and mystic; it is a renewal of the old carnal religion on the pretext of adoring the divine beauty.

It is impossible to apply the modern ethical yard-stick to the principles of Greek morality. The Greeks were scruple-ridden in many ways we know not of. It is not at all true that adogmatism was characteristic of their religion. There was a notable heresy trial, the account of which is still read in the schools. Theoretically the Greek was free to believe what he pleased — in what gods and miracles he pleased — provided only he profaned no other man's gods and miracles. He might go his own way to the mysteries of Eleusinia, but it was not well for him to sneer at the Kabeiroi of Samo-

thrace; as in this day one may be Baptist or Methodist, but there is a point beyond which differences of opinion are not tolerated. I doubt very much, however, if Louys has a very correct idea of Athenian or even Alexandrian life. It used to be a scholastic habit to divide mankind into two divisions — as Nominalists and Realists — and following the old habit I am inclined to divide mankind into Men and Puritans. In Greece there was almost the same proportion of Puritans that there is in modern France. In antique literature we read a great deal of the Aspasias and Nicoreses who dyed yellow their hair, and in other respects acted like the fashionable or fallen women of the Dumasfilial drama. There is gossip about Pericles and there is scandal about Ctesion. But is one to judge French life by the scandalous plays and gossipy memoirs of the hour? How much of French society does "La Dame aux Camélias" represent? And how much "Nana"? Fiction like history records only the exceptional. It preserves the wicked, witty women — the few! — and neglects the usual woman. When a good woman is dead she is dead forever. It is only by her vices that a woman can cheat oblivion. Bacchis and Plangon live; Phano is immortal; but, merely because there is no trace in scandalous history of their virtuous contemporaries, it is absurd to assume that there was no virtue in Athens. Indeed the very emphasis laid upon the free amours of the Athenians

is evidence enough that they were exceptional. So usual must have been the puritanic conduct of life in Greece that those who stepped outside it became notable by that one act. If Pierre Louys and René Emery and Marcel Balilliat could renew Greek life to-day, I believe they would find themselves confronted with almost all the problems of the hour — with puritanism and imperialism, proletarianism and theological bitterness. They would find quite as much intolerance and quite as little love for the Beautiful. There was more than one Athenian Calvin. There was a Thuringian monk before Luther.

In "Aphrodite," his historical romance of Alexandrian life, Pierre Louys has written a beautiful book — a book frankly non-moral, a pæan of the flesh, splendidly eloquent. It is a corrupt book. Its corruption lies in the fact that it is false to the very ideals that thunder in the index. It proclaims the essential purity of nudity — and tricks out its girls in all the shamelessness of sought and subtle apparel; it proclaims the frank nobility of human love and then permits you to peer at it sneakingly through the spy-hole of a curtain. The apostle of paganism sees only in the antique life *la grande sensualité* and forgets that it had ideals both of mysticism and beauty. Socrates loved the yellow-haired Myrto, but he dreamed as well of a superior world made of jasper, gold and porphyry — as you may

read in the dialogue. Greek life was not so simple as Pierre Louys would have you believe. It was not alone love, nor was love only the peopling of the world.

In his "Lectures Antiques" he has preserved more of the Greek spirit — in these little "Songs of Bilitis" that tricked the heavy German professors into the belief that a lost author had been recovered from the years. Of his nine volumes of Greek paraphrases and translations, few need trouble the incurious reader. The "Aphrodite" and the "Chansons de Bilitis" will suffice even the curious student. In his last book he has tried to find in Seville *la liberté morale* of Athens; and so it may be after all that his neo-paganism is little more than an attempt to draw aside that veil which is not the veil of Isis.

Jean Richepin and the Vagrom Man

JEAN RICHEPIN was born (he says) at Medeah, in Algeria, in 1850. His father was a French army surgeon of good family. His early years, like those of Sterne, were passed in the barracks or in the train of the wandering army. When he was about ten years old he was placed in the École Normale, where he remained until the breaking out of the war. He joined a company of *francs-tireurs* and fought until there was an end of fighting. Then he drifted to Montmartre. This was the epoch of the *grande Bohème.* Richepin, brooding in the *Cabaret des Assassins*, was as poor as poet well can be. He wrote fugitively for the newspapers. Between times he elaborated his marvellous "Chanson des Gueux." In summer he lived the life he had sung — he was a sailor, a strolling player, a "strong man" at suburban fairs. At this time — I speak of the early seventies — the Parnassian spirit was beginning to be dominant in French verse. Jean Richepin did not wholly escape its influence; but he was more than a rhetor, more than a juggler of words; he was not one to sit docilely in any

"school" of poetry. He went his own way, stormy, independent, audacious. He was the "strong man" of the fair.

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The trouble with the arts to-day is that they are anæmic. They are deficient in red blood corpuscles. This is true of literature; it is true of music, painting, sculpture, the drama — all the arts. George Moore used to have a phrase for it: "Art to-day," he would say, "lacks guts." And yet the world is ready enough to welcome the "strong man"; it will welcome a tenth-rate poet of windlasses and barrack-room balladry, if he have the lusty air; it will accept the tawdriest art if it have — I repeat George Moore's gruff Saxon phrase — "guts." Were I to use my own phrase I should say that what we all lack is the Rabelaisian spirit. Perhaps it is not quite easy to define this spirit in exact terms — unless one should use Luther's alliterative phrase — but your idea of it is clear enough. In every age when art has a strong accent, when it displays vigor, inventive force, power of hand, originality, you find something of this Rabelaisian spirit. It sparkles in Aristophanes. It flaunts itself magnificently across the Renascence. It laughs with you in the mirth of the Canterbury Pilgrims, just as it beckons you from the insolent canvas of Titian. Shakspere had it, and his roaring contemporaries.

Jean Richepin

It sat with Jan Steen in his cabaret among blowsy girls and ragged lads. It was conspicuous in Goethe's life and letters, as in Fielding's and Wagner's, Rubens's and Balzac's.

Wherever and whenever art and letters attain virility, vitality, force of hand, strength of creation, there you find this Rabelaisian spirit, which is, indeed, the spirit of the natural, wholesome man, who loves and laughs, labors and prays and is unashamed.

There is just a trifle more to this than was hinted in Martin Luther's phrase; "Wine, woman and song," he wrote, and after he had written the words the devil appeared to him. Martin Luther threw his ink bottle at the devil (the stain is to be seen on a wall in Eisenach to this day) and routed him gloriously. This was well done of Martin. It gives us reason to believe that he would not have objected to an emendation of his phrase, which should make it read: "Wine, woman, song and religious fervor." And this perhaps is — as near as one can get it — that state of the natural man which is described as Rabelaisian.

It would seem that the natural man loves all that tends to expand his emotions and that his art is merely the expression of his joy in expansive life. Whenever life has gone strenuously, when he has found himself in a great age — in the stormily magnificent fifteenth century, in the sturdy and subtle seventeenth century — he has made for himself an

artistic instrument, resonant, beautiful, capable of expressing his virile and individual emotions.

Great art is always virile.

The slim pallidities of Fra Angelico belong to a day of degenerate and monkish thought.

Rubens's great blond women are the solaces of the eternal fighting man.

And if the great artist has always been virile and wholesome, he has also been the broad, spendthrift, Rabelaisian man — spendthrift of his golden fancy, his wit, his heart, his intelligence. He has not chiselled a sonnet — like Mallarmé — and called himself a poet; like Homer, like Shakspere, like Goethe, like Titian, like Rubens and Da Vinci and Angelo, he has poured forth a rich and golden stream, which only death could dam. I do not think that there is a better example of the essential prodigality of the great artist than Rubens — not even Shakspere, who dowered the world with so much intellectual magnificence. And I like to think of Rubens sitting in his garden (while his handsome wife sipped a glass of wine, and his handsome children frolicked with the peacocks), and sketching out, before breakfast, a masterpiece.

What a great, flamboyant energy was here!

When one thinks of Rubens there is a measure of discouragement in looking at the art and letters of the present day. I fear it is a little generation, dear Lord, a dyspeptic generation, which whimpers

pallid roundelays. When a hirsute and Rabelaisian person like Walt Whitman passes, a shudder runs through organized society, so monstrous he seems and gross.

And this, as I have said, disquiets the thinking man. He cannot persuade himself that all is well with the age that has a petty and pallid taste in art and letters. He recognizes the sway of the artificial in the admiration which the modish art critic professes for Botticelli. He acknowledges sadly that it is the mode to admire the degenerate, the etiolate, the smug, the caduque, the petty things of this day or the grimacing symbols — out of which all meaning has faded — of the days gone by.

There can be no vital art of any sort until there has grown up an appreciation of the Rabelaisian spirit, until we dare to face our passions; until we are unashamed of the riot of red blood corpuscles; until we are frank enough to be what the dear Lord made us — lusty, joyous men and women, lovers of apples and flagons, carnal and unabashed.

It was Heine who pointed out that the Berliners are moral — because they sit in snow up to the navel; and this is the morality of art and letters to-day. It is an artificial and unclean morality. It is the insincere modesty of the fig leaf. Ah! for the frank, sweet innocence that used the fig leaf as a fan.

The art of the future?

Ah ! my pallid and anæmic friends — playwriters, poets, musicians, painters — we need have no fear of that if you will but get out into the open spaces of life, let your blood riot and your passions blaze unchecked; let your natural and wholesome egotism have its way, even though it should lead you to the whimsical conclusion that you have an immortal soul.

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It was Jean Richepin's chief distinction that he was splendidly and aggressively himself. He had Luther's broad love for life, and if he hurled immortal blasphemies at heaven, instead of throwing ink bottles at the devil, he was none the less a hunter of souls.

He was imprisoned for writing the "Chanson des Gueux" and lost his civic rights. While at Sainte-Pélagie he wrote that book of brutally modern tales, "Morts Bizarres." Then came "Les Blasphèmes," in which he condensed all the bitterness and insolence of the modern scientific soul. He was as one who walked out under the stars and beat his breast and screamed defiance at the Elemental Laws.

He wrote plays and novels; fame came to him. Jean Richepin, Bouchor, Raoul Pouchon and many others in those days frequented the Rat Mort in the Place Pigalle.

It is 4 o'clock in the morning — a crowd at the

tables — Richepin comes in. He pulls up the sleeve of his velvet jacket, opens his shirt sleeves.

"See there!" he says, pointing to a fresh wound; there were scratches too, on his face; he and Mlle. Bernhardt had been fighting.

Sardou, who has just come from Mlle. Bernhardt, remarks, "*Ça sentait les coups.*"

How did Jean Richepin and Sarah Bernhardt fall in love?

It was very simple. They met one night in the Rue des Martyrs. He saw her pass, accompanied by her maid. Her hair shone red and gold in the lamplight. He caught her in his arms and kissed her. Sarah turned on him furiously, and struck him in the face. They blackguarded each other. It was very simple; it was love.

They played "Nana-Sahib" at the Porte Saint-Martin one evening in the winter of 1883. It was the night after Christmas, I believe. Word had got about that this last performance of Jean Richepin's play would be marked by an odd incident. And those who went that night were not disappointed. Before the curtain went up the stage manager announced that the author of the piece would play the title rôle. A magnificent barbarian!

He, the poet, cared little for the devices of stagecraft. He was *Nana-Sahib*, the lover of *Djelma*. Why should he not take the public into his confidence? The illusion of the character vanished in

his magnificent personality — that gypsy figure with the burning eyes, the shock of black hair, the loose beard. And *Djelma?* The subtle Oriental was swept away in the tempest of this strange love-making. There was left Sarah Bernhardt. We who were in Paris in those days had heard odd tales of the love of these two people. And they had summoned the world to see how well they loved. It was a frank and royal passion. He cried aloud in that ringing voice of his :

> O, mon amante, O, mon épouse, O, ma maîtresse,
> Dans un rayonnement d'extase, je te vois.
> Le ciel, c'est ton regard. L'ivresse, c'est ta voix.
> Un frisson parfumé de ton être a mon être —

They loved and they proclaimed it. There were a thousand who bore witness. It was a gypsy love. They jumped over the broomstick in public and the footlights did service for the campfire. A few months later Jean Richepin had tired of it all. He fled to Newfoundland to escape the reproaches of Mlle. Bernhardt.

Once in one of his journeys he found himself near Marseilles. He had a wife and child there. He fell into his home like an aërolite. In an hour he turned *bourgeois.*

Tout passe, tout casse, tout lasse.

There for a year he cut out paper dolls for his baby and made love all over again to Nini, his wife.

For a while the old moons were forgotten. Then he wrote this letter to a friend: "I depart for Africa. I am sick of the scent of the white woman's hair and skin. I am a nomad, enemy of the white race, which has invented the fireside, the family, the ideal and religion."

He vanished into the desert beyond sight of the Berber country and the White Peak. The romance had gone out of domesticity.

* * * * * * * *

The years have gone by since then; Jean Richepin is no longer the nomad; he has forsaken the great highways; he is rich and orderly; his Paris home in the Rue Galvani might house a banker; but the vagrom man — he who knew the errant life of old, the gay life of the King's Highway, the life of the starlit ditch and the windy forest — still lives in his poems and plays and novels. He has always loved the vagabonds, and not even Robert Burns, that other independent, red-corpuscled poet, knew them better. He has danced in rags and kissed his doxy in the straw.

Were I asked to name the one book that shows the most and the best of Jean Richepin, I should select that dramatic poem, "Le Chemineau" — which is as though one should say the Tramp. It is the epic of the Vagrom Man, the Odyssey of the eternal Wanderer.

The highway — there is magic in the very word. It draws them all — gypsies, players, beggars, saltimbanques, poets — all those who go in the rags of poverty or the rags of the Great Ideal. The good bed and fare, the easy chair in the chimney nook, the cronies at the cosey tavern or club — the lover of the Highway is willing to barter them all for the journey that leads no whither and has no end, save the foolish end of the grave. He sleeps cold and dines light, the wayfarer. The four winds of heaven blow upon him. The rain and sleet drop from the north wind's wings upon him. The suns burn him. The stones of the highway cut his feet. He is fain to fill his belly with husks. The dogs bay him. And yet he is happy — only happy when he travels the Highway.

Why are you happy, old pad-the-hoof? Because you journey on and ever on, between the mountains and along the plains, by thorp and grange and town, through the forests and mysterious shaded places, on and ever on, you know not whither, save that it is toward something very far away, golden and glorious, most beautiful — which you shall never reach.

Le Chemineau — c'est celui qui chemine, n'est-ce pas? And to Richepin's hero there clings the dust of the road. He has wandered far. He has begged his crust of bread where he could. The sun is his hearth-fire, the world his home. He has roamed

the earth, singing. Here and there he has worked a little. It happens that at this time he is working for the rich farmer Pierre, who is pressed in hay-making. And there he meets the farmer's maid-servant, Toinette. The *chemineau* is twenty, a brown, merry, lusty, handsome fellow. Toinette loves him. The farmer has no fault to find with this sturdy lad, who is merry as a sand-boy, and strong as an ox. But the *chemineau* will not stay. It is not that he is ungrateful; it is not that he does not love Toinette; only — the wind passes, the birds fly — the great horizons call him, he must go. He passes on his way, singing. For Toinette there are wet eyelids and a broken heart, and an honest, home-keeping husband.

Ah! little Toinette, it is the lesson all women must learn. The *Chemineau* is not a man, this wanderer enamoured of the great horizons is the Ideal — that comes and goes and shifts and does not abide. The kisses of the Ideal do not stain a woman's lips. They sweeten them. And this the good François found when he married Toinette and consoled her. She made him a brave little wife, and the household prospered. Perhaps in dreams she heard the *chanson* of the vagabond, but that could only add happiness to her happy life. Her little son Toinet grew apace. François was like a father to him.

Twenty years go by; Toinet is almost a man.

François is crippled and kept to his chair by the fire. Toinet is in love with Alène, the daughter of the rich old farmer, Pierre. To the rich man the idea of their marriage seems preposterous. In a bitter scene he rakes up the old scandal of Toinette's love for the vagabond, and François, angered and shocked, nearly dies of a stroke. And matters are worse than ever. Young Toinet wails for love and Toinette rages like a wolf over her suffering young.

The beggarman comes singing, a rare, gay, lilting song — the song of twenty years ago. But he is no older, the wayfarer, for he is still himself — the lover of great horizons, the singer of songs, the traveller on the inn-less highway. And since he is something of the Ideal, it is not miraculous that he should bring happiness, justice and peace in his pouch. He charms the old farmer into consenting to the marriage of Alène and Toinet — ah! the sorcery of the wayfarer's songs! Even old François mends a bit and sits by the fire, wagging his head in peaceful apathy.

The end? On the contrary, it is the beginning of Jean Richepin's poem, the real point of departure. These good peasants are full of gratitude. They offer the vagabond a horse, rest, ease — oh! an easy chair and a good red fire and the Christmas goose for this weary, frozen, hungry Vagrom Man. See, he is naked of all the world prizes. They will give him all — even love, the love of kin. But on

the other side of the door, he knows, the great highway stretches, far and very far, into the infinite mysterious distance — the great highway, swept with wintry rain, burned with the summer sun, where men fare on and on to die in a wayside ditch. Which will he choose — this Vagrom Man?

Since he is indeed the Wanderer, what can he do but wander? It is the logic (awful, implacable, imperturbable as the logic of the scientist) of the Ideal. Without him they will sup well, sit warm, sleep deep; without him they will die decently between four posts — but as for him, the Vagrom Man, he must go, on and ever on, toward the mystery of the great Highway which has no end. He goes out into the stormy night, singing.

Jean Richepin's symbolic vagrant is at once masterless and thoughtless. No crime urges him on. No disturbing melancholy drags him to and fro. He is a searcher. He is indeed the man who seeks. He quests the Holy Graal — this phantom Graal, which he shall never find. He is the symbol of all those who sought (there were knights before Sir Galahad) and did not find. He seeks — he knows not what; he sings — he knows not why. Mysterious blue horizons beckon him and flee. Life slips by him, with its serenities and pleasant hours; he knows not of them; he sees only the blue, beckoning horizons. Women cry to him of love. He kisses their wet faces and as he wanders on he won-

ders what this love may be, and fashions a strange little song, all about wet eyelids and gentle kisses and broken hearts, and he trudges on toward the flying horizon, trolling the little, strange song. The world cries at him of energies and needs, of great actions and wasted hours — he makes a little song and calls it the "Chanson of Wasted Hours." So light he is, this Vagrom Man. He wanders by night. He knows the lonely forests and the sleeping cities. He is intimate with the vagrom moon. Always the nostalgia of the great highway drags him hither and thither; always the false, blue horizons summon him; then he dies in a wayside ditch — and his songs flutter for a little while like errant birds and fall. Songs and singer are dead. Jean Richepin's "Le Chemineau" is the symbol of this Vagrom Man and it is well.

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Follow your natural impulses; be happy in your own way; fashion your paradise of the passing hours; your paradise may be

Faire un enfant, planter un arbre, écrire un livre.

This, I take it, is the philosophy of Jean Richepin's life and work. Is he a great artist? He is more; he is alive, masculine, vital, and in prose and verse he has made his stormy personality live, this little brother of Walt Whitman. I have said

that he is not to be classed with the Parnassians. His talent has multiple faces. Naturalist in "La Glu," romantic in "Monsieur Scapin," realistic in "Braves Gens," romantic in "Miarka"— himself in everything, he could be classed — if classification be necessary — only as an impulsivist. This poet of the "Mer" and of the "Blasphèmes" and "Mes Paradis"— he has travelled many highways. I should not be surprised to meet him on the road to Damascus

The Christ of Jehan Rictus

FOR many years Gabriel Randon was known as a journalist, a sentimental lover of anarchy — like many of the young writers of France — and a poet, whose verses, somehow or other, never attained even the pallid success of the *cafés*. A lean, handsome, apostolic man, he wandered through life like a homeless cat. He was the MAN-OF-WHOM-MUCH-IS-EXPECTED. You know these men. They go to and fro in literature. They have abundant and impressive talent. But they never find the way. Evidently, Gabriel Randon's way was not that of æsthetic anarchy and the fashionable sneer at life. A few years ago Gabriel Randon died and a new poet was born. He called himself "Jehan Rictus"; he was lean, handsome, apostolic, and he was the ghost of the cynical and sullied anarchist. Gabriel Randon had become as a little child — a grim, vagrom, wretched *gamin* of the gutter — had been born again as "Jehan Rictus." And he sang the song of the ragged man, of him who sleeps under the blue blanket and fills his belly with the North Wind. It was as though a new Richepin, dolorous, devout and realistic, had come singing the song of the *chemineau*. He recited his

poems in the *cafés* of Montmartre. They were written in the slang of the gutter. They were black with revolt. They were poems of famine and fear and misery. Unviolent, contented citizens — fatted tradesmen and powdered girls — flocked to hear them. And Jehan Rictus — this emaciated apostle of anarchy — became a mode, a fashion, a mania.

A Belgian poet has written one verse that haunts me: "Have pity! all my irony is dead." And indeed without this armor one is helpless and naked to one's enemies. Irony — it is the last refuge of the unhappy man; in irony, as in a white garment, Renan wrapped his unsettled and sinister soul and faced the world with an air of decent content; irony — it is the sword that even the beggar may carry under his cloak.

The figure Jehan Rictus evokes comes gaunt and savage from the garret and the gutter; he would come bearing a bomb of picric acid or gun-cotton, were it not that his irony makes life tolerable.

Les Soliloques du Pauvre —

The Beggar's Soliloquies.

In the first poem, "Winter," you may read the ironic hatred of the Poor Man for the professional charity of the day — the "organized" charity of fatted ex-clergymen and salaried hypocrites — the charity of "balls" and women who snivel serenely over hungry babies and cripples — the charity that

makes it a business to "*plaind' des Pauvr's*" — the charity that beats the drum on the empty bellies of the poor — the charity that trades on the suffering it never relieves.

> Ah! c'est qu'on n'est pas muff' en France,
> On n' s'occup' que des malheureux ;
> Et dzimm et boum ! la Bienfaisance
> Bat l' tambour su' les ventres creux !
>
> L'en faut, des Pauv's, c'est nécessaire,
> Afin qu' tout un chacun s'exerce,
> Car si y gn'avait pas d' misère,
> Ça pourrait bien ruiner l' commerce.

And then — it is Jehan Rictus who speaks — contemplate (in this winter time) the poets, painters, writers, who do the dead baby act, or whimper over the poor, and see how they swim in glory and in wine. For them the poor are only a "subject" — to be put in rhyme or prose, in play or picture. Those who interpret the distress of the poor, soon make enough to retire with fortunes. Victor Hugo got enough out of his beggars to raise his family in luxury. Richepin made a fortune pitying the poor.

> Eh donc! tout seul, j' lèv' mon drapeau ;
> Va falloir tâcher d'êt' sincère
> En disant l' vrai coup d' la Misère,
> Au moins, j'aurai payé d' ma peau !

And again the Vagrom Man goes wandering in the streets; his heels are raw and his heart is black;

he dreams of girls — of ingots of love — of health and that happiness of which he has been disinherited.

> Bon, ma foi, si, gna pas moyen,
> C'est pas ca qu'empêch'ra que j' l'aime !
> Allons, r'marchons, suivons nôt' flemme,
> Revons toujours, ça coute rien !

The poet passes from hope to despair, from the dream to the deception. How high his poetry rises at times you may see from the concluding lines of "De'ception" — the style is that of rags, slang, the gutter; it is popular and gross; yet through it there speaks the true poet —

> Tonnerr' de dieu, la Femme en Noir,
> La Sans-Remords . . . la Sans-Mamelles,
> La Dure-aux-Cœurs, la Fraîche-aux-Moëlles,
> La Sans-Pitié, la Sans-Prunelles,
> Qui va jugulant les pus belles
> Et jarnacquant l' jarret d' l'Espoir ;
>
> Vous savez bien . . . la Grande en Noir
> Qui tranch' les tronch's par ribambelles
> Et dans les tas les pus rebelles
> Envoie son Tranchoir en coup d'aile
> Pour fair' du Silence et du Soir !

Not even Rollinat has dreamed a ghastlier invocation to Death, *la Femme en Noir.*

Of all the poems of Jehan Rictus the most notable is "Le Revenant," a word for which there is no suitable English word, though one is sadly needed

— were it only for this title and that of Ibsen's "Ghosts." The *Revenant* is he who has come again. And this one is Christ — that Christ who came not to the cardinal-archbishops and fatted pew-holders of his day, but to the poor and lowly — that Christ toward whom the broken and fatuous anarchists of the world still look — the Christ of two thousand years ago.

Ragged and famished the Vagrom Man goes padding-the-hoof, along the macadam of Paris town; and he says to himself:

> Say, what if He'd come again, see?
> Who? Ah, you're on — de Vag of Galilee,
> Dat bloke whose heart was bigger'n Life.

And the Vagrom Man passes, musing:

> Si qu'y r'viendrait, l'Agneau sans tache,
> Si qu'y r'viendrait, l' Bâtard de l'Ange?
>
> C'lui qui pus tard s'fit accrocher
> À trent'-trois berg's, en plein' jeunesse
> (Mêm' qu'il est pas cor dépendu!)
> Pour le plaisir d' rach'ter ses frangins
> Qui euss l'ont vendu et r'vendu;
> Car tout l' monde en a tire d' l'or
> D'puis Juda jusqu'à Grandmachin!

If He should come — if He should come — the Man in Blue who walked the sea — He who cured the sick, merely by looking them in the eyes — if

He should come! He was not especially polite to the fatted tradesmen of His day; He said, "Woe to the Rich"; the Man of Dreams, this carpenter who was always on strike, this anarcho, who bore another cross than that of the Legion d'Honneur. Hein! If He should come — this model of the economist, who fed five thousand men on three loaves and seven fishes. If He should go strolling from Montsouris to the Batignolles —

And the Vagrom Man meets Him, one night, at the corner of a street, *incognito*, and gives him the sele of the evening — *Bon soir — te v'là?* What? Say, is it really You? Well, who'd 'a' guessed! Wait till de papers hears — dey won't do a ting, see! "Extry! Return of Jesus Christ! Extry! Saviour's arrival — here ye are!" Ah, the poor devils, they must make a livin', see; dey don' know no better — now. Jes' pipe dem off — sentinels of misery. Dey don' know who You is, see. (Hist! look out — dere comes de cop!) Get a move on; dis way, Crucified — You know what de cops is! Dey had yez oncet for Disorderly Conduct, didn't dey, in de Square of Olives — de's just as bad to-day, and I don' tink You wants to be run-in again and be stacked up against anudder Pilate, see?

Lemme see You — ah, but You're white, ah, but You're pale — You shudder with the cold — You tremble — ain't had no grub, eh, and ain't slept? —

poor felly, let's be frien's. Shall we sit here on de bench, or shall we pad-de-hoof? Ah, but You're pale, an' white! Say, has You still got dat hole in Your side? What? Bleedin' still? An' Your poor hands, an' Your poor naked feet on the asphalt! Ah, but You're pale, ah, but You're white — like a ghost or the moonlight fallen. Gee, but You're thin and git onter Your rags! Say, if You'd 'a' bin dat way when dey made You King.

There on the naked corner the Vagrom Man stands and talks to this pale Christ who has come up out of the years. All about them is the noise of traffic — yonder the locomotives go barking, dogs of iron — in shop and factory whizz the iron wheels of trade; *c'est l' Désespoir actuel que beugle!* And now the snow is falling. The Vagrom Man can offer Him no shelter. Not a nip of cognac, a crust of bread — nothing. Ho, there! ye lobsters — cardinals, cures and sacristans, Protestants, Catholics, give us a crumb of the Host — *Gn'a Jésus Christ qui meurt de faim.* Go, then, open Your arms, take flight and come no more, or, Son of God, make the last miracle.

And as he turns away the Vagrom Man discovers that what he has seen was not the Christ, but his own pitiable image in a shop-window, and he passes, sad and ironic.

Vaguely across the prose-reflection I have given of this strange poem you may have discerned the

soul of Jehan Rictus — at once savage and pitiful, sweet, resigned, ironic and — if it were worth while — anarchic. He writes in argot; it is the equivalent of the speech common in the Bowery. It adds a strange realism to his verse — his verses, like his beggars, go in the rags and tatters of modernity. Argot, however, is very transitory. The slang of to-day is dead to-morrow. I must confess that I do not think "Le Revenant" would lose much either in power or actuality were it dressed in the garment of proper French. And yet I do not know. Perhaps the plaint of these poor wretches, who seek futilely the Christ, gains a new immensity — a new poignancy — when it is spoken in their own tongue.

A real poet, this Jehan Rictus. And it is real life, he sings — life pitiably real and quotidian.

Maurice Barrès and Egoism

"I FIND no sweeter fat than sticks to my own bones," said Walt Whitman; and this casual boast Maurice Barrès has erected into a theory of life. It is an inevitable consequence that he should take the dilettantesque view of life. Men and things are merely the toys with which his bored Ego amuses itself; in breaking a moral canon or a woman's heart he finds the child's pleasure in destroying a mechanical doll. One of M. Barrès' disciples — he has disciples! — has written this significant sentence: "Since in this irreparable flight of things the point and moment of our consciousness remain our only good, we must exalt it and exasperate its intensity." Surely here there is nothing new. That smug dilettante, Horace, chirped his *carpe diem* and drank himself to sleep. The voice of Omar Kháyyám has come gallantly down the years with its praise of "this day's moment." The dilettantism of M. Barrès, however, is a variant of the old theory; he has made of it a principle of action — as Byron tried to live his poetry. He has sent his soul abroad on adventurous missions. He has played his part in the comedies of the hour. Wherever there were stir and

bustle of thought he has taken his stand — loitered there, amiable and alert, amusing his Ego. He has played with politics and trifled with conspiracy. No man of his years in France — no one in our century, unless it be Disraeli — has enjoyed more of the melodramatic excitements of life and letters. In 1888 he was twenty-seven years old, a smart little *bourgeois* dandy; he had written "Taches d'Encre," perhaps, but little else. In one of the minor reviews he had published an article, "La Jeunesse Contemporaine et le Général Boulanger." Something like this: "To us, traversing a mystic and unsatisfying youth — that youth in which the souls of this generation suffer and die — there opens at last a field of action. Blessed be the hour, etc. The consoler and saviour appears, etc. Palms, victory and Boulanger, etc."

It all seems very ridiculous now. It was ridiculous then. But on the strength of this article — and thanks to the fortunate coalition of hopeful priests and despairing workingmen — this dandy of letters found himself a member of the House. M. le député — there was nothing ridiculous in that; indeed success is never ridiculous; when it is the result of a single magazine article it is in the way of being sublime. (Beside this, Stéphane Mallarmé with his donkey-cart — the price of one dark symbol — pales into insignificance.) There was an element of opera-bouffe in M. Barrès' success that

pricked up European curiosity. At St. Petersburg, as at Naples, at Edinburgh, as at Berlin, the young acclaimed him; he was belabored and defended; he was a Cause! Think, then, my brothers, what a rare adventure was this for the Ego of our little *bourgeois* dandy. He had his disciples; Hermann Bahr, Paul Remer, absurd Germans, and the sombre Neapolitan, Vittoria Pica. Nordau, with his strange Jewish instinct for decay, crept humbly to his feet, crying, "I, too, have a beautiful Ego." Ironic, elegant, charmed, alert, the little dandy looked down from his pedestal — he was amusing his soul. And he wrote, wrote, wrote; strange essays that were psychological confessions; fissiparous novels that were essays; and he travelled — in Italy and Spain he made the stations of his soul. The book "Of Blood, of Pleasure and of Death," it was his journey to the island in Lough Derg. Life in all its manifestations — the tumult of politics, the dolor of women, the fritinancy of the drawing-room — was his "divine amusement." Once he used Maeterlinck's figure of a hot-house — he was forcing his soul. Now and then he pulled it up by the roots to see how it was growing.

"I do things," he said, "merely to study the effect they will have upon Me."

At one time it was the mode to trace M. Barrès' literary ancestry through Renan and Stendhal back to Voltaire. There is truth enough in the com-

Maurice Barrès

parison to keep it sweet. As a matter of fact M. Barrès possesses "multiple atavisms," if I may use a phrase of M. Maurice le Blond. His irony, always alert, his fancy for elegant mystification, his style, at once correct and individual, his rather impudent attitude, all, serve to recall the writer whose name was Arouet. He has, too, more than a due measure of Renan's fat and dreary dilettantism. Stendhal he approaches on the side of his energy, his gross love of violence, his admiration for what Musset calls the *bruit de la vie.* And yet M. Barrès is but a pale shadow of Henri Beyle. Do you remember that episode — it is in "Les Promenades sans Rome," I believe — of the butcher who stabbed his rival? The brutal energy of this crime stirred Stendhal like the call of the bugle. M. Barrès derived the same excitement from the tawdry adventures of Marie Bashkirtseff — this poor wretch, who died (like the girl of Tristan Corbiere) *de chic*, *de boire*, *ou de phthisie.* And here, I think, there is a difference, not only in degree, but in kind. The energies glorified by M. Barrès are not those of bold and open violence — not the scarlet and beneficent energies of war — but the ptomainic energies of decay. He is feverish, not with passion, but with disease.

I have said that M. Barrès has had a very great influence upon the thought of his day. Many feeble spirits have been captivated by his non-

chalant attitudes. Not only the Nordaus and Steiners and Bahrs — these strange creatures for whom imitation is a sort of somnambulism, that leads them where they will not — have fallen under his influence. It is not unimportant, then, to define, as clearly as may be, his philosophy of life.

Of its own accord the subject falls apart into two divisions. In the first place he proclaims a revolt against the social laws and customs — all the weight of traditional morals and habitudes, under which his Ego is stifled. And, secondly, he makes an appeal for all those pleasures and for that accomplished hedonism, which are created and insured by these very laws and customs against which he revolts. It is this very contradiction that lends a charm to his philosophy. He is the child of his age. His dilettantism is complicated with tenderness and devotion. He is an anarchist who would wear purple and fine linen. He has the rebel's brain and the exigent nerves of a voluptuary. He would fain destroy the roots of civilization and yet he cannot live without its complicated and refined flowers. In a word, he is that immitigable contradiction, a sentimental anarchist. What should he do in his journey through the world? Amuse yourself, my child.

Mounted on his spry, little mule — charmed by the jangle of the bells — he journeyed through Spain; the chill of the Sierras, the burning heat of the sensual south were "therapeutics." They gave

him the exhilaration of alternate shower-baths, hot and cold. And so he rode on, soothing his nerves and tormenting his soul. He met strange little women—"Simone, who might one day be Psyche who woke and lit a torch and peered at naked Love, sleeping"—Pia, who spat blood, and of whom he said: "*Ah! combien je t'aime ainsi sanglante!*"—and Berenice, who was as a stagnant pool, whence dreams rose to the setting sun; and many others; and he said: "*Je suis un amateur d'âmes!*" Seville flaming in the sun, the "*Voluptes de la tauromachie et de l'auto-de-fé*," the mystery of old churches, wooden Christs with crowns of thorns, Goya's strenuous pictures, the songs of kissing lovers, murder, right scurvily done, quarrels in dark alleyways—he brought back with him sensations of these things. They were the Spanish adventures of his soul. Satisfied and calm, he walked abroad and took the air, a matador of the passions.

One day he said: "I am an Enemy of the Laws."

But are not laws necessary, in our civilization at least, to protect the feeble?

"Sympathy will suffice," he said, "and the gift of tears."

The gift of tears! Never was there quite so sentimental an anarchist.

Another time he remembered that the Greeks had called all those who were not of their race by the disdainful epithet, "Barbarians." M. Barrès went

a step further. The duty of his Ego, he confessed, was to look upon all others as "Barbarians." He built up this old-world insularity into a book "Sous l'Œil des Barbares." The Barbarians — they are the old habitudes, the antique heredities, the worn thoughts of our fathers, the social prejudices; and it is one's duty to turn them out of doors that one may sit, naked and alone, the jocund master of himself. M. Barrès calls this "*l'anarchie intérieure*"; and it is the boast of the young witch in Goethe's drama:

> Der Puder ist so wie der Rock,
> Für alt' und graue Weibchen ;
> Drum sitz' ich nackt auf meinem Bock
> Und zeig' ein derbes Leibchen.

"L'Homme Libre" — it is the title of another of M. Barrès' books; in this he has analyzed the history of his native land, Lorraine, and somewhat of the personality of the people — the proud and angry helplessness of the conquered — has entered into the book. It is the nearest approach M. Barrès has made to impersonal thought; indeed at one point he is brought to confess that he has "five or six very lively doubts of the importance of" his Ego. Here at last I come into complete accord with M. Maurice Barrès; I share all his doubts, be they five or six; I do not think the soul of this emotional dandy is of extreme importance. Nor

do I think that his adventures in life have borne any notable results. The problem of our generation stands where it stood — the redoubtable problem of Individualism and Solidarity, this problem which science and democracy have rendered all the more difficult of solution. This little ironic dilettante, with his pretty literary graces and eighteenth century artifices, this collector of feminine souls, this anarchist who would replace the laws by the "gift of tears," this gloating sentimentalist, who would kiss the bloody mouth of a consumptive girl, this Beau Brummel of the Palais-Bourbon — upon my word he is the drollest, saddest figure in modern French literature. He is the founder of a fugitive school of egoists. He has made himself a mode — he has impressed the popular imagination of the day. Unless there had been a taint of charlatanism this had been impossible. Like his old master, Boulanger, he has known the value of the pompous phrase and the *panache*. There is in him the politician, the poet and the philosopher — and the greatest of these is the politician. He, too, rides the black charger.

"Little I myself," Aristophanes was fond of calling himself; and it is with a touch of this classic mockery that one should take the Ego of M. Maurice Barrès.

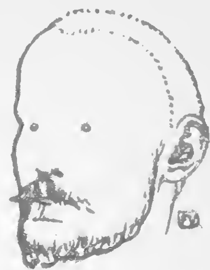
Fables, Ballads, Pastorals

Jules Renard

CANDID and blond and operose, with little eyes that twinkled like pin-points, Jules Renard stared at the blank sheets of paper. With one hand he ruffled his pale hair and beard, with the other he dipped a quill-pen in ink. Slowly he began to write. Letter by letter he painted in the words — as a Japanese poet prints flying syllables, sombre and alert. The letters marched across the page — lean and black, and errant as grasshoppers. They marched in single file. File after file. Jules Renard watched them with pride and amazement.

"I have made them," he said, "I and none other. I am victoriously myself. I am no man's son. I am not the son of Flaubert. I am not the son of Zola. I am not the son of my generation. I am The Peasant. I am sad. I am good. I am cruel. I am patient. I fear God. I love the black cricket. What I am, I write. What I write is me. It is not art. It is not life. It is myself."

He drank a glass of water, cleared his throat, and read aloud:



THE CHIMNEY-SWALLOWS.

Each day they give me my lesson.

They stipple the air with little cries.

They draw a straight line, put in a comma, then brusquely make a dash —

They set the house wherein I dwell between fantastic parentheses.

Swift, so swift that sheet of water in the garden cannot mirror their flight, they mount from cellar to cockloft.

With light pen-feathers they scrawl inimitable flourishes.

Then, two by two, in accolade, they meet and mix and become, on the blue of heaven, but a blot of ink.

Only the eye of a friend can follow them, and, though you know Latin and Greek, I — I can read the Hebrew written in the air by the chimney-swallows.

* * * * * * * *

"It is gentle. It is graceful. It is tender. It is pure," said Jules Renard; a smile rippled his pale beard.

"And now," he added, "I shall be bitter and sad and mocking."

He was in a hyssop mood. The pin-points in his face glittered. They were so small — his eyes

— and sinister. Slowly, laboriously, he painted the black letters. The black letters were squads. The squads were words. The words were a regiment.

"Ah!" said Jules Renard, "I am The Peasant, who loves and scoffs."

In a voice that was bitter and sweet, he recited:

THE TOAD.

Born under a stone, he lives under a stone and there he digs his tomb.

I visit him often, and every time I lift his stone I am afraid of finding him and afraid that he may not be there.

He is there.

Hid in his dry and tight and tidy little house, his very own, he fills every nook of it — plumps it out like a miser's purse.

When the rain drives him out he comes over to me. A few clumsy leaps and then he sets himself up on his haunches and stares at me with red eyes. The unjust world treats him like a leper, but I — I squat down in front of him and confront his face with my man's visage.

Then, conquering a remnant of disgust, I caress thee with my hand — *crapaud!*

(There is that in life to swallow that makes for greater qualmishness.)

But yesterday I lacked tact. He fermented and oozed; all his warts burst.

"My poor friend," I said to him, "I do not wish to hurt your feelings, but — Lord! but you are ugly!"

He opened his puerile, toothless mouth and replied, with a slight English accent:

"And you?"

* * * * * * * *

"And you?" Jules Renard repeated.

He stared at his man's visage in a hand mirror. The pin-points twinkled ironically.

And Jules Renard said: "I am Poil-de-Carotte and I am l'Écornifleur — my brain is peopled from the fields and my brain is peopled from books. I see the eighteenth century across Goncourt. I see workingmen across Zola. I see society across Daudet and Bourget. I see peasants across Balzac and Maupassant. I see the sea across Michelet and Richepin. But the eyes wherewith I see the fields and the farmyard are mine own."

And to himself he droned, as one who drones the Latin psalms,—

THE DRAGON-FLY.

She nurses her ophthalmy.

From bank to bank of the river she does no more than dip her swollen eyes in the fresh water.

And she flickers as though she flew by electricity.

THE WASP.

She will end, however, by spoiling her figure.

THE ANTS.

Each of them resembles a figure 3.

That's it.

There are 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 — to infinity.

THE TURKEY HEN.

She pavanes across the courtyard as though she lived under the *ancien régime.*

The other fowls eat always; no matter what. She, between her regular repasts, preoccupies herself only with having a fetching air. All her feathers are starched, and the points of her wings stripe the earth, as though to trace out the path she takes.

She carries her head so high she never sees her feet.

She never mistrusts any one, and so when I approach she imagines that I wish to render her my homage.

Already she bubbles with pride.

"Noble turkey hen," I say to her, "if you were a goose I would write your eulogy, as Buffon did, with one of your quill feathers. But you are only a turkey hen."

I must have vexed her, for the blood mounts to

her head. The grapes of wrath hang at her beak. She has a crisis of red. Smartly she flirts open the fan of her tail, and thus this old coquette turns her back on me. *Chipie !*

THE RABBITS.

In an overturned barrel Grayie and Blackie, all furry and warm, eat like cows. They have only one meal, and that lasts all day.

If one is slow about throwing them a fresh cabbage, they gnaw the old one to the stump, and whet their teeth even on the root.

Now, once there fell to them a head of lettuce. Grayie and Blackie went for it together.

Nose to nose they struggled, tossing their heads and wagging their ears.

When there was only one leaf left they seized it, each at an end, and the race began.

Though they were serious enough, you would have thought they played, and that when the leaf was swallowed their little snouts would unite in a fraternal kiss.

But Grayie felt himself weakening. Since the day before he had been in a bad way; his little stomach was puffed out like a balloon. In fact, he had eaten too much. And though a leaf of lettuce is but a trifle, even to one who is not hungry, Grayie could do no more. He dropped the leaf

and lay on his side in the dirt, shaken with convulsions.

There he lay, rigid, his paws spread, as though ready for a heraldic motto: "On tue net, on tue loin."

For one moment Blackie paused in surprise. Bolt upright, breathing gently, his lips shut fast, he stared with rose-circled eyes.

He had the air of a sorcerer who penetrates a mystery. His two erect ears marked the supreme moment.

Then they fell.

And he finished the leaf of lettuce.

A FAMILY OF TREES.

It was after traversing a sunburned plain that I met them.

They do not dwell by the roadside, on account of the noise. They inhabit the incult fields, by a brook known only of the birds.

From afar they seem impenetrable. As soon as I approach, their trunks disperse. They receive me prudently. I may rest and refresh myself, but I divine that they observe me and mistrust.

They live *en famille*, the oldest in the midst, and the little ones — those whose leaves are just budding — about them, here and there, but never straying far.

They put off dying for a long time, and they keep the dead standing till they fall to dust.

They touch each other lightly with their long branches — like the blind — to assure themselves that all are there. Wrathfully they gesticulate if the wind storms to uproot them. But among themselves no dispute. They murmur only in accord.

I feel that they should be my true family. Quickly I should forget the other. Little by little the trees would adopt me, and to merit it I should learn what needs be known.

Already I know how to watch the clouds that pass.

I know also how to keep my place.

And I know, almost, how to hold my peace.

"Je suis le chasseur d'images," said Jules Renard, "I am the hunter of images."

Paul Fort

Cette fille, elle est morte, est morte dans ses amours.
Ils l'ont portée en terre, en terre au point du jour.
Ils l'ont couchée toute seule, toute seule en ses atours.
Ils l'ont couchée toute seule, toute seule en son cercueil.
Ils sont revenus gaîment, gaîment avec le jour.
Ils ont chanté gaîment, gaîment : " Chacun son tour.
Cette fille, elle est morte, est morte dans ses amours."
Ils sont allés aux champs, aux champs comme tous les jours.

* * * * * * * *

Paul Fort is the ballad-monger of young France. He has, however, his own definition of the ballad. He has no kinship with the old minstrels, though his "Louis XI." might well have been written by a *Joculator Regis* in some idle, venomous hour. His ballads are the fanciful reverse of Villon's; indeed, they are incurably his own. They are written in prose — if that be prose which carries itself with all the rhythmic graces of verse; they are written in verse — if that be verse which has all the concision and lawlessness of prose. In a word, Paul Fort has devised for himself a new poetical instrument.

In the second series of his "Ballades Françaises" there is a little ballad that may be taken as a point of departure for this vagrom appreciation. It reads:

"Oh, who will say to me (who shall not lie): Re-creator, O visionary, if you are the black Orient slave of your symbols, you are the brother, the white master of your words."

This is self-criticism of a very high order. He is an ingenuous pantheist. He is the slave, like the suave faun and the white Pierrot, of his lawless emotions. He is their slave and he is not their dupe — Pierrot weeps and mocks his own sincere tears. The chief characteristic of the Pierrotic person is irony. He is simple and artificial, sentimental and heartless, at once man and child. His virtues are involuntary. He is irresponsible for his vices. He is a moon-lover and the Orient slave of the symbolic moon. But withal he is master of his own irony. Harlequin, this red and black effigy of humanity, belabors him with a stick; Columbine deceives him; Pantaloon sermonizes him, like the grave judge Falstaff met in the way — and yet he marks him not; blows and false kisses and hard words are merely food for his universal irony.

Now Paul Fort is distinctly a Pierrotic person. He is picturesque, sentimental and ironic. He is sincere — with a sort of semi-sincerity that mocks at itself.

"Villages aux chairs blondes, étendus sur la plaine, doux fruits qui rougissez dans vos corbeilles d'arbres, je chanterai l'éclat de vos lumières saines et tout l'horizon tendre qui vous accompagne.

"Je dirai la douceur de vos métamorphoses des fruits en clairs vaisseaux, de la brume de l'aube jusqu'au soir où, fondus dans les noires corbeilles, vous n'êtes plus qu'un miel étalé sur la plaine.

"(Des villages en fruits, puis en vaisseaux, malheur! assez de ces folies, diront mes bons amis. Ils ne savent ce qu'ils voient, mon Dieu, pardonnez-leur. Ce fruit devient vaisseau, puis ce vaisseau miel, oui!

"(La brume rapetisse et veloute les formes, et ce qui est un toit ne me paraît qu'un fruit. Je dis ce que je vois, ce que Dieu pense en somme puisqu'il crée ma vision et ce qui la produit. . . .)"

There is one little ballad that, in its absolute sincerity of mood and its simplicity of expression, will give you a fair measure of Paul Fort's curious talent. Even in translation its melancholy grace is not wholly lost:

They have chosen the sea; they shall come back no more. And then — would you know them should they come again?
The sea has masked them, ere it gave them back. You would not know whether they laughed or wept beneath their tan.
They have their soul no more, it has tarried in the sea. Assiduous in plunder, ardent, is the sea!
They shall return no more, they have chosen the sea. And then, if they should come, would it be they who came?

No one, I think, quite so well fulfils M. de Bouhélier's theory of what a poet should be — a rhythm scanned by Nature herself. No poet is such a frank

interpreter of his intimate moods. And then, withal, Paul Fort has fashioned for himself an individual and personal mode of expression — and if that be not genius, it is at least a serviceable substitute.

Francis Jammes

And askèd who thee forth did bring
A shepherd's swain, say, did thee sing
All as his straying flock he fed.

Francis Jammes is a pastoral poet. Like Edmund Spenser he has written a Shepherd's Calendar. Like Petrarch he has sung the elegy of March. All this were simple enough. The pastoral modes have always been favored in French verse. If you have ever had occasion to read much French poetry of the bucolic kind, you found it, I daresay, rather cold and tedious. Its main characteristic is its artifice of simplicity. Its shepherds are witty and gallant; they carry themselves with the grace of the little figures in a Watteau garden; they tinkle pretty rhymes of *brebis* and *habits*, of *pleurs* and *douleurs*. Perhaps you cannot read Ségrais (whom Boileau praised) nor Madame Deshoulières nor M. le Marquis de Racan, any more than you can read the pastorals of Pope; and yet all this literature has a charm — the charm of insincerity and feigned simplicity. You wander through it as through the maze at Hampton Court, a trifle bored and yet pleasantly bewildered. If not at the first turning, certainly at the second you know you will

find the unhappy shepherd seated in the shade of the sycamore tree, his head on his hands, his flute at his feet, his dog lying near him — this trist and tender shepherd; and you know he will sing of cruel love and love's deceit, as the poetical shepherds have always sung since Bion and Moschus set them singing. John Davidson in his "Fleet Street Eclogues" has shown that it is not impossible to revivify this old and faded form of verse. The "west wind" that sang to the fanciful lovers of the Marquis d'Urfé makes a new music, as it "faintly stirs the Fleet Street wires." It may be that Mr. Davidson, by informing the old modes with fresh poetry, is plotting the curves of a new movement in literature. It may be that he and not M. Jammes is forecasting the bucolics of the future.

It was, I think, in 1894 that M. Jammes' first book appeared — troubled, hurried, almost accidental verses, across which one got a glimpse of his countryside, the foot-hills of the Pyrenees, where

> Les villages brillent au soleil dans les plaines,
> Pleins de clochers, de rivières, d'auberges noires.

Sun-browned peasant girls pass along the dusty roads; the shepherd goes afield; and then — for this poet has the heart of Laurence Sterne — he makes a little incursion into asinine sentiment:

> J'aime l'âne si doux
> marchant le long des houx.

Il prend garde aux abeilles
et bouge les oreilles ;

Et il porte les pauvres
et des sacs remplis d'orge.

You smile and wonder whether some minusculous beauty may not have slipped through the meshes of your appreciation. The little book lies before me as I write; I flutter its pages and try in vain to capture some of the charm that I once felt in it — perhaps it is a book to be read only once. The witchery fades out of what one may call accidental poetry very quickly. Here, too, is "Le Jour." At second glance one is almost inclined to believe that it is a mystification, like William Edmonstoune Aytoun's famous poetical hoax, "Firmilian." It has a monstrous air of deceit — like an old man with boyish eyes. For a little while the dialogue goes blithely on, with delicate glimpses of blue horizons and shadowy trees — then there enters an image so gross and common that you veil your eyes. Is it naïveté or waggery? Here there is music, admirable and grave; then all is adrift in a confusion of rhythm and rhyme that is not "free-verse," but verselessness. And yet there are lines that win you and haunt you. In a sunny room, filled with the odor of fruit and flowers, ironing the white linen, as she stands by the window, is *la mère douce au cheveux gris dont tu est né.*

In his eclogue of the month of March, there are the same discordancies — this almost childish admixture of real insight and absurd artifice. With a peasant's exactitude he describes the lengthening of the days " by one hour and fifty minutes " and the field-faring of the herds, the fluting of the goat-herds and the farmer's sowing ; and then — for it is March — he tells again the story of Christ, with all a poet's tenderness and simplicity :

> Il était doux comme le ciel, et son petit ânon
> trottinait joyeusement sur les palmes jetées.
> Des mendiants amers sanglotaient de joie,
> en le suivant, parcequ'ils avaient la foi. . . .
> De mauvaises femmes devenaient bonnes
> en le voyant passer avec son auréole
> si belle qu'on croyait que c'était le soleil.
> Il avait un sourire et des cheveux en miel.
> Il a ressuscité des morts. . . . Ils l'ont crucifié. . . .

And because he has written these verses and many others quite as exquisite I am forced to believe that he is a poet who has not yet found his way — a shepherd whose flute is out of tune.

The New Erasmus: Marcel Schwob

IT is difficult to think of Marcel Schwob without applying to him the epithet Ἐρασμιος and all its amiable derivatives. He has the wit and tenderness and learning — a touch, too, of the pedantry — of that sixteenth century Dutchman who sank his own name in a Greek word. In a word, he is yeasted with the Erasmian principle. There is the widest possible divulsion between his calm, far-seeing philosophy and the angry and vehement speculations of the fashionable scientists. His definition of art is a masterpiece of clear-thinking: "Art is opposed to general ideas; it describes only the individual; it desires only the unique. It does not class; it declasses." And in all his work he has practised this neglected art of "differentiating existences" — if I may use a comprehensive phrase of M. Rémy de Gourmont. It is his purpose to create or re-create individual life. Let me take a definite illustration.

In all history there is nothing as inexplicable as the Children's Crusade — nothing more strangely pathetic. To the historian it has always been a stumbling-block. Even to Pope Innocent III. it

was a divine mystery. And to-day the faith that led these dead innocents to death and slavery is as dark a riddle as it was eight centuries ago. Something called to them like the voice of a bird. From Germany and Flanders and France they set out on their pilgrimage to the Saviour's tomb in Jerusalem. Tiny pilgrims were they, with birchen staves and crosses of woven flowers. There were more than seven thousand children in white garments. They filled the road like a swarm of white bees. And as they marched toward the sea — to death and captivity — they sang the songs of Him whose tomb they sought in far-off Judea.

You will seek in vain through the great histories for any vital picture of this strange adventure of the Lord's children. The perfume and tenderness — even the meaning — is crushed out in the rough grip of historical synthesis. Marcel Schwob has told the story in his own way — he has re-created for you the individual. The story is told in eight sketches. First the Goliard speaks. A poor, wandering brother he, a miserable clerk, begging his bread in our Lord's name along the roads. The children pass him and he says: "They are wild, untaught children. They are wandering toward I know not what. They have faith in Jerusalem. I think that Jerusalem is far off, and our Lord must be nearer us. They will not come to Jerusalem. But Jerusalem will come to them. And to me. The end of all holy things is in joy."

And always the little pilgrims pass, along the shining roads that lead to the sea, like a swarm of white bees.

There comes a leper; his head is covered with a white cowl and he shakes a clapper of hard wood. He no longer knows what his face is and he fears his hands. They run before him like livid and scaly beasts. The heart in his breast is ashes, for he knows the Saviour has not atoned for his pallid sin. He is alone and full of horror. He lies in the dark forest of the Loire. The little children coming down from the land of Vendôme pass thereby, and he is minded to do them harm. But the children said: "Why should we be afraid of you, white wanderer?" They were not afraid of him! His monstrous whiteness seemed to them like the whiteness of our Lord. And the leper drew his cowl and said: "Go in peace toward your white Lord, and say to him that he has forgotten me." He vanished in the dark forest and the sound of his wooden clapper came to them like the pure sound of bells.

Always the little pilgrims pass, like a swarm of white bees.

And the old pope, Innocent III., kneeled in a white, ungilded cell and prayed to God, whose vicar he was. And he said: "I am a very old man. My faith is no longer the faith of little children." The trembling of old age seized him. He said again: "This children's crusade is not a good

work. It cannot gain the sepulchre for Christians. These children will perish. Under Innocent, let there not be a new massacre of the Innocents. Lord, they are thy little Innocents. And I, Innocent, I do not know. I do not know."

Always the little pilgrims pass.

And three of them, Nicholas, who cannot speak, and Alain and Denis, walk together. And Alain says: "We have been walking a long time. We sang in the villages. All the children ran to us. And we went forward like a flock. Some men cursed us, not knowing the Lord. Some women held us back by our arms and questioned us, and covered our faces with kisses. There is a child here called Eustache, who was born with his eyes sealed. A little girl leads him and bears his cross. Her name is Allys. Eustache will not be able to see the holy lamps of the sepulchre. But Allys will take his hand and make him touch the flagstones of the tomb."

They come to the city of Marseilles, and you may read in the deposition of François Longuejoue, clerk, how ships were found to carry them over to be rid of them, for the burghers would not "meddle with the madness of this childish army." Some of the ships the storms destroyed. Many were captured by the infidels, scouring the seas in their feluccas from Algiers and Bujeiah. And these children were bought by the Commander of the

Faithful. A calendar saw them on the highway, as they passed into captivity. They walked like a flock of sheep.

There is a picture of little Allys and Eustache, who was born with sealed eyes, as they go hand in hand to death, and then the story goes back to Rome, where the old pope, Gregory IX., cries: "O Mediterranean Sea, give me back my children!"

This book is a perfect illustration of Marcel Schwob's system It differentiates existences. It re-creates the individual life. Across the waste of years it summons those little martyrs, full of blind, victorious faith, who sought the Saviour's tomb and were destroyed. It makes them live again. Garlanded with flowers, they walk the white roads, singing the songs of the cross. And as you read there comes to you something of their tragic and miraculous faith. You see with their eyes and with the eyes of the leper and the white pope.

In the "Mimes" it was his purpose to re-create Greek life. He painted twenty little pictures. In one you see the old cook, in one hand his kitchen-knife, in the other a conger eel, and the old man chatters of the life of the house; again a sycophant passes; or perhaps the children play with wooden swallows, or the poet fares ill in his inn; a disguised slave sets out on his adventures, or a shepherd pipes in the rich Sicilian meadows; here a sailorman comes

boasting from the perils of the sea, and there Kinné wanders with her lover. Each figure is as distinct as the men and women you see from your window. It is as though you had made a little journey into Greece and tarried at an inn and foregathered with a few simple folk. Your stay was short and so you came away without meeting Socrates, but you say: "At all events, I know Greece — the next time I go there I shall take letters of introduction to some of the famous men of the hour." In re-creating individuals M. Schwob has created Greek life — as no one else has done it. That you may have a faint idea of these "Mimes" I have translated the "Hermes Psychagogos." I may preface the translation with a paragraph from a letter Marcel Schwob wrote me recently, for I have never had any great care to pose as a modest man:

"Your translation of 'Hermes Psychagogos' is delightful. Do you know that Robert Louis Stevenson dearly loved that same little *mime*, which you have chosen among the others? He wrote to me and told me so,— more, he wrote to the poet William E. Henley, in one of his last letters, that it would be work worthy of such a poet as Henley is, to translate the few lines. So you can understand how proud I felt when I received your translation."

Not all the beauty of Marcel Schwob's exquisite and fluted prose is in my translation; I feel, indeed,

that it is harsh and inadequate; but since Henley has not taken good advice —

Read here:

Whether the dead be hid in sarcophagus of sculptured stone, laid in the belly of metal urns, or in the earth, or set up, gilded and painted blue, without brain or viscera, wrapped round with linen bands —

I marshall them in troops and guide the march with my compelling wand.

We fare by a fleet way that men cannot see. The harlots press against the virgins and the murderers against the philosophers and the mothers against those who would not be with child and the priests against the perjurers. For they repent of their crimes, be it those they imagined in their heads or those they did with their hands. And having never been free on earth, since they were bound by the laws and the customs, or by their own good heed, they fear the isolation and sustain each other. She who slept naked in tiled chambers among men, consoles a young girl who died ere her wedding-night and still dreams imperiously of love. One who killed on the highway, his face foul with ashes and sweat, places his hand on the brow of a thinker, who wished to regenerate the world and preached death. The dame who loved her children, and through them suffered, leans her head on the

breast of a harlot, who was wilfully sterile. The man clothed in a long robe, who persuaded himself to love his God and constrained himself to genuflections, weeps on the shoulder of the cynic, who, under the eyes of the citizens, did break all the oaths of the flesh and the spirit. Thus they help each other on the way, marching under the yoke of memory.

Then they come to the bank of Lethe, where I marshall them beside the water that rolls on in silence. And some plunge into the water the heads that held evil thoughts, and others dip the hands that did evil. They rise again, and, lo, the water of Lethe has quenched all memory. Forthwith they separate and each to himself smiles, believing he is free.

Since the name of Robert Louis Stevenson has occurred, I should say here that M. Schwob is perhaps his most subtle interpreter. His essay on Stevenson — you will find it in "Spicilège" — is singularly illuminative even to one who is not without Stevensonian lore. He has put his finger on the secret of Stevenson's magic power — the application of the simplest and most realistic means to the most complicated and inexistent subjects. Unquestionably this is Stevenson's literary process.

It was M. Schwob, also, who presented George Meredith to the French public. In addition he

translated "Moll Flanders" into French. I wished he had prefaced it with George Borrow's fine appreciation of the book, which is to be found in "Lavengro." These are M. Schwob's minor virtues, but they will be accounted to him for righteousness, even though the world prefers "Cœur Double" and "Le Livre de Monelle."

The Erasmian quality of Marcel Schwob's work is more conspicuous of course in his colloquies. As Erasmus summed up the thought of his age in those conversations which are now too much neglected — given over indeed to lads to whet their Latinity on — M. Schwob has in his dialogues netted the more lawless thought of our own day. Until he brought it back to modishness the colloquy had vanished from modern literature. Like the fashion of linking a series of letters into a novel, it is a not wholly unartificial form. Indeed, even Erasmus felt the need of apologizing for it. "In these troubled and violent times," he said, "it would not be prudent to send this book out without furnishing it with an escort." His plea for the utility of colloquies may stand for M. Schwob's *apologia*. How efficient an art-form the colloquy is in the hands of a master, you may learn from "L'Amour." The conversation is carried on by Hylas, the actor, Rodion Raskolnikoff (Dostoiewsky's hero), Herr Baccalaureus, and Sir Willoughby Patterne (of "The Egoist"). Can you

imagine a more delightful conversation? And it is carried on lightly, with faint touches of irony and joyous mystifying excursions into erudition, quite in the best Erasmian manner. In fact, to one who wishes to make the acquaintance of Marcel Schwob, I would recommend "Spicilège," wherein may be found not only the dialogues, but the best study of François Villon ever made.

Naturism and Saint-Georges de Bouhélier

"Terre divine ! nourrice de mon âme !"

AMONG the young writers M. de Bouhélier has a vaguely pontifical position. He is the High Priest of Naturism. Before he was twenty years of age he had published three books and established a new school. Round his name and round his theories there has grown up a literature by no means negligible. A monthly review of some importance is devoted to his ideas. His fellows call him The Sage, even as there were those (including Sadakichi Hartmann) who called Walt Whitman master. He is a poet, but his work is too unsettled to bring it within the present range of criticism. His theories, however, are a very important part of modern French literature. By a sort of premeditated hazard I have mentioned Whitman's name. I think I shall be able to show that he (and not M. de Bouhélier) is the creator of this new movement — the most important since the rise of the Zolaists — in modern letters.

Romanticism died hard; it lingered longest, perhaps, in the pale fictions of Feuillet and Mérimée;

but in the end it gave way before the scientific spirit. In art as in life the fashion was all for the sceptical and critical attitude. Literature began to be expressed in terms of science. Æsthetic realism was the direct and inevitable outcome of the scientific realism of the day. Zola was the complement of Darwin. The mania for cataloguing individuals and phenomena seized upon writers and painters alike. The grave folly of exactitude was to find its most impudent illustration in Huysmans, who transcribed the catalogues of perfumers and paper-makers.

"Often," said Plato on a notable occasion, "I have been troubled with the thought that what is true of certain things must be true of all."

The thought that troubled Plato is the axiom of the modern speculation that poses as science. Data — statistics — documents; an entire generation wasted its energies in picking up these coriander seeds. It was inevitable that the revolt should come. It was a revolt not against the conclusions of the scientists, but against the scientific method in art. The young thinkers took refuge in neo-paganism, in Buddhism, in egoism, in Satanism, in arid dreams of art for art and more futile dreams of art as a social redeemer; and each new movement was but a revolt against æsthetic realism and a fierce crusade for the ideal. Flaubert had urged that art should be merely a mirror of external life; Zola considered it merely a chapter of natural history.

Emerson, who had the habit of loose thinking that characterizes the sermonizing man, declared that the very sublimity of nature determines the inferiority of art and proclaimed — without much appositeness — that the flower is more beautiful than the idyl, the moss more beautiful than the eclogue. Spencer, with more destructive logic, announced that the poet was only a contingent being, in no manner indispensable, and corresponding to the artificial needs of luxury and frivolity. It is impossible to shun the conclusion — the poet, having no purpose to serve, must in time become as extinct as the great auk. The men of science were unanimous in prophesying this extinction. The realistic artists acquiesced. They claimed only the dreary privilege of standing at the bedside and taking the temperature of the moribund poetry of life. In these circumstances it became the business of the poet to justify himself, if such a thing were possible. All these revolts into frenetic and atavistic idealism were attempts at justification. They did not quite succeed; they did not wholly fail. Out of the turmoil and white tumult there came many beautiful poems and many pages of vital prose. But this could not be the end. What the age needed — what every age has needed and found — was an opportune idealism — an idealism broad enough to cover the multiple scientific speculations that colored the minds of men. It would be a mistake to assume that this situation was

new in æsthetic history. Similar periods of extreme mental humility and timid agnosticism have occurred again and again. And always, as each period rose to its climax, there has entered the timely and opportune idealist. He is not humble, the idealist; if he be Plato or Porphyry, Iamblichus or Kant or Pater, he is anything but humble. He enters proudly, the star of the thinker (like a Jewish phylactery) between his brows, bearing the wand of Zarathushtra, austere, sibylline, as one who has raised the veil of Isis. And always he proclaims: "The only reality is thought."

The hyperbolic manifestations of esteem that greeted de Bouhélier — this young man of twenty — meant only one thing: He had spoken the timely and opportune word. The message he brought had been long expected; another might have spoken it — but in France another did not — and it may be repeated in years to come with far greater eloquence.

The word naturism (invented by M. de Putte, the Belgian critic, I believe) is perhaps the best that could be found to describe de Bouhélier's theory of literature. The naturist — I use Maurice le Blond's words — is opposed to the naturalist in that he prefers emotion to observation and neglects the individual for the archetype. Thus, while the naturalist can auscultate and record, the naturist can create. This theory goes to the root of the

matter. It recaptures for the poet his lost right of the lord of the manor; he may create and, essentially, he may create heroes.

"The poet," de Bouhélier writes in his enthusiastic manner, "is like Love itself. He lights the way. He leads each soul along the road of its destiny and reveals to it angelic treasures. . . : All men do not possess souls. Some have lost their souls. It is for these that the poets create. Souls of pirates and kings and laborers."

The mission of the poet, then, is to create heroic thoughts — to sing — just as it is the function of women to be beautiful and the function of Pierrot to be white.

"The poets mingle with the multitude — they may be of the people — they may be drovers or puddlers or conquerors — according to whether they glorify the coal or the sword. They interpret."

I might summarize de Bouhélier's thought in these words: The work of art should be a monograph of eternity. That, I am quite well aware, is a pompous phrase, but it is not meaningless. Daily existence, in a way, parodies eternal life. The artist who would write a monograph of eternity has but to discern at what points the parody touches the original. Permit me to take a concrete case. I will use M. le Blond's fine illustration of the peasant. When the naturist studies the peasant it is not in his thought (which is self-centred) nor in his

passions (which he shares with but one or two beings), but in his work (which is, in spite of all, the centre of his destiny), for then the peasant becomes the hero. It is in his work that, grave and divine, he communes with nature in its seasons, its fruits and fields, and that he enters into relations with the greatest number of beings and elements. He ceases, in reality, to be a man, to become at the same time a symbol and a force.

The interest of the naturist is not in the actor, but in his rôle. Thus: "He need not consider whether the artisans are contented with their lots — all their little vain turbulences — what they chatter to each other as they weave baskets or chip stones. . . . Their attitude interprets them."

The mission of the artist is to reconstruct archetypes; of landscapes he builds paradises; he resurrects the Dieu-Mort, whose "Hic jacet" is written in every man's heart. In this sense he does not create; "the eurhythm of nature determines the rhythm of his harmonies. It is not the poet who creates the rhythm, but it is the essential rhythm of things that scans and directs the poet. . . . Ah! who will say what laws of hydraulics, attraction, repulsion, make necessary such a song, and this eclogue and that mighty statue?" Art is not nature seen across a temperament; it is nature volatilizing herself in the temperament of poet, painter, or musician.

And here, at last, the naturism of the young French poet reaches the broad pantheism of Walt Whitman.

De Bouhélier's proselytism has, in the main, gathered round what he terms the "idea of heroism." It would be an error to confound the naturistic "hero" with the popular hero, who distinguishes himself by adventurous enterprises and prodigious exploits. The idea of heroism that de Bouhélier wishes to awaken in the hearts of men is less special. His hero would be the living representative of an idea, an emotion. Thus the artist who expresses the sensibility of a being or a flower is as heroic as the laborer who spends himself in tilling the soil, or the sailor, whom the sea has shaped into *un aspect de Dieu*. The heroic man is he who accomplishes his destiny — divinely. (Need I say this is Walt Whitman?) Heroism is the appanage not only of the soldier and the martyr, but "of all the humble, who do nothing day by day except accomplish their destinies."

Is this not that modern mysticism, at once human and pagan, of which Whitman was the precursor? And Whitman, too, might have written this note, which you will find in "Destin": "In this book I speak often of God. Let it be understood that I employ the word only to make a definite allusion to the domination of the soil, to the trajectory of the stars not less than to the sway-

ing of the grasses and the heavy pulse of the sea on the sand. So the word, to my mind, is worth but a metaphor." This is the vertiginous pantheism of Whitman. That you may know I am not quoting from "Leaves of Grass," read these words in the French: "Froides montagnes qui contenez de l'eau et des métaux, de la craie et des bruyères roses, tumulte écumeux des sauvages torrents, campagnes marécageuses d'où se lèvent les cigognes, ô coteaux, ô fontaines, vous tous en qui palpitent des parcelles de mon être, comme sur la blanche mer à midi les hautes scintillations solaires! C'est de votre essentielle substance que je me sculpterai avec suavité. Je désire composer mon corps de la sève des pins résineux et des rouges argiles qui nourrissent les arbres. Mes membres s'assouplirent sous les vents."

De Bouhélier's chief distinction is not that he is the French evangelist of this antique and maternal doctrine; others have fought that fight; but to him one must give the credit of having brought it into the thought and literature of the day. He laid salutary emphasis upon the old truth that "not the white vesture and the shaven beard make the servant of Isis." In carrying out his theories he has always been the opportunist. In his tragedies he has not gone to legend or allegory. To artificial palaces and hypothetical landscapes he has preferred the markets and foundries, the shops and factories,

finding in them the "temple of nature" in which modern life attains its only hour of worship. He meets the realist on his own chosen ground. He takes up the scientist's gauge — and gives him choice of position.

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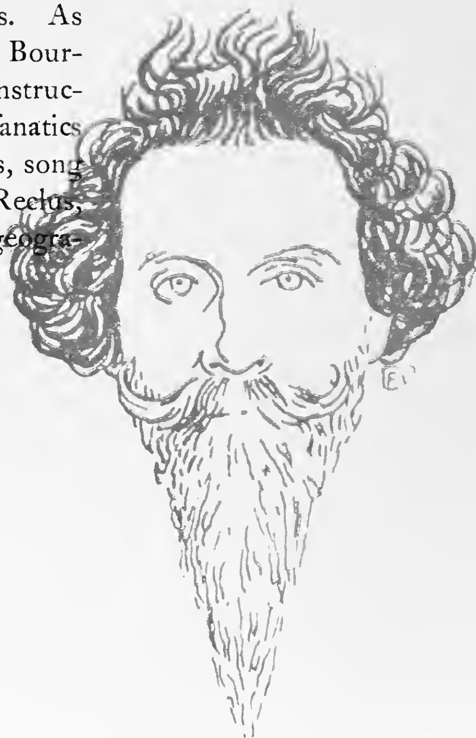
Once I wrote: "Modern French literature is largely a creation of Poe." Perhaps the desire to italicize a familiar thought led me into a slight, though uncritical, exaggeration. I should have no qualification to make, had I said: "Modern French literature is largely a creation of Poe and Whitman."

Men of Letters and Anarchy

INSTINCTIVELY one feels a sort of impatient contempt for the theory that requires the emphasis of murder. An explosion of picric acid adds no more strength to an argument than an oath does. The crude violence of words, which is the chief defect of all reformers, stands in the way of any clear understanding of the theory of latter-day anarchy. Even serene and thoughtful men, like Octave Mirbeau and Maurice Barrès, have a tendency to scream, when you touch them on their theories.

The anarchist, who believes in the "propaganda by deeds" — and lives up to his faith — is a product of the discontent which is bred of insufficient knowledge. He has failed to discern that the elementary laws never apologize. He looks out on the angry and vehement play of causes with a dull hatred — as a sea-sick girl watches the waves. As social phenomena the Henrys, Caserios, Bourdains, Lucchenis, are interesting rather than instructive. But behind these dark and dangerous fanatics are other men — the poets and philosophers, song writers and novelists of anarchy. Élisée Reclus, one of the most learned men of the day, a geogra-



pher of excellent repute, Prince Kropotkin, a scientist and a renegade to the obligations of his royal descent, Louise Michel, a poetess whom Hugo praised and, as well, the red nun of murder and revolt, the Count Malatesta, these, and a score of the most influential men of letters in France and Germany, are the real apostles of anarchy. Theirs is not the anarchy of despair, but the anarchy of even more fatuous optimism. They it is who have builded the house. But they no longer sit at the head of the table, and all about the board is a motley mob of hereditary criminals, mattoids, fanatics and epileptoids.

I once said that anarchy is the theory that society should be blown up for refusing to accept a proposition that has never been laid before it. That is no longer true. The proposition has been laid down — vaguely if you will, but with a great deal of smoky eloquence.

Within the last eight years the literature of anarchy has swelled to a gross flood. It has swept along with it scores of the earnest and fanciful young men of the day. Monsieur Léon Deschamps, the editor of *La Plume* — a magazine that stands for the new art and literature of Paris — said the other day that anarchy was no longer a social formula, but a complete philosophy. He and his fellows are preaching absolute individualism. If Nietzsche is not their saint, it is merely because they cannot

read German. The young literature has acclaimed the bomb-throwers and justified the stabbers.

M. Laurent Tailhade, a delicate poet, an admirable critic of art, spoke lightly of Vaillant's crime, as a "fine gesture." Stuart Merrill, the American poet who has elected to write in French, admired the phrase so much that he turned anarchist himself. As far as the young writers of France are concerned anarchy is merely the development of the idealism of the day. Their revolt is abstract and largely sentimental. When M. Gabriel Randon sang the "Litanies of Dynamite" he was in reality inspired by as pure a love for humanity as that of the young Shelley. André Ibels, the founder of the *Revue Libertaire*, is a mystic who dreams of absolute freedom for all — that beautiful and dangerous dream. One and all they are victims of an altruism that is neither to hold nor to bind. Not one of them is a serious student of social economics. The picturesqueness — if I may use the word — of anarchy appeals to them. They see in it a war of the few against the many, of the weak against the strong, of the individual against a strong and cruel government. They live in the dream of an anarchistic society, in which all men shall be intelligent and naturally good, and laws and dogmas shall be superfluous. "I conceive a state of society so perfect," said M. Barrès, "that the very thought of Evil will be intolerable to man." Alphonse Retté in con-

tentions, articles and dithyrambic poems has pictured that state of society which Dante deemed possible only in Paradise. Rémy de Gourmont thunders against the evils of the day in many a splendidly indignant page. Jean Graves and Zo d'Axa go serenely to prison for ideas they do not understand.

Sentimentalists and dreamers.

They see the cruelty and misery of life in a modern city; the pathos of suffering touches them; the woman who begs for bread or gains it by a shame more pitiful than beggary, the outcast child slinking in the dark streets, the laborer who cannot even find work — these are so many sign posts, pointing them to anarchy. With a man like Zo d'Axa it was an even chance whether he turned missionary or anarchist. In the sixteenth century he would have been an adventurer. His true name is Galland de Pérouse. He served in the *Chasseurs d'Afrique;* he came up to Paris and wrote patriotic songs, and was anything but an anarchist — this swaggering aristocrat. While travelling in Italy he was accused of insulting the Empress of Germany. It made an anarchist of him. He erected the proverb that "the cat may look at the king" into a political theory. He founded *En Dehors* (Outside), a journal of revolt. He declared for individualism and against everything that could limit it — church, country, military system. He was a man of fortune and he gave it to the "cause." He owned a

building in the Avenue de l'Alma, and he let it, rent free, to a printer, who got out the paper by way of return. Anarchists like Malato, the renegade priest, Abbé Jouet, Sebastian Faure, flocked to it. The journal caught the fancy of the young men of letters. In 1891, I remember, there were among the contributors Henri de Régnier, Vielé-Griffin Hérold, Bernard-Lazare, Paul Adam, Quillard — all of whom are conspicuous in French literature. This paper was condemned and Zo d'Axa was indicted. He fled to the East and was retaken (not quite legally) in the British consulate in Jaffa. And his theory that the cat may look at the king was dignified by "martyrdom." He served his time at Ste. Pélagie.

It was this man and his friend Octave Mirbeau who gave anarchy its literary prestige. A few weeks after the publication of his "Calvaire" I heard Mirbeau say: "I have stripped war of its heroism," but he had done more than make the idea of war inglorious, he had substituted for it the unreasoning destruction of dynamite. He proclaimed as heroes those whom it had been the habit to consider plain assassins. Henri Mazel took up the work. He tricked out the theory in purple metaphors and golden words. In praising his work the *Mercure de France* — the oldest and best literary review in France — said frankly: "We are all anarchists, thank God!"

It is almost true. Hardly one of the young writers of France has not shot his arrow at society. The strongest prose-writer of them all, Paul Adam, has taught anarchy in a dozen volumes. At the trial of Jean Graves he came into court to declare himself an anarchist — all in a spirit of sheer bravado. In his "Le Triomphe des Médiocres," he says: "The incidents in Spain, the épopées of Vaillant and Émile Henry, of other companions, warn the Powers of the World that the anarchists will not yield to their laws. For Pallas shot, seven hundred victims of dynamite, a city in flames,— that is what weighs down the other scale of justice, the scale of the people. Let it be understood," he says, "we live in a state of war. One part of society starves the other, forces it by poverty to suicide or merciless toil. The laborer, on the threshold of death, turns at last, arms himself and takes vengeance."

All this and a great deal more to the same purport, with much rhetoric of "soldiers of despair" and the "Black Angel of Anarchy." Now I know M. Adam. He is a brilliant writer, a student, a philanthropist, an art-lover and lover of life; in elegant Paris he lives elegantly; and I know that all this revolutionary eloquence is merely a *feu d'artifice*. He is a victim of his vocabulary. There are so many fine things to be said about anarchy that he, no more than Stuart Merrill and Maurice

Barrès, can resist the temptation to turn anarchist for the sake of saying them. Almost all of us have been dragged out over our depth by vehement words. All of us have been young enough to write Retté's "Idylle Diabolique," with its masterful "I deny and I revolt!"

If you ask any one of these leaders of anarchic thought if they believe in the propaganda by deeds — the blunt argument of dyamite, the polemics of knives and picric acid — they will assure you that they do not. Their anarchy is purely literary, purely decorative, artistic, sentimental. Zo d'Axa to be sure once affirmed the "joy of action." But for the others the bomb-thrower and assassin — even though he kill royalty — is a criminal; they will argue that he is not the only criminal, and that the complicity of society must be taken into account, but they do not applaud his crime. ("There are a thousand ways of being an anarchist; I am an anarchist after Victor Hugo and Pascal," said Ajalbert.)

They are young men and ardent. They are poets, painters, novelists or critics. Most of them are men of fortune and family. All of them are successful men. Their art has brought them fame. They are idealists and dreamers and philanthropists. They turn from a dark and troubled present to a future all rose. In a tragic night they await the "sunrise of fraternal love." Their anarchic pæans are inspired solely by altruism, by pity for

the "oppressed, who are the just." All this one may admit. These shining poets and publicists are neither rogues nor assassins.

And yet by reason of their very sincerity and their eloquence they are the most dangerous men of the day. They have made anarchy a splendid ideal — instead of the brutal and meaningless discontent it was. They have gilded plain ruffians like Ravachol and Caserio with the halo of martyrdom.

For them anarchy is a literary toy.

But what of the feather-brained wretches who believe in all these fine phrases and carry out the doctrine of social warfare to its logical and bloody conclusion? Whose is the responsibility? Who is the greater criminal? Luccheni or the silken poet who set him on?

The books of Bernard-Lazare, Hamon, Mirbeau, Adam, are scattered broadcast through France and Italy. They are the text-books — perilously eloquent — of anarchy. They are firebrands in the hands of weak-minded rogues, of dark fanatics, of epileptic egoists. Not long ago I had a talk with the Count Malatesta, the leader of the Italian anarchists. Suavely, gently in his aristocratic way, he deplored the use of bombs and the murder of women. And yet he has given his time and fortune to educating the Lucchenis up to assassination.

They have much to answer for, who have made literature the handmaid and mouthpiece of anarchy — the *chaperon* of red murder and revolt.

The New Criticism

THERE are books and books, but it is not often that one finds a book which is absolutely typical of a generation. Paul Bourget's "Essays on Contemporary Psychology," which appeared in 1883, was a book of this sort. It depicted with perfect clearness the ways of thought and habits of emotion — *l'état d'âme*, as the phrase goes — of the men and women of that day. By way of parallel, or at all events of sequel to M. Bourget's masterly book, is the fantastic volume which has appeared under the title (more than a trifle fantastic), "The Nights, the Ennuis and the Souls of our Most Notorious Contemporaries." Its author is M. La Jeunesse.

I had always fancied that the name was a pseudonym — a symbol, perhaps, for its author is a strenuous upholder not only of youth, but of all that is meant in art and letters by *la jeunesse*. But that was all wrong. When I met this precocious and sceptical young man, who looks upon his generation so shrewdly through an eyeglass, I learned that nature — who has a whimsical humor now and then — had given him this apt name. He signs himself Ernest La Jeunesse.

Although, like most witty Parisians, he was born in the provinces, yet he represents, better than any man of the day, this city, at once beautiful and horrible. He is, as M. Larroumet smartly said the other day, "*Gavroche élevé à Condorcet.*" He stands for the "youth" of Paris; he speaks for the young men, these young men who have journeyed so far from the fictitious Latin Quarter created by Henri Murger (who could not write French) and Du Maurier (who could not write English). The young generation frequents literary taverns, edits "new" reviews, visits the "free theatre," loves the sketches of Forain and the vicious and visionary pastels of Chéret, dines with girls who look like angels out of Botticelli and dress like Cléo de Mérode, is expert in all the snobbishness of literature and the priggishness of art, knows much and admires little.

If you remember Bourget's keenly intellectual and eminently sympathetic studies of the men who had influenced the youth of his day, you will find a piquant surprise in the mocking book which I have named as worthy of a place beside your copy of "Essais de Psychologie Contemporaine." Here there is no sympathy, no respect; everywhere there is irony — that irony which Renan called the "consolation of the just." The very title is a mockery. Every page affirms it. Read these few phrases from the preface: "This book will be the book which

most strictly and most outrageously respects the Truth," and then, "My little voyage is a little sincere voyage — of a demi-sincerity very superior to the vulgar sincerity, and of a truth far superior to the current truth, since it is not the truth of all."

Even I, who am apt in sincerity, never imagined the roguish subtlety of this demi-sincerity.

And this is the note of the book. In the spectacle of contemporary literature M. La Jeunesse has seen an immense and ironic drollery. And he has amused himself.

"I might have merely given my opinion on these writers," he says, "it is merely my modesty that stands in the way — what I love in them is their foibles, their weaknesses, their misery, and it pleases me to humiliate myself in them, and, in turn, to flagellate myself, to crown myself with their thorns, to ulcerate myself with their woes. Thus I gain the supreme pleasure of tasting in these pure tortures the chastisement of their sins — without having the trouble of committing the sins." And his object is the pleasant one of "delivering the young men of this epoch from these deliciously tyrannic masters."

M. La Jeunesse — he has read prodigiously; he has swallowed a library; it is the chief defect of the intellectual men of the day that they know too much.

Among those who figure in this book are Ana-

tole France, Pierre Loti, Paul Bourget, Daudet, Zola, Coppée, Huysmans, Paul Hervieu, Rochefort, Maeterlinck, Prévost, Richepin and many others!

M. La Jeunesse does not analyze them. He paints them. He parodies them. And yet this is no mere imitative trick. His originality is *étourdissante.* And "Les Nuits, les Ennuis, et les Âmes de nos plus Notoires Contemporains" initiates a new form of criticism. Of serious critics, like Brunetière and (may I say it?) Hamilton Mabie, we are weary; we are sick too of the fluent impressionism of Lemaître and George Bernard Shaw. And the new criticism of M. La Jeunesse and Maurice Barrès, even though it be in the way of fantastic exaggeration, is still criticism in that it expresses a judgment. And this judgment? M. La Jeunesse has few good words for the old; fewer still for the young. In other decades the young formed "schools"; to-day they are individualists; of old they had chiefs; to-day they have deposed and discrowned them; in other days they were strenuously gay; now they are dark and sad. And in this sadness and egotism La Jeunesse sees a fault as crying as the sin of the Parnassians and Symbolists.

I wish to refer you to the "Prayer of Anatole France" and the interview Paul Bourget had with "certain indiscreet phantoms"; but in order to give you an idea of this book of incisive whimsies I

cannot do better than extract a few lines from the "Apologia of M. Émile Zola":

"Without looking at him, without seeing him, M. Zola turned toward his visitor and, at once, without pause, without hesitation, without malice, without reflection, without effort, without thought, as he writes, he said: 'Ah! ah! another interview — another interviewer? But what do you want? And why an interview? Have my interviews ever taught anything? And why bother a poor man? Because I am sweet-tempered, because I talk! *Belle affaire!* And you might so easily do something else, write a book, for instance, *que sais-je?* Yes, I talk. And I talk in order not to disoblige you and also to rest myself. Do not question me about "Lourdes"; do not question me about "Paris." I am a poor man. I am an honest man. I write books. I have told your elders how I write them, at what hour, how many lines an hour, how many strokes a line, how many ideas a hectometre, how much ink a metaphor. I shall not repeat these details. They belong to history. I will, if you wish, confide far stranger things to you. I will tell you, then — *sans plus* — why I have written books.

"'My childhood? You know it, all the world knows it, and my youth and my struggle and my misery —

"'*Eh bien*, all that is not true. Inventions —

they are all inventions. And — mark this well, Monsieur — had I had a childhood, had I had a youth, I should never have published a line. I was born, then, at 25 or 30 years of age, at Nîmes, or St. Denis, or Gênes — it does not matter. The important part is — [he lowered his voice as though he were speaking of the Academy] — is not to let men know that I have prepared the way for my successes, worked, travailed, suffered as other men. No. I am not a man. What am I? A god, doubtless, or — this is certain — an extra-terrestrial power. . . .

"'I think then, a long time, very long. . . . I invented men! Yes. I invented them. And later I invented drunkenness, *la bourgeoisie*, the markets, painting, the Stock Exchange, churches, science. Who, before me, had entered into the existence of men? Who had suspected their mystery and their power, their vices, their simplicity, their misery?'"

And it is in this way that M. La Jeunesse exposes lightly, and withal grimly, the soul of Émile Zola, maker of men and writer of books. Is it not Zola?

It is parody, as you say, but how fine is the parody, how critical and intimate!

And then Maurice Maeterlinck: —

The Belgian writer is taken at the moment when he is engaged in composing one of his sweet and faded tragedies; read here:

"And the name of the piece was 'The Road.' . . . A road, that road, with that moon and this sky and these flowers and this river. On this road were seats which were thrones and the seats of indigent old men. And on the seats of the indigent old men were old men indigent, blind, deaf, paralytic and demented. There were seven seats and seven old men. Under the kiss of the moon the seven old men seemed to wish to live a little and speak a little. The voice of the first rose as from afar: 'The princess is very capricious. She has tresses of April, which wander over her neck and shoulders and fall, delicate and pretty, over her arms and fingers. She smiles, the capricious princess, and goes with dancing steps along the road of Silence.'

"The voice of the second old man rises, as from afar: 'The princess is very grave. She has October hair, which falls about her straight and rests upon her melancholy back. Her hands are crossed upon her meditative breasts, and with frozen steps she passes along the broken way.'

"The voice of the third rose as from afar: 'The princess is very serene. She has tresses of June, which flow in equal waves down her cheeks. She has unastonished eyes which do not question. Tranquilly she passes along the subtle road.' And the other old men said, turn in turn, in far-off voices, that the princess was languorous and August-tressed; that she shuddered and had the tresses of

November; that she was very sweet, with hair of May, uncertain with the tresses of March.

"And the road is empty, intolerably empty. And each of the seven old men sees passing along the road treasures that darken and grow, armies harmonious and strong, with sevenfold music of harps and viols and theorbos, with floating veils and suns and plants and souls.

"And the road is naked, intolerably naked. Then there come along the road princesses and treasures and armies and musicians. There are apotheosis and enchantments, miracle, beauty and gentleness. And watching the procession, among the virgins and gold, the voices of the seven old men rise dolorously, despairing: 'Oh! there is nothing on the road — there is no longer anything on the road!' And the procession passes, always richer and always more dolorous rises the cry of the seven old men."

And M. Maeterlinck has finished his piece.

This, I take it, is criticism, of an extremely subtle and effective sort; it mirrors — in a glass which distorts, perhaps — the intellectual and moral grimaces of this generation. And these grimaces only the uncultured person can neglect.

"In the Gentlemanly Interest"

Hugues Rebell

HUGUES REBELL; he is the pagan and he is the aristocrat.

"I wish to play with this life that has been given me, in all its beauty, richness, liberty, elegance; *je suis un aristocrate.*"

"But the people, M. Rebell, the heirs of liberty, equality and fraternity?"

"As for the people they shall have bread and games, *panem et circenses* — but first of all close the public libraries and museums to them. Thought is an aristocratic pleasure; what have they to do with thought? Close the libraries, whence for a hundred years the *canaille* have filched the destiny and thought of the greatest men. I love the people, just as I love the horse, the yoked oxen; and if the people would be happy after their kind, let them lead the lives of good, industrious animals. Let them love and labor and die, between the two heavens of bread and the circus. The only cruelty is in developing their brains. The educated peasant — *voire* Thomas Carlyle — undergoes all the

sufferings of the trained dog that climbs dizzy ladders and leaps shuddering through blazing hoops. Let him keep to his fields, the peasant, and the toiler to his toil."

And so he swaggers bravely down the road of life, taking the wall of his fellows, beautiful, jocund, insolent — the aristocrat of equalitarian France. His plumed hat takes the wind. His broad cloak balloons as he walks, splendidly purple.

The people — let them be brave, industrious, docile animals.

There is so much cant of the essential beauty of the low-browed proletariat in these days that the *hidalgerie* of men like Hugues Rebell is not wholly unpleasant nor all untrue. The fatted tradesmen and the lettered peasant are the pests of modern civilization. They take the wall. They jostle the amazed aristocrat. That now and again some hectoring hidalgo should sword-prick them out of his path is not a matter for undying regret. There is too much hodden gray in the world — and too little purple, far too little purple. I am no enemy of the slashed doublet.

American literature is largely an expression of the peasant soul — these educated peasants, who go shrinkingly, like trained dogs, through the novels of Mr. Howells; these timid folk that expose their arid, little souls to Miss Wilkins; these scented and soapy figures that leap through the paper hoops of

"society" fiction — they are all proletarians. They belong to the race of the labor-loosened knees and the crooked hands. American literature is the creation and expression of the gray race.

(There are two races of men. And the one is beautiful, luxurious, heroic, cruel, ravished by the splendid banality of life; the other is gray, patient, drowsy, dutiful, the race of pitiful men.)

In young France, literature is becoming more and more the amusement — a divine amusement, yet only an amusement — of the brilliant, indifferent aristocrat. 'Tis the only pleasure left him. Willingly enough would he ride at tilt or hunt the lean peasant over the brown, autumnal fields, when the deer-hunt failed; he would gladly take his pleasures in the old lordly way. But he has lost his right of lord of the manor. The peasant has his fields and his tradesmen have his palaces. His banker has married the slim, aristocratic girl. His only heritage is his contempt for the proletarians who have climbed up to his level. And so, while the manufacturers race their horses and the peasants rant Carlylean prose in parliament, he wraps his disdainful purple about him and turns to the divine sport of literature. Little by little he is making it aristocratic. Little by little he is making it a new badge of aristocracy. Still the Geneva professors write. Still the Fourth Estate writes, writes — they with the dandruff on the coat-collar and the mutton

twirling at the fire. Still the educated peasant spills his gaunt pot-hooks on paper and his faded daughters chronicle the faded thoughts that to them seem so formidably new. Margot still weeps in the melodrama. But all this is not literature, profitable though it may be to those who are interested in the results of the modern experiment in universal education. No —

The men in mail — the splendid minority that of old played with the scarlet and beneficent energies of war — have thrown themselves into the game of letters. They are crowded by the lean fellows, who come down from the garrets, by the mouldy men who crawl up from the cellars. And they are gay and insolent as those silken gentlemen of Versailles, who attacked the mob of revolutionary helots, with ribboned jasper canes. Perhaps the mob will sweep over them and trample them in the gravel. But for the moment they make a gallant stand — brandishing their clouded canes in the face of the unleashed people.

And when I think of these gentlemen adventurers — Nietzsche, the outlawed count of Poland, should have been of them — there is none upon whose swordsmanship I count more surely than upon that of Hugues Rebell. He has a supple wrist and a quick eye ("thou knowest my old ward; here I lay and thus I bore my point"), and has carried himself swashingly against the buckram men and the misbegotten knaves in Kendal Green.

Oddly enough — at least I cannot quite understand it — in his fiction Hugues Rebell's gay aristocratism takes on quite a lawless air. He has all Aristophanes' fondness for "garlands, singing girls and bloody noses." In "Nichina"— a Venetian tragi-comedy, which made him famous — he riots like a Gascon free-lance. A far truer measure of his talent is "La Femme qui a connu l'Empereur," a singularly fine novel, accomplished, balanced, audacious. The craftsmanship and the subtlety of characterization remind you of Thackeray. And like Thackeray, be it remembered, M. Rebell writes always "in the Gentlemanly Interest." Tante Rachel and M. le Vergier des Combes would not have been out of place in "Vanity Fair"; and, though that blunt girl Virginie is almost epic in her way of looking at love, she is not without a touch of Becky Sharp's wistful impulses toward virtue. And nowhere, by the way, will you find quite so admirable, colorful and vivacious a picture of the downfall of the second empire and the rise of the third Republic — that organized disorder. As Musset said of some one's book:

Ton livre est ferme et franc, brave homme ; il fait aimer.

A few years ago I read a book of proud and fanciful little verses, which Rebell published under the title — a charming title: "Chants de la Pluie et du Soleil." In verse and rhythmic prose he sang the

joy of life — the joy of affronting destiny — the joy of the silk cloak and (it is the aristocrat's ultimate pleasure) the joy of *ennui*. And ever since I read these chants of the sun and rain, I have expected a great deal of Hugues Rebell. He is a young man, *plein d'avenir*.

Le comte Robert de Montesquiou Fezensac

Always there have been two poetries — the one immediate, contemporary, in touch with the *Zeitgeist*, alive to the problems of the moment and prophetic in its forecasts of human destiny; and the other poetry, which begins by being literature, degenerates at last into sheer trifling, faded eroticism, word-juggling and self-sick analysis. The plant that has borne the hardiest, most splendid flowers, decays soonest; the bravest literature has always the most conspicuous decadence. While Byron chanted and Shelley sang, England rang with the piping of a nestful of little, libertine poets. It is an infinite error to imagine that great artists and their parodists do not exist side by side — that the rose and the dwarf rose may not blow in the same garden — that Spenser may not have his Gabriel Harvey and Vergil his Valerius Cato. Indeed the strength of a poetical movement is often most notably seen in the crowd of poetasters it drags in its train.

France has always been exceptionally rich in boudoir art — the pretty, fluttering, fantastic, obscene art of the *salon* — the art of Laclos and

Boufflers, of Bernis and Chanlieu; always, too, it apes the modes of its century — is classic or romantic, precious or free, symbolic or crystalline; it is of the fashion.

M. de Montesquiou is the type of the man who writes because all write, who echoes and exaggerates — in his shrill little way — the poetic modes of the hour. Personally he is a good-natured, harmless, fashionable, little soul, more like a silver penny than a genius — to use Horace Walpole's effective phrase — but, as the parasite and zany of modern French poetry, he is not uninteresting to the philosophically inclined. He is a gentleman. I once said — and M. René Doumic did me the honor of appropriating the phrase — that he had raised literature to the dignity of a sport. That is quite true. He has entered literature in the Gentlemanly Interest — and is, indeed, a ghastly, little parody of what I should like to call the Aristocratic Intention in letters. Hugues Rebell is the apostle of cloak and sword and *panache;* M. de Montesquiou stands for butterflies and blue hortensias, for Japanese pottery and Venetian glass, for perfumed fans and Russian tea. In dark, symbolic verse he pipes the glories of the drawing-room — the ideographic hand is that of Mallarmé, but the voice is that of Beau Tibbs.

The Latin poets of the time of the decadence diverted themselves by stringing epanaleptic verses — a game like any other. Pentadius, for instance,

was expert in the game; do you remember his distich on Vergil, and the Narcissean lines on which we whetted our Latinity in the long ago? These cadenced nothings, these harmonious bagatelles — *nugæ canoræ* — are not without charm to the frivolous-minded. I could ask nothing better on a sunny afternoon in July than to lie in the shade by a river and read Ausonius, or the rhythmic caprices of the scholars of Salerno — monkish fancies tricked out in fantastic language.

Do you remember:

> Quid facies, facies Veneris quum veneris ante?
> Ne sedeas, sed eas, ne pereas per eas.
>
> Vos estis, Deus est testis, teterrima pestis,
> O Lamachi! vestri stomachi sunt amphora Bacchi.

And, again, that tinkling enigma:

> Plaudite, porcelli, porcorum pigra propago
> Progreditur; plures porci pinguedine pleni
> Pugnantes pergunt . . .
> Flos fueram factus: florem fortuna fefellit:
> Florentem florem florida flora fleat.
> Mors mortis morti mortem nisi morte dedisset,
> Nobis cœlorum janua clausa foret.
> O Tite tute Tati tibi tanta tyranne tulisti.
> Mitto tibi navem prora puppique carentem.
> Mitto tibi metulas; cancros imitare legendo.
> Signa, te signa; temere me tangis et angis.
> Roma tibi subito motibus ibit amor.
> Mitis ero, retine leniter ore sitim.

It is all a puerile mania, said La Harpe, this occupying oneself with laborious trifles. Now if you will open the books of M. de Montesquiou — be it " Roseaux Pensants," be it " Chauves-Souris," be it " Hortensias Bleus," be it " Le chef des odeurs suaves " — you will lift your eyebrows and whisper softly to yourself: " Salerno come again." Let us read at hazard; here for instance:

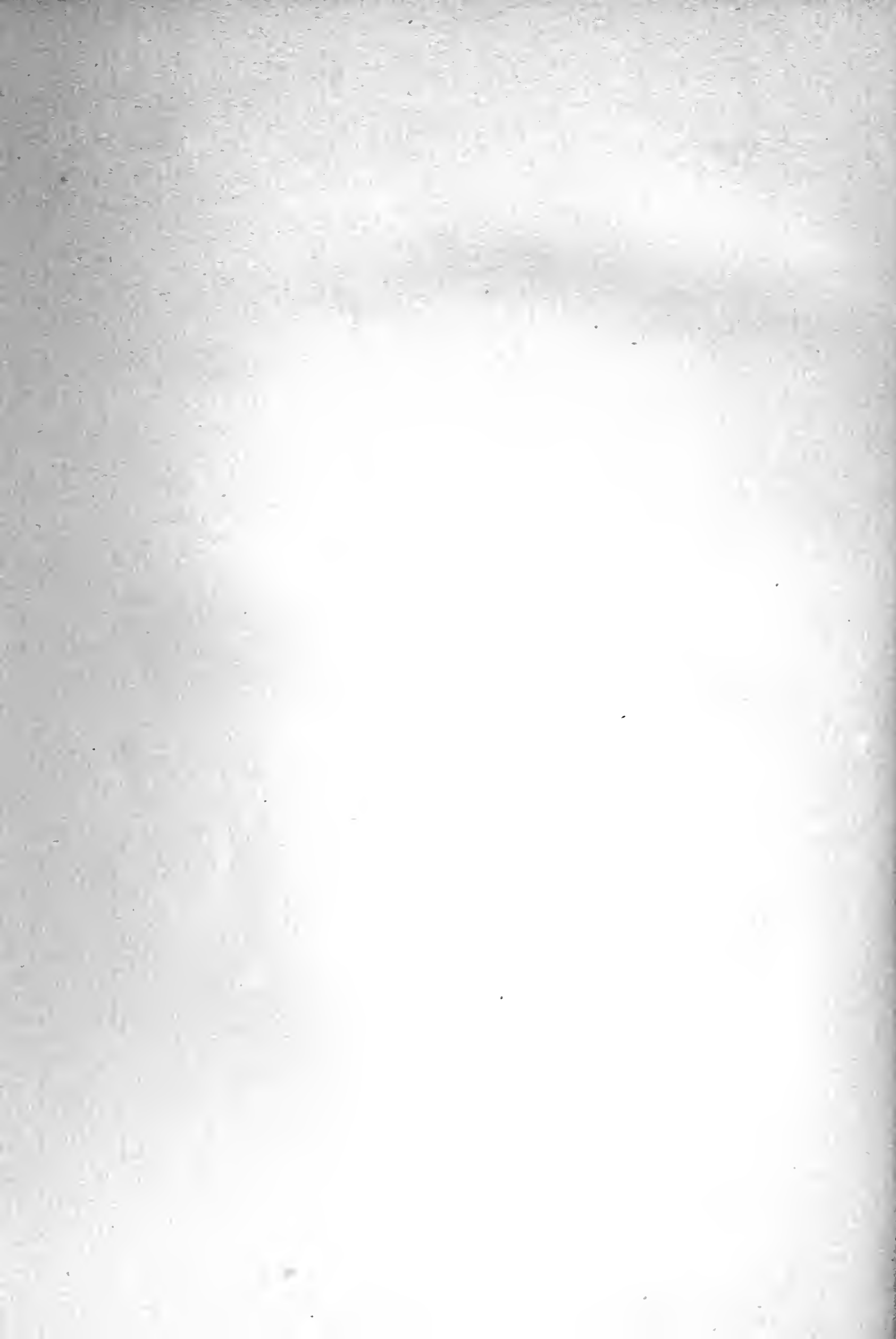
> . . . Temporaire
> Temporelle — quel lé ?
> Température tempérée . . .

" Let us love the hortensias ! " M. de Montesquiou cries prettily; and the dahlia, as well, for it is —

> Lavé, glacé, sablé, chiné,
> Panaché, recouvert, ombré,
> Onglé, rubanné, marginé,
> Avivé, reflété, marbré,
> Cerné, bordé, frisé, pointé,
> Éclairé, nuancé, carné,
> Frisé, liseré, velouté,
> Granité, strié, coccіné.

Fashionably pessimistic, M. de Montesquiou pipes his little songs of the sonorities he hears in *mauve* of the " fine, fashionable, elegant sky," which is " blue, gray, pink, like a dress, like a glove " ; and idle Paris wonders and fashionable Paris sighs : " The exquisite poet ! " And it is all very pretty

and precious — and quite in the Gentlemanly Interest. Life would be too sad, were it not for the poets of the blue hortensias, green roses and white peonies — these impassioned lovers of mauve and peacocks and Dresden china. Nature must wear an aspect of peculiar interest to those who see the sky as a silk petticoat and in the blessed sun himself see onlv an antique warming-pan.



Index

A

Aar, The, 50.
"Absinthe Drinker, The," 5.
Academy, The, 216.
Adam, Paul, 207–208, 210.
Ajalbert, 209.
Amazons, 131.
"*Amour, l'*," 192.
Anarchy, 203.
Angelo, Michel, 140.
"Ants, The," 172.
Antwerp, 43.
"*Aphrodite*," 135, 136.
"Apologia of Émile Zola," 215.
Apples of Gold, 131.
"*Archipel en Fleurs, l'*," 103, 109.
"*Aréthuse*," 103, 115.
Aristophanes, 138, 167.
Aristotle, 57.
"*Ars Poetica*," 9.
"*Assommoir, l'*," 80.
"Atrides, The," 57.
Ausonius, 227.
"*Aveugles, Les*," 35.
"*Avis*," 81.
Axa, Zo d', 206, 207.
Aytoun, William Edmonstoune, 182.

B

Baccalaureus, Herr, 192.
Bach, 12.
Bahr, Hermann, 162, 164.
"*Ballades Françaises*," 176.
Balilliat, Marcel, 135.
Balzac, 139, 171.
Banville, de, Théodore, 13, 77, 107.
Barbarians, 165, 166.
Barrès, Maurice, 160–167, 203, 205, 209, 214.
Barrès, Maurice, and Egoism, 160–167.
Bashkirtseff, Marie, 163.
Bataille, 127.
Baudelaire, Charles, 71, 76.
Beau Brummel, 167.
Beau Tibbs, 226.
Beaumont and Fletcher, 58.
Beckford, 14.
Becque, 66.
"Beggar's Soliloquies, The," 153.
Beguin Nuns, 67.
Belgian Renascence, The, 24–72.
  Camille Lemonnier, 24–28.
  Maurice Maeterlinck, 29–42.
  Émile Verhaeren, 43–49.
  Georges Eekhoud, 50–60.
  Georges Rodenbach, 61–68.
  Max Elskamp and Fernand Severin, 67–72.
Belgique, Jeune, La, 24–26.
Belgium, Young, 24–26.
"*Belle Dame passa, Une*," 108–110.

Benoit, Peter, 60.
Bernhardt, Sarah, 143–144.
Bernis, 226.
Beyle, Henri, 163.
Bion, 181.
Bisson, 66.
"Black Angel of Anarchy," 208.
"*Blasphèmes, Les,*" 142, 151.
Blockx, Jan, 60.
Blond, le, Maurice, 163, 197, 198–199.
Bobadil, 92.
Boileau, 180.
"*Bosquet de Psyché, Le,*" 115.
Botticelli, 12, 212.
Bouchor, 142.
Bouhélier, de, Saint-Georges, 178, 194–202.
Boulanger, Général, 161, 167.
Bourdain, 203.
Bourget, Paul, 171, 211, 212, 214.
Boul' Mich', 81.
"*Braves Gens,*" 151.
Bruges, 24, 62, 65.
"*Bruges-la-Morte,*" 66.
Brunetière, Fernand, 214.
Brussels, 24, 29, 42, 50.
Buddhism, 195.
Buffon, 172.
Burns, R., 145.
Burne-Jones, 29, 30.
Byron, 78, 160, 227.

C

Cabaret des Assassins, 137.
Café de l' Avenir, 3.
" *du Chalet*, 3.
" *François Premier*, 5, 91.
Café de l' Horloge, 34.
" *Rubens*, 43.
"*Calvaire,*" 207.
Calvin, 131.
"*Campagnes Hallucinées, Les,*" 47.
Campine, The, 50, 55.
Candide, 130.
Canterbury Pilgrims, 138.
"*Cantilenes, Les,*" 96.
"*Carillonneur,*" 66.
Carlyle, 219.
Caserio, 203, 210.
Chanlieu, 226.
"*Chanson des Gueux,*" 137, 142.
"*Chanson du Pauvre,*" 110.
"*Chant dans l' Ombre, Un,*" 71.
"*Chants de la Pluie et du Soleil,*" 223.
Charbonnel, 127.
"*Charniers, Les,*" 24.
Chasseurs d' Afrique, 206.
"*Chauves-Souris,*" 228.
"*Chef des odeurs suaves, Le,*" 228.
"*Chemineau, Le,*" 145–150.
Chénier, André, 122.
Chéret, 15, 212.
Children's Crusade, 184–188.
Chimay, de, Prince, 45.
"Chimney-swallows, The," 169.
Chopin, 22.
"Christ of Jehan Rictus, The," 152–159.
"*Cœur Double,*" 192.
"*Coffret de Santal, Le,*" 2.
"*Coin de Village, Un,*" 24.
Collège Rollin, 13.
Collège Sainte-Barbe, 43.
Color Theory, 80.

Color Theory, Rimbaud's, 16.
Columbine, 177.
"*Comte de la Digue, Le,*" 57.
"Confessions of a Young Man, The," 4, 17.
Contemporary Parnassus, 80.
"*Contes Épiques,*" 76.
Coppée, François, 4, 12, 214.
Coquelin, 2.
Corbière, Tristan, 163.
Corot, 71.
Criticism, New, The, 211–218.
Cros, Charles, 2.
"*Cueille d'Avril,*" 118.
"*Cycle Patibulaire, Le,*" 55.

D

"*Dame aux Camélias, La,*" 134.
Damien, Father, 43.
"*Daphné,*" 124.
Darwin, 195.
Daudet, Alphonse, 15, 77, 171, 214.
Davidson, John, 181.
Da Vinci, 140.
"*Débâcles, Les,*" 44, 46.
De Braekeler, 24.
"*D'ception,*" 155.
Degas, 5, 15.
Degas' "The Absinthe Drinker," 5.
Degron, Henri, 111.
Denys of Halicarnassus, 98.
Déschamps, Léon, 204.
Deshoulières, Mme., 180.
"*Destin,*" 200.
Disraeli, 121, 161.
Djelma, 143, 144.
"*Don d'Enfance,*" 71.
Dostoiewsky, 192.
Doumic, René, M., 226.
Doyen, le, Lemonnier, 25.
"Dragon-fly, The," 171.
Drake, 58.
Drawcansir, 92.
Dream, The, 22, 55, 85.
Droz, G., 27.
Dryden, 102.
Du Maurier, G., 212.

E

Eekhoud, Georges, 24–26, 50–60.
"Egoist, The," 192.
Elskamp, Max, 69–70.
Elskamp, Max, and Fernand Severin, 69–72.
Emerson, 14, 196.
Emery, René, 135.
"*En Dehors,*" 206.
"*Enluminures,*" 69.
Entresol du Parnasse, 81.
Erasmus, 184, 192.
Erasmus, New, The, Marcel Schwob, 184–193.
"*Ériphyle,*" 96.
Esau, 43.
"*Essais de Psychologie Contemporaine,*" 211–212.
Essays on Contemporary Psychology, 211–212.
"*Esseintes, Des,*" 19.
Euclid, 13.
"*Eurythmie,*" 103.
"*Éventail,*" 14.

F

Fables, Ballads, Pastorals, 168–183.
Jules Renard, 168–175.

Paul Fort, 176–179.
Francis Jammes, 180–183.
Falstaff, 177.
"Family of Trees, A," 174.
"Fantastic Review, The," 80.
Father Damien, 43.
"*Faune*," 17.
Faure, Sebastian, 207.
"*Faute de Mme. Charvet, La*," 28.
"*Femme en Noir, La*," 155.
"*Femme qui a connu l'Empereur, La*," 223.
Fête of the Women of Smaragdis, 57.
"*Fêtes Galantes, Les*," 7.
Feuillet, Octave, 194.
Fielding, 139.
"*Fin des Bourgeois*," 28.
Firmilian, 182.
"*Flamandes, Les*," 26, 44, 45.
"*Flambeaux Noirs, Les*," 46.
Flamma Vestalis, 29.
"Flanders, Moll," 192.
Flaubert, G., 47, 168, 195.
"Fleet Street Eclogues," 181.
"*Fleurs, Les*," 14.
"*Fleurs du Mal, Les*," 8.
Fontainas, André, 55, 127.
Forain, 212.
"*Forêt Bruissante, La*," 108.
Fort, Paul, 176–179.
Fourth Estate, The, 221.
Fra Angelico, 140.
Fra Diavolo, 51.
France, Anatole, 3, 213, 214.
Free Verse, 100–104.

G

"Garden of Love," 7.
Gautier, Judith, 77, 78.
Gautier, Théophile, 12, 19, 81.
"Gentlemanly Interest, In the," 219–229.
Germany, Empress of, 206.
Ghent, 24, 29, 30, 42, 43.
Ghent, Old and New, 30.
Ghent, the Soul of Flanders, 30.
Ghil, René, 16, 108.
"Ghosts," 156.
"Giaour," 54.
Gilkin, Iwan, 25, 27.
Giraud, Albert, 25.
Glasse, Mrs., 27.
"*Glu, La*," 151.
Godefroy, Duke, 33.
Godfrey de Bouillon, 33.
Goethe, 37, 139, 140.
"Golden Stair, The," 29.
Gomorrah, 10.
Goncourt, de, 15, 77, 171.
Goudeau, Émile, 3.
Gourmont, Rémy de, 113, 206.
Goya, 45, 165.
Grave, Jean, 112, 206.
Gudule, Saint, 31.
Gudule, Sister, 68.
Guise, Duke of, 33.

H

Halévy, L., 27.
Hamlet, 34.
Hamon, 210.
Hampton Court, 180.
"*Happe-Chair*," 28.
Hardy, Thomas, 50.
Harlequin, 177.
Hartmann, Sadakichi, 194.
Harvey, Gabriel, 69, 225.
"Haunted Palace," 102.
Heine, 76, 127, 141.

Henley, W. E., 189.
Henry, Émile, 203, 208.
Hêracles, between Virtue and Pleasure, 131.
Hérédia, de, Mlle., 115.
Hérédia, de, José-Maria, 79, 115, 116.
"*Hermes Psychagogos*," 189–191.
"*Hérodiade*," 13.
Herodotus, 133.
Hérold, 127, 207.
Hervieu, Paul, 214.
"Hesperus," 76.
Hilda, 34.
Hinds, The, 131.
Holmès, Augusta, 82.
Holy Graal, The, 149.
Homer, 49, 140.
"*Homme Libre, l'*," 166.
"*Homme et la Sirène, l'*," 115.
Horace, 160.
"Hours, The," 131.
Howells, W. D., 220.
Hugo, Victor, 12, 44, 49, 76, 86, 100, 154, 204, 209.
Huysmans, J. K., 7, 195, 214.
Hylas, 192.

I

Iamblichus, 197.
Ibels, André, 205.
Ibsen, 156.
Icres, Fernand, 2.
"*Idylle Diabolique*," 209.
"*Il pleure dans mon cœur*," 8.
Impeccables, Les, 8.
Impression of Paul Verlaine, An, 1–10.
"In Flandres al byyonde the se," 24.
"*Intérieur*," 38.
"*Intermezzo*," 76.
"In the Gentlemanly Interest," 219–229.
Hugues Rebell, 219–224.
Le comte Robert de Montesquiou Fezensac, 225–229.
"*Intruse, l'*," 35.

J

"*Jadis et Naguère*," 7.
Jammes, Francis, 180.
Jeune Belgique, La, 24, 26.
"*Jeunesse Blanche, La*," 63.
"*Jeunesse Contemporaine, La, et le Général Boulanger*," 161.
Joly, 93.
Jordaens, 45.
José, Maria, 51.
Jouet, Abbé, 207.
"*Jour, Le*," 182.
"*Justice*," 84.

K

Kahn, Gustave, 70, 116.
Kant, 119, 197.
"*Kees Doorik*," 26, 53, 54.
"*Kermesses, Les*," 53, 54.
King Otto, 97.
Kipling, Rudyard, 45, 47, 49.
Kropotkin, Prince, 204.
Kryzinska, Marie, 3, 108.

L

Laclos, 225.
Laforgue, Jules, 107,
La Harpe, 227.
La Jeunesse, Ernest, 211–218.

Lamartine, 71, 122.
"*Lamour, Claudine*," 28.
Lang, Andrew, 27.
"Lara," 54.
Larroumet, M., 212, 213.
Last of the Parnassians, The, Catulle Mendès, 73–90.
Latin Quarter, 59, 78, 92, 212.
Lavengro, 93, 192.
Lazare, Bernard, 207, 210.
"Leaves of Grass," 47, 103, 201.
"*Le ciel est, par-dessus le toit*," 102.
"*Lectures Antiques*," 136.
"*Légende des Siècles*," 76.
Lemaître, Jules, 82, 214.
Lemonnier, Camille, 24–28, 58.
Leopardi, 27.
Lisle, de, Leconte, 4, 13, 76, 77.
"Litanies of Dynamite," 205.
"*Livre de Monelle, Le*," 192.
Longfellow, 120.
Loti, Pierre, 214.
"*Louis XI.*," 176.
Loukios, 36.
"*Lourdes*," 215.
Louvain, 24, 43.
Louys, Pierre, 130–136.
"Love Lies A' Bleeding," 58.
Luccheni, 203, 210.
Lucian, 36.
Luther, 15, 135, 138, 139, 142.
"*Lys, Le*," 71.

M

Mabie, Hamilton, 214.
Macaulay, 56.
Maeterlinck, Maurice, 15, 16, 24, 29–42, 60, 95, 122, 162, 214, 216–218.
Maeterlinck, Theories of Science and Love, 39–41.
Malatesta, Count, 204, 210.
Malato, 207.
"*Mâle, Un*," 24.
Mallarmé, Stéphane, 11–23, 79, 102, 115, 125, 140, 161, 226.
Mallarmé's Symbolism, 16–23.
Mallarmé's Technique, 17–23.
Mallarmé's Theory of Verse, 12.
Manet, Édouard, 15.
Marcus Aurelius, 39.
Maréchal de lettres, 26.
Marlowe, 57.
Martin (*Candide*), 130.
Maupassant, de, Guy, 12, 171.
Mazel, Henri, 207,
"McAndrew's Hymn," 47.
"*Médée*," 84.
Memmling, 69.
Mendès, Catulle, 73–90.
Mendès, Mme., 81.
Mendès, Tibulle, 76.
Men of Letters and Anarchy, 203–210.
Mercure de France, 207.
"*Mer, La*," 151.
"*Mer Élégante*," 26.
Meredith, George, 191.
"*Mères Ennemies, Les*," 84.
Merimée, Prosper, 194.
Mérode, de, Cléo, 212.
Merrill, Stuart, 113, 116–118, 205, 208.
"*Mes Communions*," 55.
"*Mes Paradis*," 151.

"*Miarka,*" 151.
Michel, Louise, 204.
Michelet, 171.
"*Milices de St. François, Les,*" 53.
"*Mimes,*" 188–189.
Mirbeau, Octave, 203, 207, 210.
"Mirror of Venus, The," 29.
"*Moines, Les,*" 45.
Monet, Claude, 36.
"Monks, The," 45.
Mons Penitentiary, 8.
"*Monsieur Scapin,*" 151.
Montesquiou, de, Fezensac, Comte Robert, 225–229.
Moore, George, 4, 5, 16, 17, 47, 138.
Moréas, Jean, 116, 122.
Moréas, Jean, and his Disciples, 91–99.
Morice, 6.
"*Morts Bizarres,*" 142.
Moschus, 181.
Murger, Henri, 212.
"*Musée de Béguines,*" 66.
Musset, de, 163, 223.

N

"*Nana,*" 134.
"*Nana-Sahib,*" 143.
Napoleon, 94.
Naturism and Saint-Georges de Bouhélier, 194–202.
Neo-Platonists, 35.
New Criticism, The, 211–218.
New Erasmus, The, Marcel Schwob, 184–193.
New Poetry, The, 100–129.
  Free Verse, 100–104.
  Adolphe Retté, 104–112.
  Henri de Regnier, Stuart Merrill, and Vielé-Griffin, 113–120.
"*Nichina,*" 223.
Nietzsche, 38, 42, 52, 123, 204, 222.
Nights, the Ennuis, and the Souls of our Most Notorious Contemporaries, The, 211.
Nordau, Max, 162, 164.
"*Nouvelle Carthage,*" 54.
"*Nouvelles Kermesses,*" 54.
Novalis, 35.
Nuits, les Ennuis et les Âmes de nos plus Notoires Contemporains, Les, 211–214.

O

Odysseus, 132.
"Of Blood, of Pleasure and of Death," 162.
Omar Kháyyám, 160.
Othello, 34.
Otto, King, 97.
Ovid, 50.

P

Paganism of Pierre Louys, The, 130–136.
Pailleron, Édouard, 66.
Palicare of Epirus, 51.
Pantaloon, 177.
Papadiamantopoulos, 97.
"Paradise Lost," 101.
"*Paris,*" 215.
Parnassians, The, 7, 10, 12, 13, 26, 102, 107, 214.
Parnassians, Last of the, 73.
Parsifal, 117.

Pascal, 123, 209.
"Passionate Pilgrim," 96.
Pater, Walter, 83, 198.
Patterne, Sir Willoughby, 38, 192.
"*Pauvre, Le,*" 105–107.
Pentadius, 226.
"*Pélerin Passionné, Le,*" 96.
Pérouse, de, Galland, 206.
Petrarch, 180.
"Philaster," 58.
Philemon, 123.
Philistine, 27.
Pica, Vittoria, 162.
Pied-à-terre in the Rue du Marais, The, 29.
Pierrot, 6, 177, 198.
Pierrot, Socratic, 6.
Pippa, 119.
Plato, 35, 195, 197.
Plotinus, 35.
"*Plume, La,*" 20.
Poe, Edgar, 14, 59, 101, 102, 103, 202.
Poe, Edgar, Tomb of, 14.
"*Poèmes Saturniens,*" 7.
Poësie Romane, 95, 96.
Poète des Poètes, 10.
Poètes Maudits, 14.
Poetry, New, The, 100–129.
  Free Verse, 100–104.
  Adolphe Retté, 104–112.
  Henri de Regnier, Stuart Merrill, and Vielé-Griffin, 113–120.
Pompadour, 7.
Pope, Alexander, 180.
Pope Innocent III., 184.
Pope Gregory IX., 188.
Porphyry, 35, 197.
Porte St. Martin, Theatre, 143.
Pouchon, Raoul, 142.
"*Pour Lire au Bain,*" 76.
"*Pour Lire au Couvent,*" 76.
"Prayer of Anatole France," 214.
Prévost, Marcel, 214.
Prince de Chimay, 45.
Prince Hal, 1.
"*Princesse Maleine,*" 35, 38.
Prize, State, 25.
Prodicos, 131.
Putte, de, M., 197.

Q

Quartier Latin, 59, 78, 92, 212.
Quillard, Pierre, 127, 207.

R

"Rabbits, The," 173.
Racan, Marquis de, 180.
Racine, 122.
Raffaeli, 59.
Randon, Gabriel, 152, 205.
Raskolnikoff, Rodion, 192.
Rat Mort (Café), 142.
Ravachol, 210.
Rebell, Hugues, 219–224, 226.
Reclus, Elisée, 203.
"*Règne du Silence,*" 63, 66.
Régnier, de, H., 101, 113–116, 119, 122, 207.
Régnier, de, Henri, Stuart Merrill, and Vielé-Griffin, 113–120.
Remer, Paul, 162.
Renan, 39, 162, 163, 212,
Renard, Jules, 168.
Renascence, Belgian, The, 24–72.

Camille Lemonnier, 24–28.
Maurice Maeterlinck, 29–42.
Émile Verhaeren, 43–49.
Georges Eekhoud, 50–60.
Georges Rodenbach, 61–68.
Max Elskamp and Fernand Severin, 67–72.
Renascence, The, 23, 24, 28, 138.
"Republic of Letters, The," 80.
Retté, Adolphe, 12, 50, 101, 102, 104–112, 120, 122, 205, 208.
"*Revenant, Le,*" 155–158.
"Review of To-morrow," 80.
Revolt of Young Belgium, 25.
"*Revue Libertaire,*" 205.
Richepin, Jean, 55, 106, 137–151, 152, 154, 171, 214.
Richepin, Jean, and the Vagrom Man, 137–151.
Rictus, Jehan, 105, 152–153.
Rimbaud, 8.
Rimbaud's Color Theory, 16.
"Road, The," 217.
Rochefort, Henri, 214.
Rodenbach, Georges, 25, 26, 59, 61–68.
Rodin, 15, 36.
Rollinat, 155.
"*Romance sans Paroles,*" 7, 8.
Ronsard, 75.
Rops, Félicien, 24, 60.
"*Roseaux Pensants,*" 228.
Rubens, 7, 139, 140.
Ruysbroeck, 35.

S

Sacher Masoch, 50.
Sade, Marquis de, 6.
"*Sagesse,*" 3, 7, 8.
"*Sagesse et Destinée,*" 37, 38.
Saint-Armand, 43.
Saint Basil, 131.
Saint Denys the Areopagyte, 35.
Saint Francis of Assisi, 6.
St. Gudule, 31.
St. Nicolas, 30.
Saint-Pol-Roux-le-Magnifique, 127.
Sainte-Beuve, 77.
Ste.-Pélagie, Prison of, 142, 207.
Salerno, 227, 228.
Saltus, Edgar, 117.
Samain, Albert, 121, 127–129.
Santiago, 42.
Satanism, 195.
Scheldt, 43.
Schiller, 72.
Scott, Sir Walter, 27.
Schwob, Marcel, 123, 184–193.
Schwob, Marcel, The New Erasmus, 184–193.
Ségrais, 180.
"*Semaine, La,*" 44.
Severin, Fernand, 69, 70–72.
Seville, 136.
Shakspere, 17, 32, 49, 58, 96, 123, 138, 140.
Sharp, William, 16, 17.
Shaw, George Bernard, 214.
Shelley, 105, 205, 225.
"Shepherd's Calendar," 180.
Sidney, 58.
"Siegfried," 48, 109.
Signoret, Emmanuel, 121, 122, 124–127.
Signoret, Emmanuel, and Albert Samain, 121–127.

"*Similitudes*," 105.
Sir Galahad, 149.
Sir Thopas, 24.
Sister Ygraine, 36.
Socrates, 4, 6, 135.
Socratic Pierrot, 6.
"*Soirs, Les*," 46.
Solness, 34, 35.
"*Soliloques du Pauvre, Les*," 153.
"Songs of Bilitis," 136.
"Song of Islam," 105.
"*Sous l'Œil des Barbares*," 166.
Spencer, 196.
Spenser, Edmund, 69, 180, 225.
"*Spicilège*," 191, 193.
Spinoza, 123.
State Prize, 25.
Steen, Jan, 139.
Steiner, 164.
Stendhal, 162, 163.
Sterne, Laurence, 137, 181.
Stevenson, Robert Louis, 189, 191.
Story, W. W., 54.
Surrey, 58.
Swedenborg, 35.
Swinburne, 13, 14.
Switzerland, 50.
"*Sylve*," 98.
Symbolism, 94-95, 107.
Symbolism and the Symbolists, 16, 17, 214.
"*Syrtes, Les*," 96.

T

"*Taches d'Encre*," 161.
Tailhade, Laurent, 127, 205.
Tante Rachel, 223.
Tartarin de Tarascon, 99.
Tavern of the Golden Sun, 3.
Teniers, 45.
Théâtre-Librists, 66.
Theories of Science and Love, Maeterlinck's, 39–40.
Theory of Verse, Mallarmé's, 12.
"Thoughts," Pascal's, 38.
"*Tintagiles*," 35.
Tin-Tun-Ling, 82.
Titian, 138, 140.
"Toad, The," 170.
Toby, Uncle, 99.
Tolstoï, 41, 42.
"Tomb of Edgar Poe," 14.
"Tragedy of the Forest, A," 52.
"Treasure of the Humble, The," 38.
Trilogies of Verhaeren, 47.
"*Triomphe des Médiocres, Le*," 208.
"Turkey Hen, The," 172.

U

"*Une Belle Dame passa*," 108, 110.
Urfé, Marquis d', 181.

V

Vagrom Man, The, 56, 137, 145–150.
Vaillant, 205, 208.
Vakiem, Tarninch, and Sariem, 118.
Valerius, Cato, 123, 225.

Van Dyck, 44.
Van Eyck, 69.
"*Variations sur un Sujet,*" 14.
"Vathek," 14.
"Venus, Mirror of, The," 29.
Vergier des Combes, M. le, 223.
Vergil, 225, 227.
Verhaeren, Émile, 16, 24, 49, 59, 60.
Verlaine, Paul, 1–10, 13, 14, 70, 79, 91, 92, 102, 107, 122, 127, 128.
Verlaine, Pen Portrait of, 4.
"*Vers Dorés,*" 121, 124.
Verse, Free, 100–104.
Vielé, General, 116.
Vielé-Griffin, 101, 108, 113, 116, 118, 119–120, 122, 207.
"*Vies Encloses,*" 66.
"*Villages Illusoires, Les,*" 47, 48.
Villiers de l'Isle Adam, 13, 15, 79.
"*Villes Tentaculaires, Les,*" 47, 48.
Villon, François, 7, 176, 193.
Virgin of Flanders, 70.
"*Vocation, La,*" 66.
"*Voile, Le,*" 66–68.
Voltaire, 130, 162.

W

Wagner, R., 14, 15, 49, 81, 108, 112, 139.
Waldweben, 109.
Walkyries, The, 117.
Waller, Max, 25.
Walpole, Horace, 226.
"Wasp, The," 172.
Waterloo, Stanley, 52.
Watteau, 7.
Webster, 58.
"Week, The," 44.
Whistler, 16.
Whitman, Walt, 5, 23, 45, 49, 56, 58, 101, 103, 108, 112, 115, 118, 119, 141, 160, 194, 200, 201, 202.
Wilkins, Miss, 220.
"Winter," 153.
"Wisdom," 8.
"Wisdom and Destiny," 37, 38.

Y

Young Belgium, 24, 26.

Z

Zarathushtra, 56, 197.
Zeuxis, 123.
Zola, Émile, 12, 15, 36, 80, 169, 171, 195, 214–216.
Zurbaran, 45.

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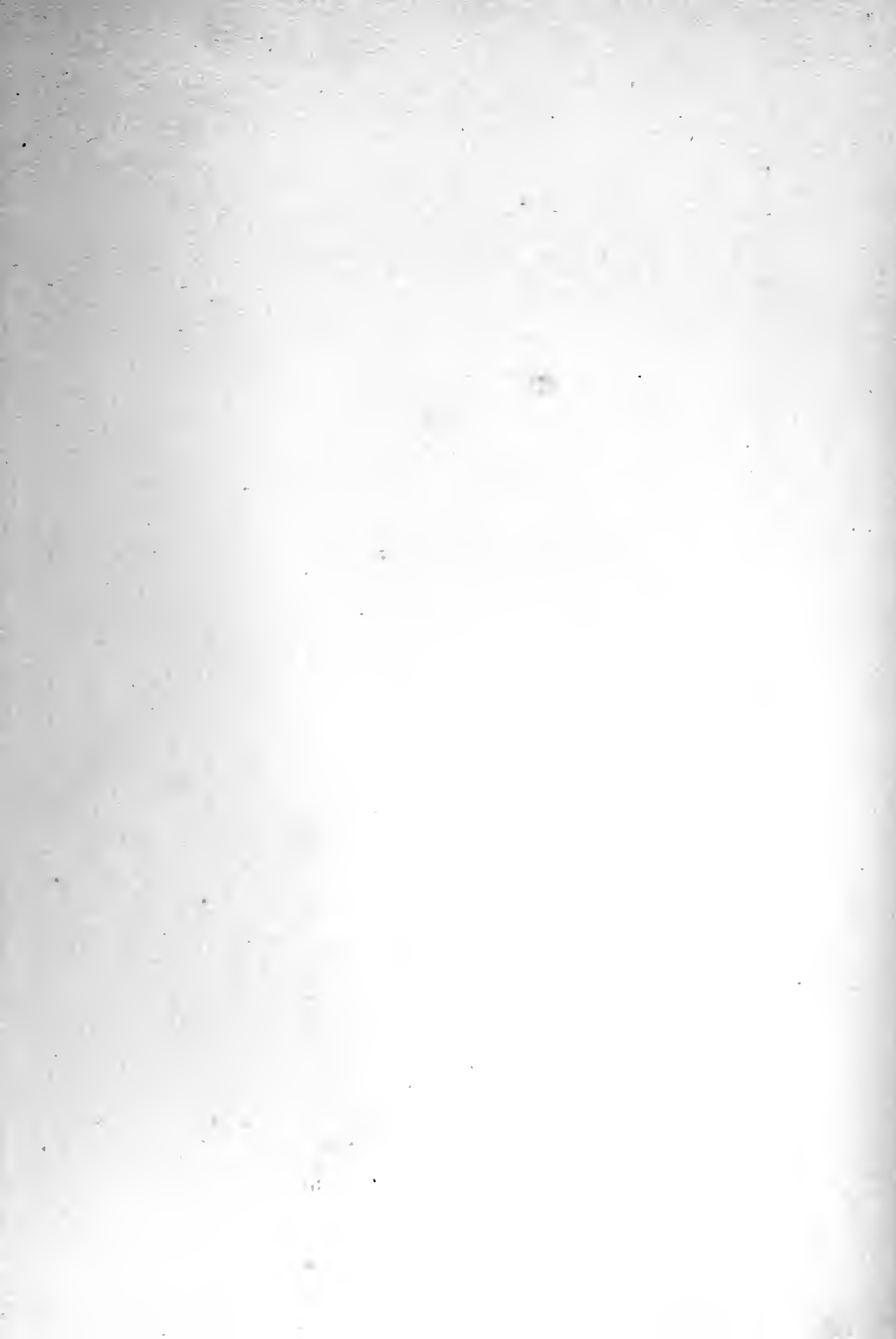

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