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# Studies in European Literature

## Taylorian Lectures

1889–1899

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*IN the foundation of an Annual Lecture at the Taylor Institution on some subject of Foreign Literature provision was made for publication. The present volume, containing all the Lectures hitherto delivered, will, it is hoped, contribute to further the study of foreign letters beyond as well as in the University.*

*The Curators of the Taylor Institution wish to express their hearty gratitude to those scholars who have, by accepting the post of Lecturer, enabled them to carry out with success the design they had in view.*

*Oxford, 1900.*



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## LITERARY CRITICISM IN FRANCE

WHEN the Curators of the Taylorian Institution honoured me with an invitation to lecture on some subject connected with the study of modern literature, I glanced back over my recent reading, and I found that a large part, perhaps an undue proportion of it, had consisted of French literary history and French literary criticism. The recent death of that eminent critic, M. Scherer, had led me to make a survey of his writings. I had found in M. Brunetière an instructor vigorous and severe in matters of literature; one who allies modern thought with classical tradition. I had beguiled some hours, not more pleasantly than profitably, with M. Jules Lemaitre's bright if slender studies of contemporary writers, in which the play of ideas is contrived with all the skill and grace of a decorative art. I had followed M. Paul Bourget, as many of us have done, through his more laborious analyses in which he investigates, by means of typical representatives in literature, the moral life of our time. And I had in some measure possessed myself of the legacy of thought left to us by two young writers, ardent students, interested in

the philosophical aspects of literature, whose premature loss French letters must deplore, M. Guyau, the author of several volumes on questions of morals and aesthetics, and M. Hennequin, whose attempt to draw the outlines of a system of scientific criticism has at least the merit of bold ingenuity. It seemed to me that I had fresh in my mind matter which must be of interest to all who care for literature, and that I should not do ill if I were to try to gather up some of my impressions on recent literary criticism, and especially on methods or proposed methods of criticism in France.

Nearly a generation has passed since a distinguished son of Oxford, Mr. Matthew Arnold, declared that the chief need of our time—and especially the need of our own country—was a truer and more enlightened criticism. He did not speak merely of literature; he meant that we needed a fresh current of ideas about life in its various provinces. But he included the province of literature, the importance of which, and especially of poetry, no man estimated more highly than did Mr. Arnold. And as the essential prelude to a better criticism, he made his gallant, and far from unsuccessful, effort to disturb our national self-complacency, to make us feel that Philistia is not a land which is very far off; he made the experiment, which he regarded as in the best sense patriotic, to rearrange for our uses the tune of *Rule Britannia* in a minor key. His contribution to our self-knowledge was a valuable one, if wisely used. The elegant lamentations of the prophet over his people in captivity to the Philistines were more than elegant, they were inspired by a fine ideal of intellectual freedom, and were animated by a courageous hope that the ideal might be, in part at least,

attained. Disciples, however, too often parody the master, and I am not sure that success in any other affectation is more cheaply won than in the affectation of depreciating one's kinsfolk and one's home. There is a Jaques-like melancholy arising from the sundry contemplation of one's intellectual travel, which disinclines its possessor for simple household tasks. Our British inaccessibility to ideas, our wilfulness of temper, our caprices of intellect, our insular narrowness, the provinciality of our thought, the brutality of our journals, the banality of our popular teachers, our incapacity to govern, or at least to be gracious in governing—these are themes on which it has become easy to dilate:—

‘ Most can raise the flowers now,  
For all have got the seed.’

And with the aid of a happy eclecticism which chooses for comparison the bright abroad with the dark or dull at home, and reserves all its amiable partiality and dainty enthusiasm for our neighbours, it really has not been difficult to acquire a new and superior kind of complacency, the complacency of national self-depreciation.

As regards the criticism of literature, Mr. Arnold did good service in directing our eyes to France, and when we spoke of French literary criticism any time in the fifties and sixties of this century, we meant first of all Sainte-Beuve. Here Mr. Arnold was surely right, nor did he depart from the balance and measure which he so highly valued when, in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, he described Sainte-Beuve as an unrivalled guide to bring us to a knowledge of the French genius and literature—‘ perfect, so far as a poor mortal critic can be perfect, in knowledge of his subject, in tact, in

tone.' We are all pupils of Sainte-Beuve. But to what Mr. Arnold has said of Sainte-Beuve, I should like to add this: that while the great critic was French in his tact, French in his art of finely insinuating opinions, in his seeming *bonhomie*, and at the same time in the delicate malice of his pen, French above all in his sense of the intimate relations of literature with social life, his method as a critic was not the dominant method of France; it was hardly characteristic of the French intellect; it was his own method, and it had been in great measure our English method<sup>1</sup>.

For, while possessing extraordinary mobility within certain limits seldom overpassed, the French intellect, as compared with that of England, is pre-eminently systematic, and to attain system, or method, or order in its ideas, it is often content to view things in an abstract or generalizing way, or even to omit things which present a difficulty to the systematizer. At the highest this order is a manifestation of reason, and when it imposes itself upon our minds, it brings with it that sense of freedom which accompanies the recognition of a law. But when by evading difficulties a pseudo-order is established, and when this is found, as it inevitably will be found in the course of time, to be a tyranny, then the spirit of system becomes really an element of disorder, provoking the spirit of anarchy, and, as M. Nisard has called it, the spirit of chimera. In a nation where the tendency towards centralization is strong, and a central authority has been constituted, an order of ideas, which is probably in part true, in

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Arnold's *Éloge* does not apply to the earlier writings of Sainte-Beuve, which were wanting in critical balance, and often in critical disinterestedness.

part false, will be imposed by that authority, and as years go by this will become traditional. So it was in France. The Academy was precisely such a central authority in matters intellectual, and from its origin it asserted a claim to be a tribunal in literary criticism. It imposed a doctrine, and created a tradition. But even among writers who revolted from the traditional or Academical manner in criticism, the spirit of system was often present, for the spirit of system is characteristic of the intellect of France. An idea, a dogma was denounced, and the facts were selected or compelled to square with the idea; an age was reduced to some formula which was supposed to express the spirit of that age, and the writers of the time were attenuated into proofs of a theory.

Now Sainte-Beuve's method as a critic was as far as possible removed from this abstract and doctrinaire method. He loved ideas, but he feared the tyranny of an idea. He was on his guard against the spirit of system. Upon his seal was engraved the English word 'Truth,' and the root of everything in his criticism, as Mr. Arnold said of him, is his simple-hearted devotion to truth. Mr. Arnold might have added that his method for the discovery of truth is the method characteristic of the best English minds, that of living and working in the closest relation with facts, and incessantly revising his opinions so that they may be in accord with facts. It will be in the memory of readers of Sainte-Beuve that in 1862, in the articles on Chateaubriand, afterwards included in the third volume of *Nouveaux Lundis*, he turned aside to give an exposition of his own critical method. He had been reproached with the fact that he had no theory. 'Those

who deal most favourably with me have been pleased to say that I am a sufficiently good judge, but a judge who is without a code.' And while admitting that there existed no 'code Sainte-Beuve,' he went on to maintain that he had a method, formed by practice, and to explain what that method was. It was that for which afterwards, when reviewing a work by M. Deschanel, he accepted the name of naturalistic criticism. He tells us how we are inevitably carried from the book under our view to the entire work of the author, and so to the author himself; how we should study the author as forming one of a group with the other members of his household, and in particular that it is wise to look for his talent in the mother, and, if there be sisters, in one or more of the sisters; how we should seek for him in 'le premier milieu,' the group of friends and contemporaries who surrounded him at the moment when his genius first became full-fledged; how again we should choose for special observation the moment when he begins to decay, or decline, or deviate from his true line of advance under the influences of the world; for such a moment comes, says Sainte-Beuve, to almost every man; how we should approach our author through his admirers and through his enemies; and how, as the result of all these processes of study, sometimes the right word emerges which claims, beyond all power of resistance, to be a definition of the author's peculiar talent; such an one is a 'rhetorician,' such an one an 'improvisator of genius.' Chateaubriand himself, the subject of Sainte-Beuve's *causerie*, is 'an Epicurean with the imagination of a Catholic.' But, adds Sainte-Beuve, let us wait for this characteristic name, let us not hasten to give it.

This method of Sainte-Beuve, this inductive or naturalistic method, which advances cautiously from details to principles, and which is ever on its guard against the idols that deceive the mind, did not, as he says, quite satisfy even his admirers among his own countrymen. They termed his criticism a negative criticism, without a code of principles; they demanded a theory. But it is a method which accords well with our English habits of thought; and the fact is perhaps worth noting that while Mr. Arnold was engaged in indicating, for our use, the vices and the foibles of English criticism as compared with that of France, Sainte-Beuve was thinking of a great English philosopher as the best preparatory master for those who would acquire a sure judgement in literature. 'To be in literary history and criticism a disciple of Bacon,' he wrote, 'seems to me the need of our time.' Bacon laid his foundations on a solid groundwork of facts, but it was his whole purpose to rise from these to general truths. And Sainte-Beuve looked forward to a time when as the result of countless observations, a science might come into existence which should be able to arrange into their various species or families the varieties of human intellect and character, so that the dominant quality of a mind being ascertained we might be able to infer from this a group of subordinate qualities. But even in his anticipations of a science of criticism Sainte-Beuve would not permit the spirit of system to tyrannize over him. Such a science, he says, can never be quite of the same kind as botany or zoology; man has 'what is called *freedom of will*,' which at all events presupposes a great complexity in possible combinations. And even if at some remote

period, this science of human minds should be organized, it will always be so delicate and mobile, says Sainte-Beuve, that 'it will exist only for those who have a natural calling for it, and a true gift for observation; it will always be an *art* requiring a skilful artist, as medicine requires medical tact in those who practise it.' There are numberless obscure phenomena to be dealt with in the criticism of literature, and they are the phenomena of life, in perpetual process of change; there are *nuances* to be caught, which, in the words of one who has tried to observe and record them, are 'more fugitive than the play of light on the waters.' Sainte-Beuve felt that to keep a living mind in contact with life must for the present be the chief effort of criticism, to touch here some vital point, and again some other point there. In that remarkable volume, *Le Roman Expérimental*, in which M. Zola deals with his fellow authors not so much in the manner of a judge as in that of a truculent gendarme, he lays violent hold on Sainte-Beuve, claiming him as essentially a critic of his own so-called experimental school; not, indeed, that Sainte-Beuve's was one of those superior minds which comprehend their age, for was he not rather repelled than subdued by the genius of Balzac, and did he not fail to perceive that the romantic movement of 1830 was no more than the cry for deliverance from dogma and tradition of an age on its way to the naturalism of M. Zola himself? Still, says M. Zola, in certain pages Sainte-Beuve formulated with a tranquil daring the experimental method 'which we put in practice.' And it is true that there are points of contact between Sainte-Beuve's criticism, with its careful study of the author's *milieu*, and the



doctrines proclaimed by M. Zola. But what a contrast between the spirits of the two men; what a contrast in the application to life even of the ideas which they possessed in common! M. Zola, whose mind is overridden, if ever a mind was, by the spirit of system; whose work, misnamed realistic, is one monstrous idealizing of humanity under the types of the man-brute and the woman-brute; and Sainte-Beuve, who in his method would fain be the disciple of our English Bacon; Sainte-Beuve, ever alert and mobile, ever fitting his mind to the nicenesses of fact, or tentatively grouping his facts in the hope that he may ascertain their law; Sainte-Beuve, whom, if the word 'realism' be forced upon us, as it seems to be at the present time, we may name a genuine realist in the inductive study of the temperaments of all sorts and conditions of men.

Of M. Scherer I spoke a few days after his death in the pages of the *Fortnightly Review*, and I shall only say here that he resembled Sainte-Beuve at least in this, that he too feared the tyranny of the spirit of system. In his earlier years, indeed, he had aspired as a philosophical thinker and a theologian to the possession of a body of absolute beliefs; but he found, or thought he found, that all which he had supposed to be fixed was moving, was altering its shape and position. He saw, or thought he saw, a sinking of the soil on which he had built his house as if to last for ever, a gaining of the tide upon the solid land; he recognized, as so many have had to recognize in this century of moral difficulty, the processes of the evolution, or at least the vicissitude, of beliefs. He ceased to hope for truth absolute, but it was not as one disillusioned and disenchanted that he

took refuge in the relative. He felt that his appointed task of truth-seeking had grown more serious and more full of promise. It seemed to him that there was something childish in the play of building up elaborate erections of dogma, ingenious toy-houses, to be tumbled down presently by the trailing skirts of Time. The business of a man was rather, as he conceived it, to live by the truth of to-day, trusting that it would develop into the completer truth of to-morrow, to contribute something of sound knowledge and well-considered opinion to the common fund, to work with all other honest minds towards some common result, though what that result may be, none of us as yet can be aware. He thought that he could perceive a logic in the general movement of the human mind, and he was content, for his own part, to contribute a fragment of truth here and a fragment there which might be taken up in the vast inductions of that mighty logician, the *Zeit-Geist*.

A critic of such a temper as this can hardly set up absolute standards by which to judge, he can hardly make any one age the final test of another, and condemn the classic because it is not romantic, or the romantic because it is not classic. Yet he is far from being a sceptic either in matters of faith or matters of literary conviction; he may possess very clear and strong opinions, and indeed it becomes his duty to give a decided expression to his own view of truth, even if it be but a partial view, for how otherwise can he assist in the general movement of thought? The discomfiture of the absolute, as Scherer has said, is an aid to tolerance, is even favourable to indulgence, but it need not and should not paralyze the judgement, or hopelessly

perplex the literary conscience. And Scherer himself was indeed at times more inclined to severity than to indulgence; behind the man, who was the nominal subject of his criticism, he saw the idea, and with an idea it is not necessary to observe the punctilio of fine manners. He must at the same time make his own idea precise, must argue out his own thesis. Yet he feels all the while that his own idea, his own thesis, has only a relative value, and that his criticism is at best something tentative. Scherer's conviction that all our truths are only relative, and that none the less they are of the utmost importance to us, gives in great measure its special character, at once tentative and full of decision, to his criticism.

But Scherer came on his father's side from a Swiss family, and the Parisian critic had been formed in the school of Protestant Geneva; Sainte-Beuve's mother was of English origin, and his reading as a boy was largely in our English books. These are facts which may fairly be noted by one who accepts Sainte-Beuve's principles of literary investigation. The critical methods characteristic of the French intellect as contrasted with the English intellect are not the methods which guide and govern the work of these writers. Their work lacks the large *ordonnance*, the ruling logic, the *vues d'ensemble* in which the French mind, inheritor of Latin tradition, delights. Without a moment's resistance we yield ourselves to such guides, because the processes of their minds agree with those to which we are accustomed, only they are conducted by them with an ease and grace which with us are rare. But perhaps we gain more, or at least something more distinctive, from contact with intellects of a type which differs essentially

from the English type, minds more speculative than ours, more apt in bringing masses of concrete fact under the rule and regimen of ideas. These characteristics of the French intellect are exhibited in a very impressive way by two well-known histories of literature, which, as regards methods and principles of criticism, stand as far apart from each other as it is possible to conceive—Nisard's *History of French Literature*, and the much more celebrated *History of English Literature* by Taine. The one is of the elder school of criticism, dogmatic and traditional; the other is of the newer school, and claims to be considered scientific. Both are works over which ideas preside—or perhaps we might say dominate with an excessive authority. A mind of the English type could hardly have produced either of the two.

The name of M. Désiré Nisard seems to carry us far into the past. It is more than half a century since he made his masked attack on the Romantic school, then in its fervid youth, in his *Latin Poets of the Decadence*, and put forth his famous manifesto against *la littérature facile*. It was in 1840 that the first two volumes of his *History of French Literature* appeared: but twenty years passed before that work was completed; and it is little more than twelve months since M. Nisard gave to the public his *Souvenirs et Notes biographiques*, volumes followed, perhaps unfortunately for his fame, by the *Ægri Somnia* of the present year. Such a life of devotion to letters is rare, and the unity of his career was no less remarkable than its length. For sixty years M. Nisard was a guardian of the dignity of French letters, a guardian of the purity of the French language, a maintainer of the traditions of learning and

thought, an inflexible judge in matters of intellect and taste. The aggressive sallies of his earlier years were only part of the system of defence which at a later time he conducted with greater reserve from within the stronghold of his own ideas. When the first volumes of his *History of French Literature* were written, M. Nisard's doctrine and method were fully formed, and when, twenty years later, he finished his task, it seemed never to have been interrupted; and though the author was of Voltaire's opinion that he who does not know how to correct, does not know how to write, there was nothing to alter in essentials of the former part of the work. It is a work which cannot be popular, for its method is opposed to that which at present has the mastery, and its style has a magisterial, almost a monumental, concision, which is not to the liking of the crowd of torpid readers. It is, says a contemporary critic, a feature in common between two writers, in other respects so unlike, M. Nisard and M. Renan, that neither can be enjoyed by the common mass of readers, because 'they are equally concerned, though in different ways, with the effort to be sober and simple, to efface colours that are over lively, and never to depart, in the temperate expression of their thought, from that scrupulous precision and exquisite *netteté* which Vauvenargues has named *le vernis des maîtres*.' But though it cannot live the noisy life of a popular book, M. Nisard's *History* remains, and does its work, a work all the more valuable because it resists in many ways the currents of opinion and taste in our age.

What, then, is M. Nisard's method? It is as far as possible removed from the method of Sainte-Beuve, as far as possible removed from what I may call the

English method of criticism. A piece of literature—a poem, a novel, a play—carries Sainte-Beuve to the other works of the author, whether they be of the same kind or not, and thence to the author himself, to the little group of persons with whom he lived and acted, and to the general society of which he formed a member. M. Nisard views the work apart from its author and apart from his other works, if those other works be of a different literary species. He compares this book or that with other books of the same *genre*, or rather with the type of the *genre*, which, by a process of abstraction, he has formed in his own mind; he brings it into comparison with his ideal of the peculiar genius of the nation, his ideal of the genius of France, if the book be French; he tests its language by his ideal of the genius of the French language; finally, he compares it with his ideal of the genius of humanity as embodied in the best literature of the world, to whatever country or age that literature may belong. Criticism, as conceived by M. Nisard, confronts each work of literature with a threefold ideal—that of the nation, that of the language, that of humanity: ‘elle note ce qui s’en rapproche; voilà le bon: ce qui s’en éloigne; voilà le mauvais.’ The aim of such criticism, according to M. Nisard’s own definition, is ‘to regulate our intellectual pleasures, to free literature from the tyranny of the notion that *there is no disputing about tastes*, to constitute an exact science, intent rather on guiding than gratifying the mind.’

Surely a noble aim—to free us from the tyranny of intellectual anarchy. We all tacitly acknowledge that there is a hierarchy of intellectual pleasures, and it is M. Nisard’s purpose to call upon these individual pre-

ferences and aversions to come forward and justify themselves or stand condemned in the light of human reason. The historian of French literature has somewhere contrasted two remarkable figures of the Renaissance and Reformation—Montaigne and Calvin; Montaigne, a representative of the spirit of curiosity then abroad, and, notwithstanding his sceptical tendency, a lover of the truth; Calvin, a representative of theological system and rigour, a wielder of the logic of the abstract idea. We may describe Sainte-Beuve as a nineteenth-century descendant of Montaigne, with the accumulated erudition and the heightened sensibility of this latter time. M. Nisard carries into the province of literature something of Calvin's spirit of system, and we can hardly help admiring the fine intolerance of his orthodoxy as he condemns some heretic who disbelieves or doubts the authority of the great classical age of French letters. He would have criticism proceed rather by exclusions than by admissions, and has no patience with the 'facile and accommodating admirations of eclecticism;' he sees a sign of decadence in the ambition peculiar to our time which pretends to reunite in French literary art all the excellences and all the liberties of foreign literatures<sup>1</sup>. It is easy to indulge a diluted sympathy with everything; it is harder, but better, to distinguish the evil from the good, and to stand an armed champion of reason, order, beauty.

The genius of France, according to M. Nisard, is more inclined to discipline than to liberty; it regards the former—discipline—as the more fruitful in admirable results. An eminent writer in France is 'the

<sup>1</sup> *Hist. de la Littérature Française*, i. 13.

organ of all, rather than a privileged person who has thoughts belonging to himself alone, which he imposes on his fellows by an extraordinary right.' And hence, French literature, avoiding, when at its best, all individual caprice, all license of sensibility or imagination, is, as it were, the living realization of the government of the human faculties by reason. It is not so with the literature of the North; there the equilibrium of the faculties is disturbed, there liberty often prevails over discipline, there reverie or subtlety often usurps the place of reason. It is not so with the literatures of the South; there passion often prevails over reason, and the language of metaphor takes the place of the language of intelligence. But human reason did not come to maturity in France until the great age of classical literature, the age of Molière and Racine and La Fontaine, of Bossuet and Pascal, of La Bruyère and La Rochefoucauld. Then first in French literature humanity became completely conscious of itself, then, first, man was conceived as man in all the plenitude of his powers, then, first, human nature was adequately represented and rendered in literary art. And since that great age, if we strike the balance of gains and losses we shall find perhaps that the gains are exceeded by the losses. In the eighteenth century, which claimed to be the age of reason, the *saeculum rationalisticum*, the authority of reason in fact declined, and the spirit of Utopia, the chimerical spirit, exemplified by Rousseau, obtained the mastery. As to our own century, the magisterial words of condemnation uttered by M. Nisard half a century ago have perhaps gained in significance since the day on which his *Latin Poets of the Decadence* appeared. We have, as he says,



analyses infinitely subtle of certain moral situations ; delicate investigations of the states, often morbid states, of individual souls ; but where is the great art that deals with man as man in those larger powers and passions which vary little from generation to generation ? The difficulties of our social problems, the mass of talents for which, in our old world, scope can hardly be found, the consequent restlessness of spirit, the lack of religious discipline, the malady of doubt, the political passions of the time, a boundless freedom of desires, ambitions, sensations, and almost no proportion between power and desire, a refinement of intelligence which multiplies our wants—these were enumerated long since by M. Nisard as causes unfavourable to the growth of a great nineteenth-century literature ; and though the word *pessimism* was not in fashion in 1834, the anxious physician of his age foresaw the modern malady.

No wonder that such a critic was not popular with young and ardent spirits in the first fervours of the Romantic movement. But M. Nisard's work, as I have said, remains, and partly by virtue of the fact that he maintained the great tradition of French letters. In the literature of the age of Louis XIV, where M. Taine sees only or chiefly the literature of a court and courtiers, he saw the genius of humanity embodied and expressed by the special genius of the French nation. His view was determined by a deeper and a truer insight than that of M. Taine or of the romantic critics of an earlier date. The revolt of the Romantic school itself testifies to the strength in France of the classical tradition, and no critic of French literature can be a sure guide who does not recognize

the force and value of that tradition. We, who have had no one age supremely great, who have had the double tradition of the age of Queen Elizabeth and the age of Queen Anne, this embodying the truths of discipline and that the truths of liberty, can find in our literary history no one stream of tendency 'strong without rage, without o'erflowing, full,' at all corresponding to that derived in French literary history from the age of Louis XIV. We may feel sure that however the fashions of literature may change, the best mind of France must always, from time to time, make a return upon the wonderful group of writers, poets, thinkers, orators, epigrammatists, of the seventeenth century, and find in them undying masters of thought, of art, of literary style. And this is what the idealist school of critics, represented by M. Nisard, have rightly understood, and what the historical school, represented by M. Taine, has failed to perceive. At the present moment we may rejoice to see so eminent a critic as M. Brunetière taking vigorous part in the much-needed return upon the masters of the great tradition. He comes to them in no servile spirit to pay blind homage. Without accepting the ingenious paradox that every classic was in his own day a romantic, he perceives that these revered masters were in fact innovators, and encountered no little opposition from their contemporaries; they enlarged the bounds of art; and one who now dares to enlarge the bounds and break the barriers may be in the truest sense the disciple of Racine and of Molière. He perceives that the immortal part of such a writer as Racine is not his reproduction of the tone and manners of the Court. If Assuérus, in *Esther*, speaks in the mode of

Louis XIV, or Bérénice has a likeness to Marie de Mancini, this, as M. Brunetière says, is precisely what is feeble in Racine, this is the part of his work which has felt the effects of time, the part which is dead. The enduring part of his work is that which, if French of the seventeenth century is something more than French, the part which is human, and which in 1889 has precisely the same value that it had in the fortunate days when his masterpieces appeared for the first time on the stage<sup>1</sup>.

M. Brunetière, from whose review of a study of Racine by M. Deschanel I have cited some words, is, like Nisard, a critic who values principles, who himself possesses a literary doctrine, and who certainly does not squander his gift of admiration in various and facile sympathies. He has been described as a less amiable, less elegant, less delicate Nisard: and it is true that he has not Nisard's fineness of touch nor his concinnity of style; but M. Brunetière suffers less than Nisard from the rigour of system, and he is far more than Nisard in sympathy with contemporary ideas. He is a combative thinker, with a logic supported by solid erudition and reinforced by a resolute temper which does not shrink from the severities of controversy. Yet to a certain extent M. Brunetière has been a conciliator, attempting, as he has done, to distinguish what is true and fruitful in that movement of the present day which has claimed the title of 'naturalism,' and to ally this with the truths of that other art discredited or extolled under the name of 'idealistic.' He recognizes the power of envioning circumstances, the 'milieu,' in forming the characters of men and deter-

<sup>1</sup> F. Brunetière, *Histoire et Littérature*, ii. 9.

mining their action; but, as becomes one who does honour to the great art of the seventeenth century, the art of Corneille and Racine, he recognizes also that (to use Sainte-Beuve's hesitating phrase) there is in man that which they call freedom of will. 'Man hath all which nature hath, but more,' wrote Matthew Arnold in a memorable sonnet, in which perhaps he had that far more admirable poem of Goethe, *Das Göttliche*, in his mind:—

‘ Man, and man only,  
Achieves the impossible,  
He can distinguish,  
Elect and direct.’

In an article on M. Paul Bourget's remarkable novel *Le Disciple*, in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* of July 1, M. Brunetière, in the interest of art and of sound criticism no less than in the interest of morality and social life, sets himself to oppose what he terms the great error of the last hundred years, the sophism which reduces man to a part of nature. In art, in science, in morals, argues M. Brunetière, man is human in proportion as he separates himself from nature.

‘ It is *natural*,’ he writes, ‘ that the law of the stronger and the more skilful should prevail in the animal world; but this, precisely, is not *human*. . . . To live in the present, as if it had no existence, as if it were merely the continuation of the past and the preparation for the future—this is *human*, and there is nothing less *natural*. By justice and by pity to compensate for the inequalities which nature, imperfectly subdued, still allows to subsist among men—this is *human*, and there is nothing less *natural*. Far from loosening, to draw closer the ties of marriage and the family, without which society can no more progress than life can organize itself without a cell—this is *human*, and there is nothing less *natural*. Without attempting to destroy the passions, to teach them moderation, and, if need be, to place them under restraint—this is *human*, and there is nothing less *natural*. And finally, on the ruins of the base and

superstitious worship of force, to establish, if we can, the sovereignty of justice—this is *human*, and this, above all, is an effort which is not *natural*.'

I have quoted this passage from M. Brunetière because, as we are all aware, there is a school of literary criticism, brought into existence by the same tendencies of the present time which have given birth to what M. Zola somewhat absurdly names 'the experimental novel,' a school of criticism, led by an eminent French thinker, which reduces to a minimum the independence and originating force of the artist, and is pleased to exhibit him in a group with his contemporaries as the natural and inevitable product of ancestry and ambient circumstances. Since the publication of M. Taine's *History of English Literature* some twenty-five years ago, all students of literature and art have been more or less under the spell of that triple charm—the race, the *milieu*, and the moment, and every critic has found it needful to get the magic formula by heart. A new dogmatism, which in the name of science holds all dogma in scorn, has set forth its *credo*; and the spirit of system, that passion for intellectual *ordonnance*, characteristic of the French mind, has once again manifested itself in a powerful manner. M. Taine's great work is one which at first overmasters the reader with its clear and broad design, its comprehensive logic, its scientific claims, its multitude of facts arranged under their proper rubrics; it seems for a little while to put a new organon for the study of literature into our hands; and the rest of our time, I fear, is spent in making ever larger and larger reservation. The truth is, as Scherer noticed, that professing to proceed by the way of induction, M. Taine

is constantly deductive in his method. 'He begins by giving us a formula, and then draws from that formula the consequences and conclusions which, as he believes, are included in it.' The works of this writer or of that are studied not for their own sakes, but in order that they may furnish proofs of the thesis of the scientific critic. 'His crowd of descriptions, his accumulation of details'—I quote the words, eminently just, of Scherer—'his piled-up phrases are so many arguments urged upon the reader. We perceive the dialectic even under the imagery. I never read M. Taine without thinking of those gigantic steam hammers, which strike with noisy and redoubled blows, which make a thousand sparks fly, and under whose incessant shock the steel is beaten out and shaped. Everything here gives us the idea of power, the sense of force; but we have to add that one is stunned by so much noise, and that, after all, a style which has the solidity and the brilliancy of metal has also sometimes its hardness and heaviness.'

Two debts we certainly owe to M. Taine, and we acknowledge them with gratitude; first, he has helped us to feel the close kinship between the literature of each epoch and the various other manifestations of the mind of the time; and secondly, he has helped to moderate the passion for pronouncing judgements of good and evil founded on the narrow aesthetics of the taste of our own day. We have all learnt from M. Taine the art of bringing significant facts from the details of social manners, government, laws, fashions of speech, even fashions of dress, into comparison with contemporaneous facts of literature. He has made it easier for us to ascertain, at least in its larger features, what is called the spirit of an age. And this is much.

But there are two things which as they express themselves in literature he has failed to enable us to comprehend—the individual genius of an artist, that unique power of seeing, feeling, imagining, what he and he alone possesses; and again, the universal mind of humanity, that which is not bounded by an epoch nor contained by a race, but which lives alike in the pillars of the Parthenon and in the vault of the Gothic cathedral, which equally inspires the noblest scenes of Sophocles and of Shakespeare, which makes beautiful the tale of Achilles' wrath and that of the fall of the Scottish Douglas. Of what is local and temporary in art M. Taine speaks with extraordinary energy. Of what is abiding and universal he has less to say. Each author whom he studies is presented to us as the creature of the circumstances of his time, or at the highest as a representative of his tribe and people. The critic does not possess that delicate tact which would enable him to discover the individuality of each writer; it suits his thesis rather to view the individual as one member of a group. Nor does he possess that higher philosophical power which would enable him to see in each great work of art the laws of the universal mind of man.

M. Taine has served us also, I have said, by moderating our zeal for a narrow kind of judicial criticism, which pronounces a work of art to be good or bad as it approaches or departs from some standard set up by the taste or fashion of our own day. He started indeed from a false position—that criticism was to attempt no more than to note the characteristics of the various works of literature and art, and to look for their causes. It was, he said, to be a sort of botany applied not to

plants, but to the works of men. Botany does not pronounce the rose superior to the lily, nor should criticism attempt to establish a hierarchy in art; enough, if it records characteristics and ascertains their causes. But it will be remembered that M. Taine quickly abandoned his false position. In his lectures on *The Ideal in Art* he showed himself as ready to absolve or condemn as any disciple of the old aesthetic, and as I remember putting it in a review of M. Taine's volume which appeared soon after its publication, he said in unmistakable language, 'Despise pre-Raphaelite art, it is ascetic,' 'Despise the English school of painting, it is literary;' 'Admire above all else Renaissance art; it shows you what painting ought to show, straight limbs, well-developed muscles, and a healthy skin.'

M. Taine, in fact, did not cease to be a judicial critic; but he endeavoured to base his judgements on principles of a different kind from those accepted by the older school of judicial critics. He endeavoured to find what we may call an objective standard of literary and artistic merit, one which should be independent of the variations of individual caprice and current habits of thought and feeling. A great work of art, he tells us, is one in which the artist first recognizes, in the object he would represent, the predominance of its central characteristic—the flesh-eating lust, for example, of the greater carnivora; and secondly, by a convergence of effects heightens in his representation the visible or felt predominance of that characteristic, so that with a great animal painter the lion becomes indeed—as a zoologist has described the creature—a jaw mounted on four feet. So also, in representing man, the artist



or author who exhibits the predominance of the master powers of our manhood ranks higher than he does who merely records a passing fashion, or even than he who interprets the mind of a single generation. A book which possesses an universal and immortal life, like the *Psalms*, the *Iliad*, the *Imitation*, the plays of Shakespeare, attains this deserved pre-eminence by virtue of its ideal representation of what is central and predominant in man. Thus M. Taine, no less than M. Nisard, attempts to establish a hierarchy of intellectual pleasures, and he has perhaps this advantage over M. Nisard that he does not identify the human reason with the genius of the French people, nor this again with its manifestation in the literature of the age of Louis XIV. If he does not reap the gains, he does not suffer from the narrowing influence of the French tradition of which we are sometimes sensible in M. Nisard, he does not yield to that noble pride or prejudice which once drew from Sainte-Beuve the impatient exclamation—'Toujours l'esprit français et sa glorification!'

M. Brunetière, in a thoughtful article on the *Literary Movement of the Nineteenth Century*, in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* of October 15, has justly distinguished M. Taine as the critic who has expressed most powerfully the tendencies of that movement which has carried literature forward into new ways since the Romantic movement has ceased to be a living force. The Romantic movement was essentially lyrical in spirit; it subordinated everything to personal sentiment, personal passion, often to personal fantasy and caprice; it cared little for the life of the world at large; it consisted of an endless series of confessions in prose or rhyme uttered by great souls and by little;

it perished because the limited matter of these confessions was speedily exhausted, and the study of outward things and of social life was found to be inexhaustibly rich in fruit. Hence the justification of that movement of our own day which has assumed the title of naturalism or realism, of which the error or misfortune has been that it has studied too exclusively and too persistently the baser side of life. M. Taine's critical writings have tended to reduce the importance of the individual, have operated together with the scientific tendencies of our time in antagonism to the lyrical, personal character of the Romantic school; they belong essentially to the same movement of mind which has found other expression in the plays of Dumas, the poems, severely impersonal, of Leconte de Lisle, the novels of Flaubert, and the works of the modern school of historians which stand in marked contrast with the lyrical narratives of Michelet and our English Carlyle. A play of Shakespeare's, a group of Victor Hugo's odes or elegies, is for M. Taine not so much the work of its individual author as the creation of the race, the *milieu*, and the moment—a document in the history and the psychology of a people. We perceive, as M. Brunetière has justly said, the close relation between his principles of criticism and the doctrine of the impersonality of art, a doctrine drawn out to its extreme logical consequences in some of the recently published letters of Flaubert.

Scientific criticism, however, in the hands of its latest exponent comes to restore to the individual leaders of literature some of their alienated rights. M. Hennequin, while expressing his high esteem for Taine, as the writer who has done more than any other of our

generation to advance the study of literature, was himself ambitious to remodel the method of Taine, to amend it in various respects, to widen its scope, and to set forth the revised method as a *Novum Organum* for the investigation of literature. He does not deny the influence of heredity, which Taine asserts so strongly, but the race, considered as the source of moral and intellectual characteristics, seems to him to be little better than a metaphysical figment. There is no pure, homogeneous race in existence, or at least none exists which has become a nation, none which has founded a civilized state, and produced a literature and art. Nor is it true, as M. Taine assumes, that the intellectual characteristics of a people persist unchanged from generation to generation. The action of heredity on individual character is in the highest degree variable and obscure; we may admit it as an hypothesis, but it is an unworkable hypothesis, which in the historical study of literature can only confuse, embarrass, and mislead our inquiry. In like manner, as to the *milieu*, the social environment, we may admit that its influence is real and even important; but can that influence, in which there is nothing fixed and constant, be made a subject of science? It is in the power of the artist to shield or withdraw himself from the influence of his environment, and to create a little *milieu* in harmony with his peculiar genius; or he may prove himself refractory and react against the social *milieu*. How else shall we account for the diversity, the antagonism of talents existing in one and the same historical period? Did not Pascal and Saint Simon come each to his full development at the same epoch and in the same country? Did not Aristophanes and Euripides?

Hume and Whitefield? Shelley and Scott? William Blake and David Wilkie? Mr. Herbert Spencer and Cardinal Newman? In truth, the influence of environment constantly diminishes as an art or a literature advances to maturity. Man has acquired modes of adapting circumstances to himself, and so of economizing the force of his individuality; in a highly civilized community every type of mind can find the local habitation and the social group which correspond with its peculiar wants and wishes. Nor indeed is the principle of life and growth altogether that of adaptation to surrounding circumstances; life is also 'a resistance and a segregation, or rather a defensive adaptation, antagonistic to the action of external forces,' and as the years advance the system of defence becomes more ingenious, more complicated, and more successful. Each of the great influences, the effects of which M. Taine attempts to ascertain, doubtless exists and is operative, but the action of each is occult and variable. If M. Taine's results have an appearance of precision, this arises from the art with which he manipulates his facts and disposes his arguments.

Such in substance is the criticism of the younger thinker on the method of his master. He recognizes no fixed relation between an author and his race or his environment. On the other hand, such a fixed relation can certainly be discovered between an author or artist and the group of his disciples or admirers. He is a centre of force drawing towards him those who spiritually resemble himself. Thus a great author, instead of being the creature of circumstances, in fact creates a moral environment, a world of thoughts and feelings, for all those who are attracted, and as we may

say enveloped, by his genius. The history of literature is the history of the successive states of thought and feeling proceeding from eminent minds and obtaining the mastery, often in the face of much contemporary opposition, over inferior minds of a like type. With much pomp of scientific terms—some of them possibly seeming more scientific because they are barbarous from a literary point of view—M. Hennequin brings us round to the obvious truth that a powerful writer, if he is in part formed by his age, reacts on his contemporaries and impresses his individuality upon them.

The central fact with respect to the contemporary movement remains, the fact dwelt on with much force by M. Brunetière, that literature has turned away from the lyrical, the personal, or, as they call it, the subjective, to an ardent study of the external world and the life of man in society. The lyrical, the personal, has doubtless a subordinate place in literary criticism, but the chief work of criticism is that of ascertaining, classifying, and interpreting the facts of literature. We may anticipate that criticism in the immediate future if less touched with emotion will be better informed and less wilful than it has been in the past. If it should be founded on exact knowledge, illuminated by just views, and inspired by the temper of equity we shall have some gains to set over against our losses. The subordination of self to the faithful setting forth of the entire truth of one's subject will be some compensation for the absence of the passion, the raptures, the despairs, the didactic enthusiasm of one great English critic; some compensation even for the quickening half-views and high-spirited, delightful wilfulness of another.

1889.



## PROSPER MÉRIMÉE

FOR one born in eighteen hundred and three much was recently become incredible that had at least warmed the imagination even of the sceptical eighteenth century. Napoleon, scaling the tomb of the Revolution, had foreclosed many a problem, extinguished many a hope, in the sphere of practice. And the mental parallel was drawn by Heine. In the mental world too a great outlook had lately been cut off. After Kant's criticism of the mind, its pretensions to pass beyond the limits of individual experience seemed as dead as those of old French royalty. And Kant did but furnish its innermost theoretic force to a more general criticism, which had withdrawn from every department of action, underlying principles once thought eternal. A time of disillusion followed. The typical personality of the day was Obermann, the very genius of *ennui*, a Frenchman disabused even of patriotism, who has hardly strength enough to die. More energetic souls, however, would recover themselves, and find some way of making the best of a changed world. Art: the passions, above all, the ecstasy and sorrow of love: a purely empirical

knowledge of nature and man : these still remained, at least for pastime, in a world of which it was no longer proposed to calculate the remoter issues :—art, passion, science, however, in a somewhat novel attitude towards the practical interests of life. The *désillusionné*, who had found in Kant's negations the last word concerning an unseen world, and is living, on the morrow of the Revolution, under a monarchy made out of hand, might seem cut off from certain ancient natural hopes, and will demand, from what is to interest him at all, something in the way of artificial stimulus. He has lost that sense of large proportion in things, that all-embracing prospect of life as a whole (from end to end of time and space, it had seemed), the utmost expanse of which was afforded from a cathedral tower of the Middle Age : by the church of the thirteenth century, that is to say, with its consequent aptitude for the co-ordination of human effort. Deprived of that exhilarating yet pacific outlook, imprisoned now in the narrow cell of its own subjective experience, the action of a powerful nature will be intense, but exclusive and peculiar. It will come to art, or science, to the experience of life itself, not as to portions of human nature's daily food, but as to something that must be, by the circumstances of the case, exceptional ; almost as men turn in despair to gambling or narcotics, and in a little while the narcotic, the game of chance or skill, is valued for its own sake. The vocation of the artist, of the student of life or books, will be realized with something—say ! of fanaticism, as an end in itself, unrelated, unassociated. The science he turns to will be a science of crudest fact ; the passion extravagant, a passionate love of passion, varied through all the exotic phases of



French fiction as inaugurated by Balzac; the art exaggerated, in matter or form, or both, as in Hugo or Baudelaire. The development of these conditions is the mental story of the nineteenth century, especially as exemplified in France.

In no century would Prosper Mérimée have been a theologian or metaphysician. But that sense of negation, of theoretic insecurity, was in the air, and conspiring with what was of like tendency in himself made of him a central type of disillusion. In him the passive *ennui* of Obermann became a satiric, aggressive, almost angry conviction of the littleness of the world around; it was as if man's fatal limitations constituted a kind of stupidity in him, what the French call *bêtise*. Gossiping friends, indeed, linked what was constitutional in him and in the age with an incident of his earliest years. Corrected for some childish fault, in passionate distress, he overhears a half-pitying laugh at his expense, and has determined, in a moment, never again to give credit—to be for ever on his guard, especially against his own instinctive movements. Quite unreserved, certainly, he never was again. Almost everywhere he could detect the hollow ring of fundamental nothingness under the apparent surface of things. Irony surely, habitual irony, would be the proper complement thereto, on his part. In his inflexible self-possession, you might even fancy him a mere man of the world, with a special aptitude for matters of fact. Though indifferent in politics, he rises to social, to political eminence; but all the while he is feeding all his scholarly curiosity, his imagination, the very eye, with the, to him ever delightful, relieving, reassuring spectacle, of those straightforward forces in human

nature, which are also matters of fact. There is the formula of Mérimée! the enthusiastic amateur of rude, crude, naked force in men and women wherever it could be found; himself carrying ever, as a mask, the conventional attire of the modern world—carrying it with an infinite, contemptuous grace, as if that, too, were an all-sufficient end in itself. With a natural gift for words, for expression, it will be his literary function to draw back the veil of time from the true greatness of old Roman character; the veil of modern habit from the primitive energy of the creatures of his fancy, as the *Lettres à une Inconnue* discovered to general gaze, after his death, a certain depth of passionate force which had surprised him in himself. And how forcible will be their outlines in an otherwise insignificant world! Fundamental belief gone, in almost all of us, at least some relics of it remain—queries, echoes, reactions, after-thoughts; and they help to make an atmosphere, a mental atmosphere, hazy perhaps, yet with many secrets of soothing light and shade, associating more definite objects to each other by a perspective pleasant to the inward eye against a hopefully receding background of remoter and ever remoter possibilities. Not so with Mérimée! For him the fundamental criticism has nothing more than it can do; and there are no half-lights. The last traces of hypothesis, of supposition, are evaporated. Sylla, the false Demetrius, Carmen, Colomba, that impassioned self within himself, have no atmosphere. Painfully distinct in outline, inevitable to sight, unrelieved, there they stand, like solitary mountain forms on some hard, perfectly transparent day. What Mérimée gets around his singularly sculpturesque creations is neither more nor less than empty space.

So disparate are his writings that at first sight you might fancy them only the random efforts of a man of pleasure or affairs, who, turning to this or that for the relief of a vacant hour, discovers to his surprise a workable literary gift, of whose scope, however, he is not precisely aware. His sixteen volumes nevertheless range themselves in three compact groups. There are his letters—those *Lettres à une Inconnue*, and his letters to the librarian Panizzi, revealing him in somewhat close contact with political intrigue. But in this age of novelists, it is as a writer of novels, and of fiction in the form of highly descriptive drama, that he will count for most:—*Colomba*, for instance, by its intellectual depth of motive, its firmly conceived structure, by the faultlessness of its execution, vindicating the function of the novel as no tawdry light literature, but in very deed a fine art. The *Chronique du Règne de Charles IX*, an unusually successful specimen of historical romance, links his imaginative work to the third group of Mérimée's writings, his historical essays. One resource of the disabused soul of our century, as we saw, would be the empirical study of facts, the empirical science of nature and man, surviving all dead metaphysical philosophies. Mérimée, perhaps, may have had in him the making of a master of such science, disinterested, patient, exact: scalpel in hand, we may fancy, he would have penetrated far. But quite certainly he had something of genius for the exact study of history, for the pursuit of exact truth, with a keenness of scent as if that alone existed, in some special area of historic fact, to be determined by his own peculiar mental preferences. Power here too again, —the crude power of men and women which mocks,

while it makes its use of, average human nature ; it was the magic function of history to put one in living contact with that. To weigh the purely physiognomic import of the memoir, of the pamphlet saved by chance, the letter, the anecdote, the very gossip by which one came face to face with energetic personalities : there lay the true business of the historic student, not in that pretended theoretic interpretation of events by their mechanic causes, with which he dupes others if not invariably himself. In the great hero of the *Social War*, in Sylla, studied, indeed, through his environment, but only so far as that was in dynamic contact with himself, you saw, without any manner of doubt, on one side, the solitary height of human genius ; on the other, though on the seemingly so heroic stage of antique Roman story, the wholly inexpressive level of the humanity of every day, the spectacle of man's eternal *bêtise*. Fascinated, like a veritable son of the old pagan Renaissance, by the grandeur, the concentration, the satiric hardness of ancient Roman character, it is to Russia nevertheless that he most readily turns—youthful Russia, whose native force, still unbelittled by our western civilization, seemed to have in it the promise of a more dignified civilisation to come. It was as if old Rome itself were here again ; as, occasionally, a new quarry is laid open of what was thought long since exhausted, ancient marble, *cipollino* or *verde antique*. Mérimée, indeed, was not the first to discern the fitness for imaginative service of the career of “the false Demetrius,” pretended son of Ivan the Terrible ; but he alone seeks its utmost force in a calm, matter-of-fact, carefully ascertained presentment of the naked events. Yes ! In the last years of the Valois, when its fierce

passions seemed to be bursting France to pieces, you might have seen, far away beyond the rude Polish dominion of which one of those Valois princes had become king, a display more effective still of exceptional courage and cunning, of horror in circumstance, of *bêtise*, of course, of *bêtise* and a slavish capacity of being duped, in average mankind: all that under a mask of solemn Muscovite court-ceremonial. And Mérimée's style, simple and unconcerned, but with the eye ever on its object, lends itself perfectly to such purpose—to an almost phlegmatic discovery of the facts, in all their crude natural colouring, as if he but held up to view, as a piece of evidence, some harshly dyed oriental carpet from the sumptuous floor of the Kremlin, on which blood had fallen.

A lover of ancient Rome, its great character and incident, Mérimée valued, as if it had been personal property of his, every extant relic of it in the art that had been most expressive of its genius—architecture. In that grandiose art of building, the most national, the most tenaciously rooted of all the arts in the stable conditions of life, there were historic documents hardly less clearly legible than the manuscript chronicle. By the mouth of those stately Romanesque churches, scattered in so many strongly characterised varieties over the soil of France, above all in the hot, half-pagan south, the people of empire still protested, as he understood, against what must seem a smaller race. The Gothic enthusiasm indeed was already born, and he shared it—felt intelligently the fascination of the Pointed Style, but only as a further transformation of old Roman structure; the round arch is for him still the great architectural form, *la forme noble*, because it was

to be seen in the monuments of antiquity. Romanesque, Gothic, the manner of the Renaissance, of Lewis the Fourteenth :—they were all, as in a written record, in the old abbey church of Saint-Savin, of which Mérimée was instructed to draw up a report. Again, it was as if to his concentrated attention through many months that deserted sanctuary of Benedict were the only thing on earth. Its beauties, its peculiarities, its odd military features, its faded mural paintings, are no merely picturesque matter for the pencil he could use so well, but the lively record of a human society. With what appetite ! with all the animation of Georges Sand's *Mauprat*, he tells the story of romantic violence having its way there, defiant of law, so late as the year 1611 ; of the family of robber nobles perched, as abbots *in commendam*, in those sacred places. That grey, pensive old church in the little valley of Poitou, was for a time like *Santa Maria del Fiore* to Michelangelo, the mistress of his affections—of a practical affection ; for the result of his elaborate report was the Government grant which saved the place from ruin. In architecture, certainly, he had what for that day was nothing less than intuition—an intuitive sense, above all, of its logic, of the *necessity* which draws into one all minor changes, as elements in a reasonable development. And his care for it, his curiosity about it, were symptomatic of his own genius. Structure, proportion, design, a sort of architectural coherency : that was the aim of his method in the art of literature, in that form of it, especially, which he will live by, in fiction.

As historian and archæologist, as a man of erudition turned artist, he is well seen in the *Chronique du Règne de Charles IX*, by which we pass naturally from

Mérimée's critical or scientific work to the products of his imagination. What economy in the use of a large antiquarian knowledge! what an instinct, amid a hundred details, for the detail that carries physiognomy in it, that really tells! And again what outline, what absolute clarity of outline! For the historian of that puzzling age which centres in the "Eve of Saint Bartholomew," outward events themselves seem obscured by the vagueness of motive of the actors in them. But Mérimée, disposing of them as an artist, not in love with half-lights, compels events and actors alike to the clearness he desired; takes his side without hesitation; and makes his hero a Huguenot of pure blood, allowing its charm, in that charming youth, even to Huguenot piety. And as for the incidents—however freely it may be undermined by historic doubt, all reaches a perfectly firm surface, at least for the eye of the reader. The *Chronicle of Charles the Ninth* is like a series of masterly drawings in illustration of a period—the period in which two other masters of French fiction have found their opportunity, mainly by the development of its actual historic characters. Those characters—Catherine de Medicis and the rest—Mérimée, with significant irony and self-assertion, sets aside, preferring to think of them as essentially commonplace. For him the interest lies in the creatures of his own will, who carry in them, however, so lightly! a learning equal to Balzac's, greater than that of Dumas. He knows with like completeness the mere fashions of the time—how courtier and soldier dressed themselves, and the large movements of the desperate game which fate or chance was playing with those pretty pieces. Comparing that favourite century of the French Renaissance with our

own, he notes a decadence of the more energetic passions in the interest of general tranquillity, and perhaps (only perhaps!) of general happiness. "Assassination," he observes, as if with regret, "is no longer a part of our manners." In fact, the duel, and the whole morality of the duel, which does but enforce a certain regularity on assassination, what has been well called *le sentiment du fer*, the sentiment of deadly steel, had then the disposition of refined existence. It was, indeed, very different, and *is*, in Mérimée's romance. In his gallant hero, Bernard de Mergy, all the promptings of the lad's virile goodness are in natural collusion with that *sentiment du fer*. Amid his ingenuous blushes, his prayers, and plentiful tears between-while, it is a part of his very sex. With his delightful, fresh-blown air, he is for ever tossing the sheath from the sword, but always as if into bright natural sunshine. A winsome, yet withal serious and even piteous figure, he conveys his pleasantness, in spite of its gloomy theme, into Mérimée's one quite cheerful book.

Cheerful, because, after all, the gloomy passions it presents are but the accidents of a particular age, and not like the mental conditions in which Mérimée was most apt to look for the spectacle of human power, allied to madness or disease in the individual. For him, at least, it was the office of fiction to carry one into a different if not a better world than that actually around us; and if the *Chronicle of Charles the Ninth* provided an escape from the tame circumstances of contemporary life into an impassioned past, *Colomba* is a measure of the resources for mental alteration which may be found even in the modern age. There was a corner of the French Empire, in



the manners of which assassination still had a large part.

“The beauty of Corsica,” says Mérimée, “is grave and sad. The aspect of the capital does but augment the impression caused by the solitude that surrounds it. There is no movement in the streets. You hear there none of the laughter, the singing, the loud talking, common in the towns of Italy. Sometimes, under the shadow of a tree on the promenade, a dozen armed peasants will be playing cards, or looking on at the game. The Corsican is naturally silent. Those who walk the pavement are all strangers: the islanders stand at their doors: every one seems to be on the watch, like a falcon on its nest. All around the gulf there is but an expanse of tanglework; beyond it, bleached mountains. Not a habitation! Only, here and there, on the heights about the town, certain white constructions detach themselves from the background of green. They are funeral chapels or family tombs.”

Crude in colour, sombre, taciturn, Corsica, as Mérimée here describes it, is like the national passion of the Corsican—that morbid personal pride, usurping the place even of grief for the dead, which centuries of traditional violence had concentrated into an all-absorbing passion for bloodshed, for bloody revenges, in collusion with the natural wildness, and the wild social condition of the island still unaffected even by the finer ethics of the duel. The supremacy of that passion is well indicated by the cry, put into the mouth of a young man in the presence of the corpse of his father deceased in the course of nature—a young man meant to be common-place. “Ah! Would thou hadst died *mala morte*—by violence! We might have avenged

thee!" In *Colomba*, Mérimée's best known creation, it is united to a singularly wholesome type of personal beauty, a natural grace of manner which is irresistible, a cunning intellect patiently diverting every circumstance to its design; and presents itself as a kind of genius, allied to fatal disease of mind. The interest of Mérimée's book is that it allows us to watch the action of this malignant power on *Colomba's* brother, *Orso della Rebbia*, as it discovers, rouses, concentrates to the leaping-point, in the somewhat weakly diffused nature of the youth, the dormant elements of a dark humour akin to her own. Two years after his father's murder, presumably at the instigation of his ancestral enemies, the young lieutenant is returning home in the company of two humorously conventional English people, himself now half Parisianised, with an immense natural cheerfulness, and willing to believe an account of the crime which relieves those hated *Barricini* of all complicity in its guilt. But from the first, *Colomba*, with "voice soft and musical", is at his side, gathering every accident and echo and circumstance, the very lightest circumstance, into the chain of necessity which draws him to the action every one at home expects of him as the head of his race. He is not unaware. Her very silence on the matter speaks so plainly. "You are forming me!" he admits. "Well! 'Hot shot, or cold steel!'—you see I have not forgotten my Corsican." More and more, as he goes on his way with her, he finds himself accessible to the damning thoughts he has so long combated. In horror, he tries to disperse them by the memory of his comrades in the regiment, the drawing-rooms of Paris, the English lady who has promised to be his bride, and

will shortly visit him in the humble *manoir* of his ancestors. From his first step among them the villagers of Pietranera, divided already into two rival camps, are watching him in suspense—Pietranera, perched among those deep forests where the stifled sense of violent death is everywhere. Colomba places in his hands the little chest which contains the father's shirt covered with great spots of blood. "Behold the lead that struck him!" and she laid on the shirt two rusted bullets. "Orso! you will avenge him!" She embraces him with a kind of madness, kisses wildly the bullets and the shirt, leaves him with the terrible relics already exerting their mystic power upon him. It is as if in the nineteenth century a girl, amid Christian habits, had gone back to that primitive old pagan version of the story of the Grail, which identifies it not with the Most Precious Blood, but only with the blood of a murdered relation crying for vengeance. Awake at last in his old chamber at Pietranera, the house of the Barricini at the other end of the square, with its rival tower and rudely carved escutcheons, stares him in the face. His ancestral enemy is there, an aged man now, but with two well-grown sons, like two stupid dumb animals, whose innocent blood will soon be on his so oddly lighted conscience. At times, his better hope seemed to lie in picking a quarrel and killing at least, in fair fight, one of these two stupid dumb animals with their rude ill-suppressed laughter one day, as they overhear Colomba's violent utterances at a funeral feast, for she is a renowned *improvisatrice*. "Your father is an old man," he finds himself saying, "I could crush with my hands. 'Tis for you I am destined, for you and your brother!" And if it is by course of nature

that the old man dies not long after the murder of these sons (self-provoked after all), dies a fugitive at Pisa, as it happens, by an odd accident, in the presence of Colomba, no violent death by Orso's own hand could have been more to her mind. In that last hard page of Mérimée's story, mere dramatic propriety itself for a moment seems to plead for the forgiveness, which, from Joseph and his brethren to the present day, as we know, has been as winning in story as in actual life. Such dramatic propriety, however, was by no means in Mérimée's way. "What I must have is the hand that fired the shot," she had sung, "the eye that guided it; aye! and the *mind* moreover—the mind, which had conceived the deed!" And now, it is in idiotic terror, a fugitive from Orso's vengeance, that the last of the Barricini is dying.

Exaggerated art! you think. But it was precisely such exaggerated art, intense, unrelieved, an art of fierce colours, that is needed by those who are seeking in art, as I said of Mérimée, a kind of artificial stimulus. And if his style is still impeccably correct, cold-blooded, impersonal, as impersonal as that of Scott himself, it does but conduce the better to his one exclusive aim. It is like the polish of the stiletto Colomba carried always under her mantle, or the beauty of the fire-arms, that beauty coming of nice adaptation to purpose, which she understood so well—a task characteristic also of Mérimée himself, a sort of fanatic joy in the perfect pistol-shot, at its height in the singular story he has translated from the Russian of Pouchkine. Those raw colours he preferred; Spanish, Oriental, African, perhaps, irritant certainly to cis-alpine eyes, he undoubtedly attained the colouring you

associate with sun-stroke, only possible under a sun in which dead things rot quickly.

Pity and terror, we know, go to the making of the essential tragic sense. In Mérimée, certainly, we have all its terror, but without the pity. Saint-Clair, the consent of his mistress barely attained at last, rushes madly on self-destruction, that he may die with the taste of his great love fresh on his lips. All the grotesque accidents of violent death he records with visual exactness, and no pains to relieve them; the ironic indifference, for instance, with which, on the scaffold or the battle-field, a man will seem to grin foolishly at the ugly rents through which his life has passed. Seldom or never has the mere pen of a writer taken us so close to the cannon's mouth as in the *Taking of the Redoubt*, while *Matteo Falcone*—twenty-five short pages—is perhaps the cruellest story in the world.

Colomba, that strange, fanatic being, who has a code of action, of self-respect, a conscience, all to herself, who with all her virginal charm only does not make you hate her, is, in truth, the type of a sort of humanity Mérimée found it pleasant to dream of—a humanity as alien as the animals, with whose moral affinities to man his imaginative work is often directly concerned. Were they so alien, after all? Were there not survivals of the old wild creatures in the gentlest, the politest of us? Stories that told of sudden freaks of gentle, polite natures, straight back, *not* into Paradise, were always welcome to men's fancies; and that could only be because they found a psychologic truth in them. With much success, with a credibility insured by his literary tact, Mérimée tried his own hand at such stories :

unfrocked the bear in the amorous young Lithuanian noble, the wolf in the revolting peasant of the Middle Age. There were survivals surely in himself, in that stealthy presentment of his favourite themes, in his own art. You seem to find your hand on a serpent, in reading him.

In such survivals, indeed, you see the operation of his favourite motive, the sense of wild power, under a sort of mask, or assumed habit, realised as the very genius of nature itself; and that interest, with some superstitions closely allied to it, the belief in the vampire, for instance, is evidenced especially in certain pretended Illyrian compositions—prose translations, the reader was to understand, of more or less ancient popular ballads; *La Guzla*, he called the volume, *The Lyre*, as we might say; only that the instrument of the Illyrian minstrel had but one string. Artistic deception, a trick of which there is something in the historic romance as such, in a book like his own *Chronicle of Charles the Ninth*, was always welcome to Mérimée; it was part of the machinery of his rooted habit of intellectual reserve. A master of irony also, in *Madame Lucrezia* he seems to wish to expose his own method cynically; to explain his art—how he takes you in—as a clever, confident conjuror might do. So properly were the readers of *La Guzla* taken in that he followed up his success in that line by the *Theatre of Clara Gazul*, purporting to be from a rare Spanish original, the work of a nun, who, under tame, conventual reading, had felt the touch of mundane, of physical passions; had become a dramatic poet, and herself a powerful actress. It may dawn on you in reading her that Mérimée was

a kind of Webster, but with the superficial mildness of our nineteenth century. At the bottom of the true drama there is ever, logically at least, the ballad: the ballad dealing in a kind of short-hand (or, say! in grand, simple, universal outlines) with those passions, crimes, mistakes, which have a kind of fatality in them, a kind of necessity to come to the surface of the human *mind*, if not to the surface of our *experience*, as in the case of some frankly supernatural incidents which Mérimée re-handled. Whether human love or hatred has had most to do in shaping the universal fancy that the dead come back, I cannot say. Certainly that old ballad literature has instances in plenty, in which the voice, the hand, the brief visit from the grave, is a natural response to the cry of the human creature. That ghosts should return, as they do so often in Mérimée's fiction, is but a sort of natural justice. Only, in Mérimée's prose ballads, in those admirable, short, ballad-like stories, where every word tells, of which he was a master, almost the inventor, they are a kind of half-material ghosts—a vampire tribe—and never come to do people good; congruously with the mental constitution of the writer, which, alike in fact and fiction, could hardly have horror enough—theme after theme. Mérimée himself emphasises this almost constant motive of his fiction when he adds to one of his volumes of short stories some letters on a matter of fact—a Spanish bull-fight, in which those old Romans, he regretted, might seem, decadently, to have survived. It is as if you saw it. In truth, Mérimée was the unconscious parent of much we may think of dubious significance in later French literature. It is as if there were nothing to tell of in this world

but various forms of hatred, and a love that is like lunacy; and the only other world, a world of maliciously active, hideous, dead bodies.

Mérimée, a literary artist, was not a man who used two words where one would do better, and he shines especially in those brief compositions which, like a minute intaglio, reveal at a glance his wonderful faculty of design and proportion in the treatment of his work, in which there is not a touch but counts. That is an art of which there are few examples in English; our somewhat diffuse, or slipshod, literary language hardly lending itself to the concentration of thought and expression, which are of the essence of such writing. It is otherwise in French, and if you wish to know what art of that kind can come to, read Mérimée's little romances; best of all, perhaps, *La Vénus d'Ille* and *Arsène Guillot*. The former is a modern version of the beautiful old story of the Ring given to Venus, given to her, in this case, by a somewhat sordid creature of the nineteenth century, whom she looks on with more than disdain. The strange outline of the Canigou, one of the most imposing outlying heights of the Pyrenees, down the mysterious slopes of which the traveller has made his way towards nightfall into the great plain of Toulouse, forms an impressive background, congruous with the many relics of irrepressible old paganism there, but in entire contrast to the *bourgeois* comfort of the place where his journey is to end, the abode of an aged antiquary, loud and bright just now with the celebration of a vulgar worldly marriage. In the midst of this well-being, prosaic in spite of the neighbourhood, in spite of the pretty old wedding customs, morsels of that local colour in which Mérimée



delights, the old pagan powers are supposed to reveal themselves once more (malignantly, of course) in the person of a magnificent bronze statue of Venus recently unearthed in the antiquary's garden. On her finger, by ill-luck, the coarse young bridegroom on the morning of his marriage places for a moment the bridal ring only too effectually (the bronze hand closes, like a wilful living one, upon it), and dies, you are to understand, in her angry metallic embraces on his marriage night. From the first, indeed, she had seemed bent on crushing out men's degenerate bodies and souls, though the supernatural horror of the tale is adroitly made credible by a certain vagueness in the events, which covers a quite natural account of the bridegroom's mysterious death.

The intellectual charm of literary work so thoroughly designed as Mérimée's depends in part on the sense as you read, hastily perhaps, perhaps in need of patience, that you are dealing with a composition, the full secret of which is only to be attained in the last paragraph, that with the last word in mind you will retrace your steps, more than once (it may be) noting then the minuter structure, also the natural or wrought flowers by the way. Nowhere is such method better illustrated than by another of Mérimée's quintessential pieces, *Arsène Guillot*, and here for once with a conclusion ethically acceptable also. Mérimée loved surprises in human nature, but it is not often that he surprises us by tenderness or generosity of character, as another master of French fiction, M. Octave Feuillet, is apt to do; and the simple pathos of *Arsène Guillot* gives it a unique place in Mérimée's writings. It may be said, indeed, that only an essentially pitiful nature could have

told the exquisitely cruel story of Matteo Falcone precisely as Mérimée has told it; and those who knew him testify abundantly to his own capacity for generous friendship. He was no more wanting than others in those natural sympathies (sending tears to the eyes at the sight of suffering age or childhood) which happily are no extraordinary component in men's natures. It was, perhaps, no fitting return for a friendship of over thirty years to publish posthumously those *Lettres à une Inconnue*, which reveal that reserved, sensitive, self-centred nature, a little pusillanimously in the power, at the disposition of another. For just there lies the interest, the psychological interest, of those letters. An amateur of power, of the spectacle of power and force, followed minutely but without sensibility on his part, with a kind of cynic pride rather for the mainspring of his method, both of thought and expression, you find him here taken by surprise at last, and somewhat humbled, by an unsuspected force of affection in himself. His correspondent, unknown but for these letters except just by name, figures in them as, in truth, a being only too much like himself, seen from one side; reflects his taciturnity, his touchiness, his incredulity except for self-torment. Agitated, dissatisfied, he is wrestling in her with himself, his own difficult qualities. He demands from her a freedom, a frankness, he would have been the last to grant. It is by first thoughts, of course, that what is forcible and effective in human nature, the force, therefore, of carnal love, discovers itself; and for her first thoughts Mérimée is always pleading, but always complaining that he gets only her second thoughts; the thoughts, that is, of a reserved, self-limiting nature, well under the yoke of convention,

like his own. Strange conjunction ! At the beginning of the correspondence he seems to have been seeking only a fine intellectual companionship ; the lady, perhaps, looking for something warmer. Towards such companionship that likeness to himself in her might have been helpful, but was not enough of a complement to his own nature to be anything but an obstruction in love ; and it is to that, little by little, that his humour turns. He—the *Megalopsychus*, as Aristotle defines him—acquires all the lover's humble habits : himself displays all the tricks of love, its casuistries, its exigency, its superstitions, aye ! even its vulgarities ; involves with the significance of his own genius the mere hazards and inconsequence of a perhaps average nature ; but too late in the day—the years. After the attractions and repulsions of half a lifetime, they are but friends, and might forget to be that, but for his death, clearly presaged in his last weak, touching letter, just two hours before. There, too, had been the blind and naked force of nature and circumstance, surprising him in the uncontrollable movements of his own so carefully guarded heart.

The intimacy, the effusion, the so freely exposed personality of those letters does but emphasise the fact that *impersonality* was, in literary art, Mérimée's central aim. Personality *versus* impersonality in art :—how much or how little of one's self one may put into one's work : whether anything at all of it : whether one *can* put there anything else :—is clearly a far-reaching and complex question. Serviceable as the basis of a precautionary maxim towards the conduct of our work, self-effacement, or impersonality, in literary or artistic creation, is, perhaps, after all, as little pos-

sible as a strict realism. "It has always been my rule to put nothing of myself into my works," says another great master of French prose, Gustave Flaubert; but, luckily as we may think, he often failed in thus effacing himself, as he too was aware. "It has always been my rule to put nothing of myself into my works" (to be *disinterested* in his literary creations, so to speak), "yet I have put much of myself into them": and where he failed Mérimée succeeded. There they stand—Carmen, Colomba, the "False" Demetrius—as detached from him as from each other, with no more filial likeness to their maker than if they were the work of another person. And to his method of conception, Mérimée's much-praised literary style, his method of expression, is strictly conformable—impersonal in its beauty, the perfection of nobody's style—thus vindicating anew by its very impersonality that much worn, but not untrue saying, that the style is the man:—a man, impassible, unfamiliar, impeccable, veiling a deep sense of what is forcible, nay, terrible, in things, under the sort of personal pride that makes a man a nice observer of all that is most conventional. Essentially unlike other people, he is always fastidiously in the fashion—an expert in all the little, half-contemptuous elegances of which it is capable. Mérimée's superb self-effacement, his impersonality, is itself but an effective personal trait; and, transferred to art, becomes a markedly peculiar quality of literary beauty. For, in truth, this creature of disillusion who had no care for half-lights, and, like his creations, had no atmosphere about him, gifted as he was with pure *mind*, with the quality which secures flawless literary structure, had, on the other hand, nothing of what we call *soul* in literature:—

hence, also, that singular harshness in his ideal, as if, in theological language, he were incapable of grace. He has none of those subjectivities, colourings, peculiarities of mental refraction, which necessitate *varieties* of style—could we spare such?—and render the perfections of it no merely negative qualities. There are masters of French prose whose art has begun where the art of Mérimée leaves off.

1890.



## LEOPARDI

IT is, I believe, not only plausible but correct to describe Leopardi by two phrases in the superlative degree of comparison: he is the *most* unhappy among men of literary genius; and he is the *most* finished master of style in Italian letters since the date of Petrarca. If these statements are even approximately true, he must be a very interesting personage to study in both relations. Certainly, in the brief time at our disposal this evening, nothing like justice can be done to him in either regard; I shall endeavour to present the facts as comprehensively and as clearly as I can, and must trust to your indulgence if, at the conclusion of my discourse, you find—what I myself know—that much of what required to be indicated or developed is left unsaid.

The Conte Giacomo Leopardi—or, to give his long name in full, Giacomo Aldegardo Francesco Salesio Saverio Pietro—was born on June 29, 1798, at the height of the turmoils in Italy consequent on the French Revolution; the more important part of

his literary activity began in 1818, when everything connected with France and with Napoleon I had vanished from the Italian soil, the old reigning families were reinstated, and the dead weight of Austria lay heavy upon the whole peninsula; and he died in 1837, at the age of very nearly thirty-nine, when the series of great events which have resulted in the national revival and unity of Italy remained still a score or so of years distant, and were not so much as surmised to be contingently probable, still less impending. The birthplace of Leopardi was the small town of Recanati in the March of Ancona, belonging to the then Papal States. Recanati stands conspicuous upon a tall hill, not far from the sea coast, between Macerata and the famous shrine of the Holy House of Loreto: the set of sun darkens the distant Apennines. Recanati is a place of no great note; not to us alone on the present occasion, but to Italy also and to the world, its chief distinction is that it gave birth to Giacomo Leopardi. The town and its immediate vicinity have, however, at least one other point of pre-eminence, to which our poet has borne very emphatic testimony, namely, that the Italian language is spoken there with singular purity and propriety. In this respect Recanati is an oasis in the desert, for all around the contrary condition prevails in a marked degree. Of the old-world isolation of this town one may obtain some idea from the statement, made by Leopardi in a letter dated 1819, that were a book to be ordered from Milan, it might take from four to twelve months in arriving.

Leopardi came of an ancient and patrician stock, which, towards the time of his birth and during his too



brief life, was greatly embarrassed. His father, the Conte Monaldo Leopardi (or Leopardi-Confallonieri), who attained his majority shortly before the date when Giacomo, his eldest child, was born, had inherited a considerable fortune. He appears to have been a man of strict virtue, and, according to his lights, even of exemplary character; but, in one way or another—perhaps through mere generosity, or perhaps through want of practical insight and business faculty—he dissipated his patrimony so deplorably that the law had to be invoked against him, and he was interdicted in 1803 from controlling his own money affairs, the charge of which was transferred to his wife. One form of expense in which he largely indulged was the collection of a copious and valuable library, which, with the munificence of a true scholar, he placed at the disposal of all his fellow citizens; but, from the account which Giacomo Leopardi has given us of the Recanatense, their temper, likings and habits, it may be inferred that they left the library strictly alone, and never invaded its sacred and unrequited precincts. Here therefore the Conte Monaldo shut himself up, as a man not only unadapted for commerce with the large outer world, but even pronounced incapable of managing his own affairs. His character as a family man has been painted in very diverse colours, and at one time he used to be the theme of much obloquy as harsh and oppressive to his illustrious son, and worse than indifferent to his interests and aspirations. The lapse of time and the course of investigation have enabled us to form a truer and gentler judgement of Monaldo. He was in fact a very affectionate father, and watched over his family of four sons and a

daughter with the most anxious solicitude, so far as his peculiar position allowed. But he belonged to the narrowest and most hidebound school of thought in politics and religion, abhorring all new lights, and seeing the mystery of iniquity in whatsoever savoured of modern progress or expansion of ideas. Every petty prince or established abuse of the old régime, every mouldering authority which could plead a tradition or a pedigree, seemed to him a bulwark of order beyond cavil or challenge. Hence it necessarily followed that to stunt the active and inquiring mind of his son whenever it tended towards an independent flight was, in the view of Conte Monaldo, an act at once of absolute duty and of the most judicious kindness. Monaldo, it should be added, was himself an author; and writings of his, in verse as well as prose, can be unearthed, showing excellent feeling according to his restricted point of view, and some of them, if not striking, certainly far from contemptible, in point of composition.

The mother of Giacomo was the Marchesina Adelaide Antici, a fit match for Monaldo in birth and station, and in severe principle. Her daughter Paolina, even when chafing the most uneasily under her rigid rules, has spoken of her as a standard of Christian perfection. She seems to have been as capable as her spouse was incapable of managing money affairs; he and all the rest of the household were kept down within strict limits of expenditure, and, if money was wanted and the father was applied to as the more squeezable party, and by far the more good-natured, he had to plead inability and refer the applicant to the mother. The crown and proof of her able handling of

affairs was that, just about the time when Giacomo Leopardi died, after his lifetime of narrow means, careful thrift, and galling dependence, the Contessa had retrieved the fortunes of the family, which once again became opulent and prosperous. I will only here add that the father survived the poet-son by ten years, and the mother survived him by twenty.

Such then—let me very briefly recapitulate it—was the environment into which our poet was born. A troublous and revolutionary state of public affairs, holding out high promises which collapsed into the antiquated abuses; a stagnant small town, the hotbed of small gossip, small amorous and other intrigues, small malignities, unleavened (so at least Giacomo has repeatedly said) by a particle of intellectual fervour; a noble but impoverished race; well-principled and well-meaning but narrow-minded parents—the father studious and affectionate, a cipher in his own house, the mother managing, economizing, and hard; three younger brothers and a sister, all of whom—but more especially the elder brother Carlo and the sister Paolina—were warmly beloved by Giacomo and warmly returned his love. As to the relations between our poet and his father it may be well to observe that a multitude of letters addressed by the former to the latter are in print. The form of address is invariably in the third person—the ceremonial or complimentary *ella* and *lei* of the Italians. They are most profuse in professions of affection, as well as respect and deference; this has sometimes been spoken of as insincere, but, in my own opinion, without any sufficient reason. It is certainly true, however, that Giacomo suffered acutely under the tight restrictions, personal

and intellectual, which hemmed him round under the paternal (one might rather say the maternal) roof; and in one letter to a friend—written in a mood of great mortification, for he had just then been baulked in an attempt to abscond and see a little of the outer world—he charged his father with systematic dissimulation. This must count for what it is worth.

I must now proceed to give some account of Leopardi's career—an equally sad and uneventful one; and I shall for the present relate the external facts, with as little reference as possible to his literary work, which will be detailed afterwards. Up to the age of fourteen he was tutored by two ecclesiastics; beyond that age he received no education whatever, except what he gave himself by incessant and inexorable study in his father's library—the father also doing his very best to encourage and direct him. He spent his days over grammars and dictionaries; learning Latin with but little aid, and Greek and Hebrew and the principal modern languages with none; French, Spanish, and English are specified—not German, though I presume that this also was not wholly neglected. He became thus a consummate scholar in Greek, both of the best period and of the decline, deeply imbued with the antique conception of life, and of literary form and style. Indeed, he has left it on record that Greek, far rather than Latin or Italian models, is the true guide to perfection of style for an Italian. It was not till 1822, when Giacomo was about twenty-four years of age, and was already celebrated as a poet—his two odes, *All' Italia* and *Sopra il Monumento di Dante che si preparava in Firenze*, having been written in 1818 and published in 1819—that his father at length

authorized him to leave Recanati, and to go to Rome. Here he was cheered by the zealous encouragement of the learned Germans Niebuhr and Bunsen; but his interest in the monuments of the Eternal City was soon exhausted, and he found scarcely any satisfaction in Roman lettered society, complaining that it was solely concerned with archaeological pedantry, to the grievous neglect of pure literature. He would have liked to obtain some employment from the Government; but his sceptical opinions—formed at an early age, although not until after he had written various things in a contrary sense—prevented his taking holy orders, the only avenue to office under the papal rule. He returned poor and dispirited to Recanati, and remained there for three years in great dejection. In 1825 he undertook to edit Cicero and Petrarca for the Milanese publisher Stella, and he resided in Bologna, enjoying the friendship of the Count of Malvezzi (who, however, seems to have grown lukewarm after a while), and of the Tommasini and Maestri families, distinguished in learned professions. His letters to the ladies of these two families glow with the most cordial friendship. The same may be said of his prolonged correspondence with the eminent author Pietro Giordani of Piacenza, who had discovered his genius, and had visited him in 1818 at Recanati; and again of his letters to the Avvocato Brighenti of Bologna. If a tithe of the expressions in these various letters is to be taken as genuine—nor do I question that substantially it is so—Leopardi must have been most eminently susceptible of the sentiment, or indeed the passion, of friendship; warmer protestations, a more moving impulse of the affections, are hardly to

be found anywhere. Nor were Giordani and the others at all behindhand in reciprocation. Leopardi also visited Florence, and Pisa, which he found more suitable than Florence to his health; and more than once he returned to Recanati. The small income which he derived from his literary work for the publisher Stella ceased towards the middle of 1828. His last sojourn in his native place—and this soon became a most unwilling sojourn—ended in May, 1830; he then went back to the Tuscan capital, becoming intimate with the literary leaders, Giambattista Niccolini, Gino Capponi, and Frullani; Florence was succeeded by Rome, and finally by Naples. In Florence he had had an unhappy attachment to a lady whom in his verse he names *Aspasia*. This attachment, like his other love affairs, of which some three or four are rather vaguely traceable, appears to have been of the purest kind; but Leopardi considered after a time that he had been trifled with, and he has left in verse a vivid record of his wounded self-respect. Who *Aspasia* may have been is a subject of some dispute. Some writers erroneously suppose that she was the Princess Charlotte Bonaparte, then a widow; one Leopardian editor, Mestica, says on the contrary that she was a married lady, still living in 1886. Certain it is at any rate that Leopardi knew the princess, and to some extent admired her, though he did not consider her beautiful. This lady was a daughter of Joseph Bonaparte, the ex-king of Naples and of Spain; and she had married the Prince Napoleon, who was the elder son of Louis Bonaparte, ex-king of Holland, and was therefore the elder brother of that Louis Napoleon whom most of us remember too well as the Emperor

Napoleon III. The Prince Napoleon died young, of hardships encountered in an abortive attempt at Italian insurrection. The Princess Charlotte cannot have been Aspasia; for Leopardi speaks of the infants (*bambini*) of Aspasia, whereas the princess was childless. She inspired, about that very date, a hopeless passion in a very distinguished French painter, Léopold Robert, who committed suicide in consequence; we need not duplicate her responsibility by assuming that she in any way played fast and loose with the greatest Italian poet of recent times.

We have now reached the last stage of Leopardi's gloomy monotony of life. A young Neapolitan of some literary position, named Antonio Ranieri, who had met him in 1827, re-encountered him in Florence in 1830. Ranieri admired most intensely the poetical and literary eminence of Leopardi, and in this respect he did no more than many other Italians: but he went beyond them in a very important practical relation—he shared his purse with the poet, and, instead of allowing him to lapse once again into the dreaded obscurity and lassitude of Recanati, he persuaded him to journey southwards, and try what the enchantments of Naples might do for his health and spirits. To Naples therefore Leopardi, along with Ranieri, proceeded in October, 1833: the two young men housed together, and they were joined by Ranieri's sister—named, like Leopardi's own sister, Paolina—who devoted herself to tending and solacing the poet with an abnegation worthy of any mediaeval saint, or any modern sister of charity. They lived generally at Capodimonte, but at certain periods of the year adjourned to a little villa at Torre del Greco on the slopes of Vesuvius, amid scenery not easily sur-

passed in Europe. In 1836 the cholera was raging in Italy. It was one of the singular contradictions of character in Leopardi that, although in constant ill-health, and professing, no doubt with a good deal of sincerity, a longing for death, he exhibited a lively alarm at cholera; so in August he returned from Naples to Vesuvius, and remained there till the ensuing February, getting gradually worse and worse. Towards this time he was about to bring out a new edition of his works in four volumes—two of these were already printed: the obscurantist Government of the Neapolitan kingdom confiscated the two printed volumes, and prohibited the issue of the other two. Leopardi was on the eve of going back to the Vesuvian villa, when dropsy at the heart put a period to his sufferings and his life on June 14, 1837. The physician, Dr. Mannella, sent for a priest as the end was approaching, but, before the churchman's arrival, Leopardi was no more. One of his last utterances was, like Goethe's, a longing for more light (*fammi veder la luce*); and then, to his devoted Ranieri, 'I see thee no more' (*io non ti veggio più*). It was only by active exertion and entreaty that Ranieri succeeded in saving the remains of his friend from the promiscuous burial which attended all persons who died in Naples during that visitation of the cholera; he procured for the poet a separate interment in the church of San Vitale near Pozzuoli, marked by a suitable inscription, which was traced by the loving and admiring hand of Giordani.

I have just said that Leopardi was 'in constant ill-health': this is but a very faint term for indicating his truly deplorable physique. The catalogue of his tribulations is indeed an appalling one. Such it would



be for anybody : but, when we reflect upon the excessive sensitiveness of the poetical temperament, and upon the yearning of a scholar for a fair chance of prosecuting his studies, we shall see that to a man like Leopardi the conditions were peculiarly desperate. He must apparently have been born sickly and over-nervous. Of this, however, we hear nothing until, at the age of eighteen or thereabouts, he is represented to us as totally ruined in constitution through incessant, unmitigated over-study. His eyesight was so weakened that he was frequently unable to read or write for months together ; in the last seven years of his life he could hardly read, and he wrote not at all, unless it were some three or four verses per day, but simply dictated. His hearing also became very defective. His bones were permanently softened and wasted ; his blood was pale and slow ; he suffered from dyspepsia and pulmonary and kidney disease, leading on to dropsy. *Sono un tronco che sente e pena* is his own expression in the year 1824. And in 1828, ‘ I am unable to fix my mind upon any serious thought for a single minute, without feeling an internal convulsion, without a disturbance in the stomach, bitterness in the mouth, and the like.’ No change of diet, no alternation from walking to resting, would serve his turn. Doctors told him that the essential evil was an extraordinary intestinal delicacy, combined with a corresponding affection of the nerves. Heat and cold were equally noxious to him : the winter shattered him, and he could not approach a fire. During one cold season in Bologna he had to plunge himself into a sack of feathers up to the armpits, and in this plight he studied and received visitors. ‘ A double and deforming curvature ’ (as Ranieri ex-

presses it) came on, beginning when he was only seventeen years old : in fact, Leopardi became a hunchback, and was termed by his townsmen in Recanati, more expressively than politely, *il Gobbo dei Leopardi*. In the winter of 1831 a horrid phthiriasis assailed him, of which Ranieri has given some pitiably details. It is not to be supposed indeed that he was always *equally* ill: at intervals he improved, and acknowledged it (unlike some other invalids) freely enough: but there was always an early relapse in store for the tormented body and the tortured mind. He had got so used to suffering that at last, contrary to his earlier impressions, he even came to suppose that he might be destined to a long life: this idea was to him the reverse of consoling, and he was rapidly undeceived. One must add that Leopardi was anything but a reasonable or cautious invalid. He was so far obedient to his doctors that, if they recommended meat or what not for his diet, he would take to that sort of food with indiscriminate zeal; but, spite of severe warnings, he persisted in indulging in sweets and ices. He turned night into day, and would be wanting a solid meal in Naples or Torre del Greco when poor Paolina Ranieri and her servants were needing to get to bed. It may well be that by this time he had given up as hopeless any attempt to re-establish his health by regimen, and therefore humoured his own capricious taste, in whatever direction it might point.

In person Leopardi was of middling height, bowed and thin. His head was large, his complexion pallid; the eyes blue and languid, the features delicate, with a prominent aquiline nose, a small chin, a small and thin mouth and a large expansive forehead—the whole

type of face not greatly unlike that of Mr. Algernon Swinburne in our own days. Ranieri credits him with 'an unspeakable and almost heavenly smile.' His elocution was modest and rather weak.

I said at starting that Leopardi was 'the most unhappy among men of literary genius.' I by no means intend to imply that he suffered outward misfortunes greater than, or at all equalling, those which several of his compeers have had to endure; to go no farther than two of his own illustrious countrymen, the external misfortunes which tried the mettle of Dante and of Tasso in the furnace of affliction were beyond comparison greater than those which beset Leopardi. We have now skimmed the current of our poet's life, and we find that, by way of external misfortunes, he had nothing severer to show than a partly uncongenial home, unappreciative townfolk, narrow means, and (what I have not brought out in any detail) some disappointments in the attempt to obtain employment, or to develop on a large scale the vast resources of his intellect. Even these distresses were but partial; for his family were upright and to a large extent affectionate, and his literary reputation was, if limited in scope, very considerable in degree. But it is the man himself that was unhappy—abnormally and almost uniquely unhappy. His miserable ill-health scourged him from pillar to post, deformed his person, made him an object of derisive compassion, hampered and stunted his power of work. But physical disability and suffering served only as the ante-room to settled and profound mental gloom. Leopardi meditated upon the nature and the destiny of man, and the character of men in society; and he found scarcely anything to record

except the blackness of desolation. A large proportion of his writings is devoted to enforcing the view that men and women in society are almost universally selfish, heartless, malicious, and bad; that the very idea of happiness in this world, for any human being, is a mere delusion; that there is not any other world to serve as a counterbalance or compensation to man for his unhappiness in this sphere of being; and that thus it is a universal misfortune for men to be born, and the only thing to which they can reasonably look forward with some sense of consolation, or some approach to satisfaction, is death. He allowed that the emotion of Hope, though irrational, affords some mitigation to the evils of humanity; and laid stress upon the noble aspirations of virtue, wisdom, glory, love, and patriotism, as magnificent incentives, although essentially illusions—phantasms which man does well to believe in until the paralyzing influence of Truth resolves them into nothingness. Happiness, according to Leopardi, would really consist in the sensation or emotion of pleasure, and freedom from pain; but these, especially after the season of early youth is past, are not to be attained, unless in transient and momentary glimpses: old age he regarded with peculiar repulsion. He was therefore as absolute a pessimist as any writer of whom literature bears record. It seems difficult to doubt that what compelled him into pessimism was, to a great extent, his own chronic suffering, and the lot of bitterness and self-abnegation which this imposed upon him in all his personal and social relations. He himself admitted as much, in a letter dated in 1820; but afterwards, in another letter of May, 1832, he indignantly repelled such an inference, and affirmed that his pessimism was

the genuine unbiassed deduction of his own reasoning upon the nature and condition of general humankind. It is curious that, of the two poets who, by frailty of constitution and deformity of frame, most nearly resembled each other, Alexander Pope and Giacomo Leopardi, one, the Englishman, professed the extreme of optimism, 'Whatever is, is best,' while the other proclaimed an equally complete pessimism, amounting practically to the assertion, 'That speck in the universe, called man, is born to nothing but disaster in life, and extinction in death—the puppet and the mockery of fate.'

I find it somewhat difficult to account for the extremely bad opinion which Leopardi formed of the characters of men—and women he regarded as even inferior to men. It is said that in his early years he assumed that people were, broadly speaking, all good; with the lapse of time he went to the opposite pole of opinion, and considered them to be all bad. In other words, he held that human nature was so frail and faulty as to leave the good elements in it, or the good specimens of the race, in a lamentable minority. As early as 1820 (when he was only twenty-two years of age, and had never left his native town) he could write as follows to a friend: 'The coldness and egoism of our time, the ambition, self-interest, perfidy, the insensibility of woman, whom I define as an animal without a heart, are things which scare me.' He does not however appear to have ever become misanthropic, rightly speaking; he was willing to be courteous and accommodating to all, and cordial to some. Neither is it shown that he had any cause to regard his professing friends as callous or treacherous, or to complain of the treatment which he received from ordinary

acquaintances, or (apart from his own townspeople) from general society. His letters to various friends—more especially Giordani, Brighenti, the ladies of the Tommasini and Maestri families, and his own sister and brother Carlo—continued to the end to be full, not only of earnest affection, but of strong asseverations of his belief in their gifts and virtues; and, if he thought so extremely well of a few persons with whom he was intimate, he might have been expected to infer that a vast number of other people, whom he had no opportunity of knowing, would prove to be similarly distinguished for character or faculty. This however was not his inference; he viewed human nature as a mean affair, human society as a hotbed of corruption, and human beings as condemnable in the lump. As to his pessimism in its more express shape—his opinion that no man is even moderately happy, and that all men, from the cradle to the grave, are an example of persistent tribulation, increasing as the years advance—it is not my business to enter into any discussion. Spite of Leopardi, a great multitude of people have believed, and will continue to believe, that their life consists of a balance between unhappiness and happiness. Some will go so far as to say that the happiness visibly predominates. To consider yourself, to feel yourself, principally or partially happy, must *pro tanto* amount to *being* principally or partially happy; and the lucky people who are conscious of that sensation will continue to entertain it, spite of the most positive assurances from the pondering or ponderous philosopher that, under the fixed conditions and adamantine bonds of human existence, they neither ought to be, nor are, nor can be, happy in any but the smallest degree. It

should be added that, according to Leopardi's view, not only mankind but all living creatures drag out a life of suffering, and had better never have been born; he made a possible exception for birds, whose structure, powers, and demeanour, impressed him as showing a vivacity of temperament unknown to other animals. Men, of course, he regarded as *more* unhappy than the others, owing to their vaster aspirations, their acuter perception of the facts, and their unshared faculty of reasoning upon them, and realizing to themselves the nothingness of hope and the emptiness of things.

We shall do well to listen to the very words of Leopardi on some of these points. I collect the passages here and there as they happen to come; but I confine myself to prose passages, being reluctant to turn his superb Italian verse into bald English prose: 'Be assured that, in order to be strongly moved by the beautiful and the great in works of imagination, it is needful to believe that there is in human life something great and beautiful in reality, and that the poetic of the world is not a mere fable. Which things a young man always does believe, even though he may know the contrary, until his own experience supplements the knowledge; but they are with difficulty believed after the sad discipline of practical testing, and all the more when experience is combined with the habit of speculating, and with scholarship.' 'The truest delights which our life admits of are those which arise from false imaginings; and children find everything even in nothing, men nothing in everything.' 'If in my writings I record some hard and sad truths, either to relieve my mind, or to find some consolation in a jeer, and not for any other object, I none the less fail not in

those same books to deplore, deprecate, and reprehend, the study of that miserable and frigid truth, the knowledge of which is the source either of apathy and sloth, or baseness of spirit, iniquity, and dishonour of act, and perversity of character. Whereas on the contrary I laud and exalt those opinions, false though they be, which generate acts and thoughts noble, strong, magnanimous, virtuous, and useful to the common or private good; those beautiful and felicitous imaginings, although vain, which confer a value on life; the natural illusions of the soul; and in fine the antique errors, far diverse from barbarian errors, which latter alone, and not the former, ought to have collapsed by dint of modern civilization and of philosophy.' 'If I obtain death, I will die as tranquil and as content as if I had never hoped or desired anything else in the world. This is the sole benefit that can reconcile me to destiny. If there were proposed to me on one side the fortune and the fame of Caesar or of Alexander, free from every blemish, on the other, to die to-day, and if I had to choose, I would say, "To die to-day," nor would I need any time for deciding.' 'Men of feeling are little understood when they speak of tedium' (*la noja*, or *ennui*, for which we have, I believe, and strange it seems, no right English word); 'and they make the herd sometimes marvel and sometimes laugh when they refer to this, and complain of it with that gravity of terms which is used in relation to the greatest and most inevitable evils of life. Tedium is in a certain sense the most sublime of human sentiments. Not that I believe that, from an examination of this sentiment, those consequences flow which many philosophers have undertaken to deduce; but none the



less the inability to be satisfied with any earthly thing, or (so to say) with the whole earth; the contemplation of the incalculable amplitude of space, the number and the marvellous dimensions of the worlds, and finding that all is little and puny to the capacity of one's own mind; imagining the number of worlds infinite, and the universe infinite, and feeling that our soul and desire would be yet greater than this universe; and always to accuse things of insufficiency and nullity, and to suffer default and void, and hence tedium, seems to me the highest symptom of greatness and nobility which human nature exhibits. Therefore tedium is but little known to men of no faculty, and very little or not at all to other animals.' My next extract comes from a letter addressed by Leopardi from Rome, in 1825, to his sister at Recanati. 'I am extremely sorry to learn that you are so harassed by your imagination. I say "by imagination," not as intending to imply that you are under a mistake, but I mean to indicate that thence come all our ills; because in fact there is not in the world any real good nor any real ill, humanly speaking, except bodily pain. I will not repeat to you that human happiness is a dream, that the world is not beautiful, is not even endurable, unless seen as you see it, that is, from afar; that pleasure is a name, not a thing; that virtue, sensibility, greatness of soul, are not only the sole solaces of our evils, but even the sole goods possible in this life; and that these goods, if one lives in the world and in society, are not enjoyed nor turned to profit, as young people fancy, but get entirely lost, the spirit remaining in a terrifying void. Hold as certain this maxim, recognized by all philosophers, which may

console you in many contingencies, namely, that the happiness and the unhappiness of every man (leaving out of count bodily pains) are absolutely equal to those of every other, in whatever grade or situation the one and the other may be found. And therefore, speaking with exactness, the poor man, the old, the weak, the ugly, the ignorant, enjoys as much and suffers as much as the rich, the young, the strong, the handsome, the learned; because every one, in his own condition, fashions his good and his evil, and the sum of the good and of the evil which each man can fashion for himself is equal to that which any one else can fashion.' The following comes from a letter to Giordani, written from Recanati in 1825. 'I study day and night so long as health permits. When health gives in, I pace up and down my room for a month or so, and then I return to study; and thus do I live. As to the quality of my studies, as I am changed from what I was, so are the studies changed. Anything which partakes of the emotional or eloquent wearies me, looks like a mockery and risible child's play. I no longer seek for anything except the truth—what I heretofore so much hated and detested. I find a pleasure in ever better discovering and fingering the misery of men and of things, and in shuddering self-possessed (*inorridire freddamente*) as I scrutinize this hapless and terrible arcanum of the life of the universe. I now well perceive that, when the passions are spent, study supplies no other source and foundation of pleasure except a vain curiosity, the satisfaction of which has nevertheless much attractive force; a fact which previously, so long as the last spark remained in my heart, I could not comprehend.'

These utterances of Leopardi's, fragmentary though they are, throw a good deal of light upon his character and mind. I think the main trait of his character was a great personal pride. By pride I do not mean anything allied to arrogance, presumption, or conceit; but a strenuous internal self-assertion, which urged him to rise superior to whatever, in natural conditions, or in the stress of society or of the affections, seemed to threaten to bend or break his will. Pride of this sort can even take on the guise of humility, and Leopardi confessed, with a frankness emulated by few writers, those terrible problems of the dominancy and inscrutability of nature, and the impotence of man bound with the iron chain of necessity—problems which sap the very root of human pride. He confessed them, but did so with a sense that this was a bolder, a manlier course than other people were prepared to adopt—that he could do what others flinched from doing, and that to do it was one more proof, not of a submissive, but of a resolute and unconquered soul. A distinguished French writer, Edouard Rod, makes some observations on Leopardi's mental attitude which appear to me both true and acute. 'Remark,' he says, 'that Leopardi never did anything to escape from the tyranny of his ideas; quite on the contrary, he cherished them. He found a sort of bitter and haughty satisfaction in proclaiming, in the name of all sentient beings, the woe of living.' And further on, 'His disposition for seeing the truth of things made him at once timid in temperament and stoical in mind.' In society Leopardi appears to have been uniformly quiet, unassuming, and free from any aristocratic prejudices; conscious indeed that he seldom or never met his peers, but not allowing this consciousness to transpire by any

overt act or wilfulness of speech. He was, according to Ranieri, modest, pure in mind and in deed, just, humane, liberal, high-spirited, and upright. It is true that at a later date Ranieri wrote in a different strain—impelled perhaps by that jealous perversity which makes a man resent the commonplaces of universal praise bestowed upon a long-deceased friend to whom, in his hour of trial, only the one helping hand had been extended. He then dwelt more than enough on the poet's physical infirmities, and partly on blemishes of his mind or character. Of these blemishes, most are immediately related to those same physical infirmities, and consist of capricious, neglectful, or unreasonable habits, detrimental to his own interests as an invalid, and to the comfort of the persons whose care was lavished upon him in that capacity. Apart from this, the most substantial charge is that he was excessively and unduly sensitive to literary praise or blame; a point in which, even if we suppose the charge to be true to the uttermost, Leopardi only shared a weakness highly common among poets, and not uncommon among authors of whatsoever class. There is also the statement, well worth noting, that Leopardi detested the country and country-life as distinct from town-life. If this is entirely correct, he must have had a wonderful power of assimilating, without enjoying or liking, the aspects of natural landscape; for many most finished, touching, and intimately felt pictures and details of this kind are to be found in his poems. His love of the moon and moonlight seems at any rate unmistakably genuine. It is perhaps true that Italians generally are not such lovers of scenic nature as people are in England, where a Wordsworth and a Ruskin—not to

speak of other writers—have almost made it a canon of moral obligation, or a test of spiritual rectitude, that we should admire a flower or a tree, a mountain or a river, the rolling rack or the illumined horizon and unfathomable zenith.

I will recur for a moment to one of the very strong expressions which I quoted direct from Leopardi—that in which he says he would rather die to-day than enjoy the fortune and fame of Caesar or of Alexander. This is spoken in the person of Tristano, an imaginary speaker in one of his *Dialogues*; but it is plainly intended to represent the deliberate conclusion of the author himself. The idea of well-earned renown, of glory, was certainly one of those for which Leopardi had a powerful natural bias; and, if he preferred death to glory, he must have wished for death very intensely—and indeed he constantly asserted that so he did. The wish for death, combined with the highly negative opinions which he entertained regarding a revealed or peremptory rule of right, or an immortal destiny for man, might naturally have suggested the act of suicide. Nor was this thought foreign to Leopardi's mind. But practically he rejected the notion of suicide; saying, in a letter to Signora Tommasini, dated in 1828, 'the unmeasured love which I bear to my friends and relatives will always retain me in the world so long as destiny wills I should be there.' And in an elaborate dialogue which he composed, with Porphyry and Plotinus as the speakers, he develops the same conception in befitting detail.

Having now slightly sketched the life and exhibited some outlines of the character of Leopardi, I must devote the remainder of my Lecture to that which makes

him a memorable figure for our contemplation—his writings in poetry and in prose.

As we have already seen, the chief tendency of Giacomo Leopardi's boyish studies was towards linguistics, or a consideration of the classical authors as the subject of critical scholarship. About the earliest writing of his that has been preserved is a Latin essay, *De Vita et Scriptis Rhetorum quorundam*, i. e. Latin rhetoricians of the second century A. D.; its date is 1814, Leopardi's sixteenth year, but he is said to have begun writing on Latin Philology even at the age of twelve. Then came a treatise *On the Life and Writings of Hesychius of Miletus*; a translation of the Fragments, published by Cardinal Mai, of Dionysius of Halicarnassus; *The History of Astronomy*, from its origin up to the year 1811, written at the age of fifteen, and said to show great erudition in its way, though defective in respect to science and criticism; an essay *On the Popular Errors of the Ancients*, citing more than 400 authors; Notes on Plato, Demetrius Phalereus, Theon the Sophist; a Collection of Fragments written by fifty-five Fathers of the Church; a *Comment on Porphyry's Life of Plotinus*; a Discourse on the *Batrachomyomachia*, popularly attributed to Homer, followed by two verse-translations of the poem; an essay *On the Reputation of Horace among the Ancients*; and another on the *Chronicle of Eusebius*, one of the best and maturest of these writings. Several more could be named. Out of this great mass of learned compositions, a few were published by the author here and there in reviews. The bulk of them were confided by him towards 1831 to a Swiss philologist, Dr. De Linner, who undertook to have them published in Germany or in Paris. But, for

one reason or another, De Linner left his promise almost totally unfulfilled. After De Linner's death the Italian Government bought the MSS., and they are now preserved in the Palatine Library of Florence, and a large proportion of them have been published. Besides these productions in prose, I should not omit a Greek ode to Poseidon, and two others on the manner of Anacreon, which were written towards the age of eighteen, and imposed upon some accredited Italian and even German scholars; at a later date there was a fictitious martyrology of some Sinaitic monks, imitating the Italian of the thirteenth century, and this also was accepted as genuine. Another early prose writing, of a different kind, was an *Oration on the Liberation of the Piceno* in the May of 1815, written when Leopardi was not quite seventeen. This is a philippic against King Joachim of Naples, Murat, when he undertook his disastrous expedition for freeing Italy from the Austrians. I don't suppose that Leopardi, at any period of his life, felt the least predilection for a French, as opposed to an Austrian, predominance in Italy; at any rate he did not in 1815, when he was still more or less under the influence of his father's stiffly conservative opinions, and moreover Murat's military movements had caused much commotion and inconvenience in the young author's own vicinity, and popular animosity seethed against them. This pamphlet is adverse to Italian national unity, and upholds small sovereigns and their courts. It arraigns the French Revolution as having led to the tyranny of Napoleon—'that monster—the barbarous slaughterer who used to entitle himself our king'—and it denounces tyranny in general. One need scarcely observe that the political sentiments

expressed by Leopardi at this very early age are not of much importance to any one; yet they are worth noting as the starting-point from which he developed into the earnest advocacy of national dignity and enlightenment, though he was not at any time a believer in 'the progress of the species' (a conception inconsistent with his pessimism), or in mechanical discoveries as a powerful factor for such progress, or in the motives or the methods of insurgent leaders. It seems curious that in his later writings there is practically nothing about Napoleon, that colossal figure who had filled Italy and the world through all the years of Leopardi's youth. I find only one reference to him, in the scattered *Pensieri*, where Napoleon is taken as an illustration of the axiom that men of extraordinary faculty are admired and loved, not only in spite, but even because, of their avowed contempt of mankind. We must remember however—and this is with respect to *all* the burning questions of which Leopardi treated—that he was writing in the days of censorship of the press, and he was well aware that any outspoken utterance on certain subjects would not be permitted to pass muster.

We have now done with Leopardi's early prose writings, mostly philological or critical, and must proceed to his poems. Among these a few very early specimens have been preserved to us, chiefly a boyish and of course quite worthless tragedy, *Pompeo in Egitto*, written at the age of thirteen, and a fairly long composition, nearly 900 lines, in *terza rima*, *Appressamento alla Morte*, which belongs to his eighteenth or nineteenth year. This is modelled on the *Trionfi* of Petrarca, which are themselves to some extent modelled



on the *Commedia* of Dante. The *Appressamento alla Morte* is a poem of very fair merit and attainment, although it runs on in a rather uniform strain of over-emphasis, which lacks the relief of concentration and strong constructive points. It was never published until long after its author's decease, though he printed, in a modified form, one or two detached fragments of the composition. The poem is at any rate highly interesting as one of personal feeling; written as it was to give vent to Leopardi's emotions when, in the early break-up of his health, he first became convinced that he was foredoomed to a premature death. The argument is briefly this:—The young poet's Guardian Angel appears to him, warns him that he is shortly to die, and shows him visions to satisfy him that death is not an evil. He exhibits Love and his victims (our Henry VIII is one of them), then Avarice, Heresy (or speculative error, false philosophy, &c.), War, Tyranny, and Oblivion, and the victims of all these. Then comes a vision of Paradise and the Saints, with Dante among them, and the King and Queen of Heaven, Christ and Mary. Why then should the youth be reluctant to die, and to see the very reality of this glorious vision? In the last canto Leopardi meditates his own hopes of poetic and other renown, and his natural shrinking from a death which would compel him to leave no name behind; but he finally resigns himself, taking refuge in the religious ideas of eternity and of God. This poem, it will be seen, clearly indicates that Leopardi was as yet animated by the Christian beliefs and sentiments in which he had been brought up; these, without being openly attacked, are either tacitly dropped in the various poems which he himself pub-

lished, or they are visibly incompatible with the line of thought which we find there developed.

The mature period of Leopardi's poetic genius and performance commences with the two odes which I have already had occasion to name—the address *To Italy* and the canzone *On the Projected Monument to Dante*. As these were composed in the autumn of 1818, when he was but twenty years of age, and as both are highly finished performances, majestic in tone, exalted in style, and purged in diction, one must number Leopardi among the poets who in adolescence have produced the fruits of ripest manhood—an Ephesus worthy to take his seat among the Areopagites. Having once attained this height, he never descended from it; whatever he produced afterwards in verse is so excellent of its kind, so clearly conceived as a whole, with details so congruous and so selected, adornment so precious and so discriminate, fine literary form so constantly observed, force and depth of feeling so enhanced by strength of self-restraint, that one might almost cite any and every one of his compositions as a model of how—given the theme to be treated—the treatment should best proceed. In saying that he never descended from his original height, I do not mean to ignore the fact that a few of his pieces, especially his last and longest poem, are of a more familiar kind—they are indeed of a directly satirical or sarcastic cast, with clear touches of humorous ridicule; but these examples, not less than the others, are permeated by large ideas, and executed with a not inferior sense of style, according to their requirements. Neither do I beg the question whether the themes which he treated are always or to the full approvable; they are

often the themes of a pessimist, and pessimism is a doctrine which many or most of us dissent from, and which a large number heartily disapprove.

If we leave out of count the one rather long poem, the whole of Leopardi's mature writing in verse is of extremely moderate bulk; there are about forty compositions, in the form of canzoni or other lyrics, and of blank verse; not a single sonnet is among them—a rarity for an Italian author. Their most general subject-matter is the sorrows of mortality—the mystery and nothingness of man's life, his perpetual endeavours, his ever-recurrent and sometimes sublime illusions, the fate which dogs, and the death which extinguishes him. I should incline to say that the very finest of these poems is that entitled *Canto Notturno di un Pastore Errante dell' Asia* (Nightly Chant of a Nomadic Shepherd of Asia), written chiefly in 1826; the greatest general favourites are perhaps the two latest in date, *The Setting of the Moon*, and *La Ginestra* (The Broom-Plant)—where this shrub, growing in abundance on the volcanic slopes of Vesuvius, is used as the occasion for much gloomy and far-reaching comment on the transiency and insignificance of the human generations. Leopardi continually takes some aspect of Nature as a symbol or incentive of feeling, and fuses the two things so that the feeling predominates. Apart from their general tone of philosophic or speculative meditation, always in the direction of sadness and pessimism—a sadness which is bitter without being exactly sour, and pessimism which is scornful without lapsing into actual cynicism—the poems have naturally some amount of variety in subject; some being mainly patriotic, others tender and

passionate (never erotic); others chiefly descriptive, replete with quiet yet precise observation of Nature and of ordinary life, all touched with a lingering pity, and mellowed by the light of a noble contemplative imagination. That none of these poems is in any degree 'entertaining' (if perhaps we except the *Palinodia a Gino Capponi*) may be admitted at once; their general tone is castigated and severe, and certainly not conciliating to such as are minded to run while they read. The epithet 'stuck-up' is about the mildest which readers of this turn would apply to the verse of Leopardi.

If opportunity permitted, it would be very befitting to enter into an analysis of some of the most conspicuous of these poems—the ideas on which they are founded, their details of thought, treatment, and execution. But, as this is not now practicable, I must limit myself to a few remarks upon their general poetic quality. Melody of sound and poetic charm are ever present, with a grace and force of words which (so far as these precious qualities are alone concerned) we may perhaps more nearly compare to that of Tennyson than of any other English writer; there are of course greater austerity of presentment, and greater detachment from the thing presented, than we find in Tennyson. The diction is very condensed, and one has to pay steady attention lest some delicacy of meaning or some shade of beauty should remain unprized. The perfection of expression is great indeed. In some of his poems Leopardi is free in mixing unrhymed with rhyming lines; and he does it with so much mastery that the ear catches a diffused sense of rhyme, without missing it where it is

not. He is throughout one of the most personal of poets; all that he says he says out of himself; I use the term 'personal' rather than 'subjective,' though the latter now rather hackneyed adjective would also be quite apposite here. Not indeed that he never takes a motive or a suggestion from earlier writers; he has done so—especially in his more youthful compositions—from Petrarca, and not from him alone; but he appropriates such things, and does not merely reproduce them. His subject never overmasters him. Whatever he deals with, he seems to see round it, to impose upon it his own law of thought, to extract its quintessential virtue according to this law, and to present the result to us with a sense of superiority—no mean or common achievement of volition for a writer whose continual theme is inscrutable and unappealable Fate, Nature hostile and Man the shadow of a shade.

The last and longest poem of Leopardi—he completed it only the day before his death—is of a very different class from all the others. It is named *Paralipomini della Batracomiomachia*, forming a kind of arbitrary sequel to the Greek *Batrachomyomachia*, of which in early youth he had produced two verse-translations. This poem is in the *ottava rima*, the metre of Ariosto and Tasso, and represents the fortunes or misfortunes of the Mice after their army had been slaughtered by the Crabs. It is the only narrative poem by our author, and the only one which professes to be amusing. And amusing it is, though rather diffuse—one may well suppose that it would have been condensed here and there prior to publication by himself. Its tone is light, pungent, and grotesque, not

unmingled with serious meanings. The poem is generally reputed to be a satire on the Neapolitans, and their revolution of 1820; the Mice (so says Ranieri, who must have heard something of the sort from Leopardi) standing for the Italians, the Crabs for the Austrians, and the Frogs for the Priests. There is, however, I think, a great deal of 'chance medley' in the narrative, which does not stick close to Neapolitan or any other political events, but here glances at some actual incident, there laughs at some actual person (Louis Philippe and the French Revolution of 1830 are clearly enough implied), and there again makes merry at the weaknesses or grievances of general humankind.

From what has been said of his style it necessarily follows that Leopardi was an extremely careful writer: even such a minor matter as punctuation received considerate and precise attention from him. In conception he was rapid, in execution deliberate and fastidious. In a letter dated in 1824, after observing that he had only written few and short poems, he adds: 'In writing I have never followed anything except an inspiration or phrensy: when this arrived, I found in a couple of minutes the design and distribution of the entire composition. When that is done, my custom always is to wait until I again feel myself in the vein; when I do, and this generally happens only a month or so later on, I then settle down to composing; but with so much slowness that I cannot possibly finish a poem, short as it may be, in less than two or three weeks. This is my method: and, if the inspiration does not come to me spontaneously, more easily would water gush from a tree-trunk than a single verse from my brain.' The

serious spirit in which Leopardi wrote poetry appears from another letter, dated in 1826. He there remarks that, by the mere common sort of verse-spinning, 'we do an express service to our tyrants, because we reduce to a sport and a pastime literature, from which alone the regeneration of our country might obtain a solid beginning.'

The prose works of Leopardi—apart from those early critical or linguistic writings to which I have already referred—consist principally of Dialogues, which he began writing towards 1820. There is also a very noticeable performance named *Detti Memorabili di Filippo Ottonieri*, which may be termed a mental autobiography, thinly disguised: it is imitated from the account of a real sage in Lucian's *Demonax*; and a set of scattered *Pensieri* on a variety of subjects. For acuteness and penetration, and a kind of intrinsic perception of the characters and manners of men from an extrinsic point of view, these two works are highly remarkable. The style of them, as also of the Dialogues, is regarded by Italians—and we may safely acquiesce in this verdict—as consummately good: straightforward, pure without mannered purism, unlaboured, and yet tempered and polished like the most trenchant steel. Leopardi considered excellent prose-writing to be more difficult than excellent verse; comparing the two to the beauty of a woman, undraped and draped. There is besides the collection of his letters, of which no fewer than 544 are given in the principal edition, and some others are to be found elsewhere. Of these I have already spoken to some extent: they are full of sensibility, and contain a great deal of strong substance eloquently put. An Italian editor holds that the

letters to Giordani, and to the historian Colletta, surpass all Italian letters except those of Tasso; he terms them ‘tasteful, candid, affectionate, edifying, philosophical.’ To an English taste the letters generally are no doubt somewhat marred by the ceremonial style which has been common among Italians: some small service or symptom of good-will is acknowledged as if it were the acme of benevolence; the acknowledgment itself pants through superlatives; the person addressed figures as the most commanding, and the writer as the least considerable, of mankind. All this is on the surface; it must be skimmed off and allowed for, and the letters then become enjoyable reading, though also—from the constant suffering of body and mind which they exhibit—saddening and poignant.

The Dialogues and some other prose-writings were published in 1827 under the name of *Opere Morali*. Lucian appears to have been Leopardi’s chief model in the Dialogues, as in the *Detti Memorabili di Filippo Ottonieri*; but, while often sportive in form, and not sparing in sallies of telling wit and humour, he is a far more serious Lucian. As usual, the unaccountableness of life, the yawning gulf between the aspirations of man and his capacities and destiny, the want of *raison d’être* for such a creature so circumstanced, the trammels which he fashions for himself so as to make his position all the more comfortless and absurd, form the burden of the strain. Leopardi here combines the weeping and the laughing philosophers. That so the thing should be is a grief ‘too deep for tears’: the mode in which the thing presents itself to observation, the sorry shifts adopted by these sorry beings, oscillating and staggering



between a hapless birth and a death inevitable, final, and in its degree welcome, the uselessness of hope, the cruelty of Nature and of Truth, furnish the occasion for smiles frequent enough, though they come mostly on the wrong side of the mouth. 'Grin and bear it' might be inscribed as a general motto for Leopardi's Dialogues. Luckily he writes so well, says so many things barbed with meaning and feathered with grace, that the reader is enabled to smile along with him. After *A History of the Human Race*, a very pregnant and suggestive summary in a vivid imaginative form of allegory (this is not a dialogue), come the colloquies of *Fashion and Death*, *Nature and a Soul*, *The Earth and the Moon*, *A Physicist and a Metaphysician*, *Nature and an Icelander*, *Copernicus and the Sun*, and several others, bearing titles which do not so strongly indicate the general nature of their subjects. The two which I have named last are among the very best. In the Dialogue between Nature and an Icelander we find a Hyperborean who, chastened by experience into longing for no higher good than a life as far as possible quiet and unpainful, has journeyed into the interior of Africa, where it is vouchsafed to him to descry Nature in a human form. He inquires why she so perpetually persecutes the unfortunate denizens of Earth, and is answered that, persecution or no persecution, she scarcely so much as reflects whether these personages exist or not; and the conversation is proceeding with much earnestness on the part of the Icelander, and some courtesy tempering indifference on the part of Nature, when a brace of famished lions arrive on the scene, and eat up the traveller, or (as a different account of the transaction runs) a violent sandblast overwhelms

him, and preserves his mummy in prime condition for some European Museum. The Dialogue between Copernicus and the Sun is throughout a piece of arch pleasantry; in which the Sun is represented as being mortally weary of his perpetual task of moving round the Earth, and therefore he persuades Copernicus to get the Earth to move round the Sun; and the philosopher, willing to accommodate but afraid of being burned as a heretic, is reassured on being enjoined to dedicate his treatise (as in fact he did) to the Pope.

With this I must bring to a conclusion the slight account which I have been able to furnish of the Conte Giacomo Leopardi, his melancholy career and his melancholy intellect, but a career as blameless and an intellect as exalted as they were melancholy. His writings have not perhaps had any very extensive vogue outside Italy: the Poems have, however, been translated into German by Heyse and Brandes, and the Essays and Dialogues into English by Mr. Edwards and by the late James Thomson; and by one means or another he has certainly borne a considerable part in clinching the nail of pessimism into the speculative panoply of our now closing century. It has been his privilege to convey to the reader, along with the hard and unwelcome assertions of pessimism, a large measure of sympathy with his own singularly adverse fate: we read his personal sorrows into his abstract cogitations, and those among us who have no liking and little indulgence for the latter are still touched by their all too close affinity to the former. As a poet, Leopardi holds us by a firm and thrilling grasp, and readers who have once passed under his spell recur to him again and

again with a still increasing sense of its potency. I will borrow in conclusion a strong, yet no more than a just, expression of one of our best critical authorities, Dr. Richard Garnett, and say that Leopardi is 'the one Italian poet of the nineteenth century who has taken an uncontested place among the classics of the language.'

1891.



## LESSING AND MODERN GERMAN LITERATURE

NOT long ago a friendly reviewer of a small book of mine on the life and work of Lessing observed that in dealing with Lessing's scholarship, with that knowledge of the literatures of Greece and Rome which so largely contributed to make him a great originative force in the literature of his own country, I had not laid sufficient stress on the limitations of that scholarship, or, what my reviewer called, its essentially 'eighteenth-century' character. By which he meant that Lessing, like most scholars of his day, concerned himself with the text of the ancient literature and not with what lay behind it, not with that body of legend and tradition, or the social or historical influences, which form as it were the soil out of which literature grows. Of course it is quite true that in this respect Lessing did belong to the earlier, the pre-Wolfian, generation of scholarship. It is also true that the fact was altogether a favourable one for the work he had to do. His mission was to create a modern German literature. For this purpose he was obviously much better equipped in knowing the literature of the ancients as a product

of imaginative art than as a field for scientific investigation. Of course no one who knows anything of these investigations, or of the vast and rich field of interest which they open up, would dream of disparaging them. Nor do I. But it is highly necessary to dwell upon the fact that these investigations, however full and complete, however valuable and necessary, are not in themselves a study of literature, and will not yield to those who pursue them what it is the function of literature to yield. They are a branch of science, and their main interest is scientific; literature—imaginative, creative literature—is a branch of art, and its main interest is aesthetic. Now, as everybody knows, the scientific interest has been very keenly and almost exclusively pursued in Germany for some two generations. And Germany is great in philology, great in mythology and folklore; but she has ceased for the present to produce, I will not say writers like Goethe or Lessing, but like our own Tennyson or Matthew Arnold—poets, these, without any very conspicuous endowment of native force, but whose loving familiarity with the supreme types of literary art gave them no small measure of the height, the dignity, the disdain for every cheap and vulgar success which mark in all ages, in all languages, and in all materials, the art called classic.

Yet if one happens to hear the question of higher education discussed in Germany, one is pretty sure to find it taken for granted that German education at the present day is based on the literature of Greece. And it is easy to verify the assertion that the German ‘gymnasiast’ of to-day is very largely concerned with Greek. But what does he get from Greek—what does

he ask from it? Let me here quote a remark of an acquaintance of mine who has had a large practical experience as an assistant-master in one of the historic public schools in England, and who has also had unusual opportunities for making himself acquainted with German classical education. I had asked him what he thought of the relative attainments in Greek of the average English and the average German school-boy of the same standing. His reply was to this effect: 'The German schoolboy will be posted in the latest theory of the composition of the Homeric poems; the English boy will perhaps be but dimly aware that there is any question in the matter at all. But if you set them both down to a piece of unseen translation, the English boy will leave the German a long way behind.' Now, it is better, incomparably better, to be able to read the *Iliad*, than to know, or to know that we cannot know, how the *Iliad* came to be written. To English readers this might seem a truism of a very obvious kind, yet it is certain that the ideas of literary study which have long prevailed in Germany, and which are beginning to prevail in France, are making themselves distinctly visible in England too. Thus we have a scholar of the eminence of the late Mr. F. A. Paley, asserting, in his introduction to the *Œdipus Coloneus* (Cambridge Texts), that without believing the plot to be founded on a solar myth it is impossible to have other than 'a partial and imperfect conception' of it. Mr. Paley probably did not realize that he was denying to Sophocles himself any genuine understanding of his own play. Struck with the importance and significance of modern investigations into the sources of literature, he confounded for a moment the scientific interest of

these investigations with the aesthetic interest of a great poetic work—an interest always, surely, centring not upon the raw material, but upon the poet's conception. And of this we may be sure—that the quickening and inspiring influences of Greek literature which acted so conspicuously and so momentously in the revival of German literature in the last century will never be felt, or communicated, by scholars who see little or nothing in that literature but the materials for philology or folklore.

I am writing of the origins of modern German literature. The phrase may need, perhaps, some justification. There is no such thing as a modern English literature; there is no chasm between Tennyson and Chaucer. But between German literature in the epoch of Lessing and German literature in the epoch of the *Nibelungenlied* there is a chasm of some 600 years. Not, of course, that German histories of literature are a *tabula rasa* for that period. But if, as was once suggested, all German books likely to be read outside Germany were to be printed in Latin characters, then by far the greater part of the literature—I speak of the secular literature—of those 600 years might safely be left in Gothic. This is in itself a somewhat singular fact, for the Germanic peoples are not notably lacking in the literary impulse, and never have been. The famous library of Charlemagne contained a collection of *barbara carmina*, among which were doubtless some relics of those ancient hymns, described as *antiqua* by so early an authority as Tacitus, who, like a modern *savant*, is chiefly interested in them for the light they throw on Teutonic mythology.

Among the luminous and pregnant criticisms on



German literature of which Goethe's *Wahrheit und Dichtung* is full, he observes that during this long period of barrenness the thing which seems to have been mainly wanting to that literature was substance, contents, *Inhalt*—and that, he adds, a 'national' *Inhalt*. Beside this remark let us place a sentence from the interesting *Allgemeine Litteraturgeschichte* of Johannes Scherr. 'The idea of Fatherland,' he writes, 'must be the soul of every achievement of culture, and hence also the fundamental motive of literature.' Now Germans are at present possessed by this idea of Fatherland to a degree which is not favourable to a perfectly clear, unbiassed view of things; yet here, I think, with certain restrictions, with certain explanations, Scherr states a very important truth. At any rate, what he here asserts is really the unexpressed background of nearly all literary criticism. Literature is universally regarded as being something peculiarly national. How far does the actual history of literature justify this view? And can we discover a rational basis for it?

Let us begin, in Lessing's fashion, by considering what is naturally and necessarily implied in the very existence of literature as such. We observe first that the written word, like the spoken word, implies an audience. And by the nature of that audience, by its characteristic influence upon the person who addresses it, the nature of his utterance must, one would think, be very largely determined. Speaking broadly, may we not say that no great, worthy, and enduring work of literature could ever be addressed save to an audience which the writer regarded with a profound love and veneration, and which had power to stir and sway to

their very depths the tides of noble passion? Now two such audiences there are, and only two: as a matter of fact, the great literatures of the world have been addressed to Fatherland, or they have been addressed to God. These are the august presences—these, and not Fatherland alone, which have hitherto dominated all literature. Take, for instance, the literature of Greece, which ran a course so singularly self-impelled, so free from complicating external influences, that any true law of literary evolution will surely be mirrored there with singular clearness. To begin with the Homeric poems: little, comparatively, as we know of the external conditions under which they were produced, they bear internal witness of the most unmistakable kind to the fact that they took form among a people who had a proud and keen sense of Achaean unity. It was stronger than that which existed in Hellas in the period closely preceding the Persian wars. But when those wars had roused the Hellenic spirit into vivid life and energy, when, in the words of Mr. Swinburne—

‘All the lesser tribes put on the pure Athenian fashion,  
One Hellenic heart was from the mountains to the sea’—

then the second epoch of Greek literature began. It began with a poet who fought at Marathon, and with whom did it end? With an orator who fought at Chaeronea. The Macedonian conquerors dispersed Greek culture throughout the world, but they ended the national life of Greece. There was Hellenism, but there was no longer a Hellas. And secular literature, now the pastime of courtiers and scholars, ceased to attract the noblest powers and ambitions of the race. In what direction, then, did those powers turn? They

turned to the divine. It was now that the great ethical systems of antiquity began to take shape. The illustrious names of the epoch are Zeno, Cleanthes, Chrysippus, Epicurus, and it was they who handed on to future generations the torch of Greek intellect. Yet there is one poetic work surviving to us from the Hellenistic epoch, one, no doubt, of many that have perished, which suffices—to quote the words of Mr. Mahaffy—to redeem the whole literature of that epoch ‘from the charge of mere artificiality and pedantry.’ And what is this work? It is a hymn, the profound and majestic Hymn to Zeus written by the Stoic Cleanthes. This we owe to the Hellenistic, the denationalized epoch—this, and the creed its author helped to found, a creed which, though Pagan, was destined never to be outworn.

The secular literature of Greece was succeeded by that of Rome, and we find the flowering time of the latter coinciding with the final establishment of Roman unity and power. That unity was dissolved, that power dethroned, and that literature perished. But when the flood of barbarism which had submerged the ancient civilization began to sink, then, one by one, like islands above the waste of waters, the different European nationalities made their appearance. There began to be an England, a France, a Germany. And then, and not till then, there began to be an English, a French, a German literature. There was not indeed then, or for long afterwards, an Italy, though there was an Italian literature. But there were in Italy many centres of an intense municipal patriotism. There was a Milan, a Florence, a Pisa, and literature and art found there the soil in which they could strike root and grow. But was there, then, no literature in the preceding ages of

tumult and dissolution? There was a literature, majestic and impressive to the utmost height ever reached by the human spirit, but it was not a secular literature addressed to Fatherland, it was a religious literature, addressed to God. This was the age which saw the development of the hymnology and the liturgy of the Christian Church. That was the direction in which literary power then went, and if we seek for a poetic work which may stand as a type of the most serious, the most impassioned, the most central utterance of the time, we shall no more think, let us say, of the *Hero and Leander* of Musaeus, lovely as it is, than in a previous age we should think of the *Idylls* of Theocritus. We shall think of the *Te Deum*, of the *Veni, sancte Spiritus*, or of the tremendous heart-shaking rhythm of Bernard of Cluny.

And now to fix our eyes on Germany alone. Only in one spot amid her chaos of warring tribes did the eye of Tacitus discern the beginnings of anything like a national organization. The name 'Suevi,' he tells us, unlike the other names noted by him, was applied not to one tribe or clan but to a kind of military confederacy. Some century or so after Tacitus, however, events of profound importance, which have never found, and never will find, an historian, began to be accomplished in the obscurity of the German forests. When Germany again emerges into historic light a great change has taken place. Clans have grown together and become nations, the old tribal names have largely disappeared, and instead of them we hear now of Saxons, Bavarians, Alamanni, or they win a wider significance like that of the Lombards or the Goths. That new and powerful sentiment which the Germans brought into European

politics, the sentiment of *Treue*, of passionate fidelity to a personal leader, suffers nothing in these changes. With every advance in centralization, the kingly power is strengthened and consolidated. Germany hitherto had been on her defence against Rome. Now the situation is reversed, Rome is the defender, Germany the aggressor. With centralization has come power, the power which broke in pieces the civilization of the south, and which made, if ever anything made, a breach in the continuity of history.

After this amazing triumph one might have looked for the speedy formation of a great and united German Empire. But for a time many causes conspired to prevent this consummation. Religious differences were amongst the principal. Many of the German clans or confederacies were Arian, others orthodox, others heathen, or half Christian, half heathen. Add to this, that the very power and dignity which the centralizing movement had conferred upon the German leaders made further steps in the same direction increasingly difficult after a certain limit had been reached.

But the time, of course, did come when the conception of a strong and united Germany became an object of policy, and in great measure an attained object. We may set it down as having been first consciously pursued in the tenth century, the period of the great Saxon Emperors. Henry the Fowler and Otto the Great building an impregnable rampart of German valour against the deluge of Hunnish barbarism; Otto II besieging Paris, and restoring Lothringen to the Reich; Otto III, the 'World's Wonder,' with his soaring imagination, the German and the Greek mingled in his blood, who took the insignia of empire from the dead

hands of Charlemagne—this great dynasty left a legacy of aspirations and memories which sank deep into the heart of the German people. Giesebrecht notes that it was in the reign of Otto the Great that the word *Deutsche* was first used in official documents to signify the mass of German-speaking peoples, a memorable landmark indeed.

Under the Franconian Emperors the same movement went on, and we note here a decisive token of the height it had reached in the expression ‘*Teutonica Patria*,’ first used, and used by two independent annalists, towards the close of the eleventh century. But that epoch was marked by an historic event from which, as from a fountain head, we can trace, down the history of Germany, a long sequence of barren and devastating warfare, of rebellion and anarchy, of oppression and plunder, of the encouragement of all lawless and the enfeeblement of all lawful power. In 1075 a German Emperor was summoned to give an account of his government before the Court of Rome. For long the German Emperors had encouraged the authority and increased the territory of the Church in Germany, hoping thus to check and balance the growing power of the secular princes. The fruits of this short-sighted policy were now evident. Henry IV, treating the summons of the Pope with contempt, was forced to expiate his contumacy in dust and ashes. And henceforth the prime object of Papal policy, policy successfully pursued for many centuries, was to prevent the growth of a strong central power in Germany. But the national impulse once given could not be subdued by one defeat. The predecessor of Henry IV had made and unmade Popes at will, and the Pope who brought

a German Emperor to the dust at Canossa himself died in defeat and exile. It was not until the tragic ruin of the great House of Hohenstaufen that fortune finally declared against the hope of German unity, a hope which even then continued for many a generation to haunt the imagination of the German people, embodied in that strange and significant legend of the great Hohenstaufen Emperor, alive in his mountain sepulchre and waiting but the fulness of the time to awaken from his enchanted sleep, and drive out the oppressors and robbers who had made the 'Teutonica Patria' their victim since his death.

It was in the time of the Hohenstaufens that Germany began to possess a great national literature. And it is not perhaps idle to note that while Tacitus found the first indications of a national organization in the 'Suevi,' it was Swabia, the home of that organization, which gave to Germany the Hohenstaufen Emperors, under whom Germany reached her highest pitch of unity and power, and it was Swabia which became the centre of the poetic movement of the time. Out of that movement issued a literature of heroic greatness, a literature which was the indisputable authentic product of the German spirit and of a German nationality.

To have produced such a king as Barbarossa, and such a poem as the *Nibelungenlied*, was to have taken a step towards national self-consciousness which could never be retraced. The word 'Teutonica Patria' had been uttered, and had become more than a word. Yet, even in the full glory of the Hohenstaufen period, it was evident that the realization of this idea was to be left for other times and other men. When Henry VI conquered Sicily in 1194, every German province sent

its contingent to his army. When, forty years later, his son, the wizard Emperor Frederick II, set forth to subdue rebels in Lombardy, his main reliance was on the Saracen troops with whom he had surrounded himself, and who had this essential superiority over Germans, that they were proof against excommunication. And when, in 1239, this terrible sentence was launched against himself, the ferment which took place all over Germany showed what a blow had been struck. 'Robbers rejoiced,' says a contemporary annalist, 'ploughshares were turned to swords, and pruning hooks to spears.' Aided by the all-important fact that the Empire was elective, not hereditary, the Papacy had by this time succeeded in driving a hundred lines of cleavage through the heart of the nation. That Germany should be wholly subdued was not written in the book of fate, but henceforth for many centuries Pope and Kaiser could do nothing but mutually enfeeble each other, and aggrandize the petty princes and feudal lords whose minute territories and boundless pretensions made the future work of consolidation one of such infinite difficulty.

The history of this disastrous conflict is the history of Germany for 600 years; and in those dismal centuries German literature, which had produced the *Nibelungenlied* and the *Song of Gudrun*, the *Parzival* and the *Tristan*, withered wellnigh to death. By which, as I have already observed, it is not to be understood that German histories of literature are a blank for this period. But certainly the best powers of the nation did not then go into literature, as that word is commonly understood. They did precisely what we have seen them do in the period intervening between the fall



of Greece and the rise of Rome, and again in the period intervening between the fall of Rome and the emergence of the modern European nationalities. They turned to religion. Now was the time of Tauler and the mystics, now was the time of the religious and didactic verse of the Meistersinger. The Reformation, essentially a national movement, would doubtless have led to the growth of a great national literature; and, indeed, in the poetry of the typical Meistersinger, Hans Sachs, and in the dramatic movement which roughly coincided with the great Elizabethan period in England, the promise of such a literature is distinctly visible. But the fresh struggle with the Papacy, which culminated in the devastations, the incredible horrors, of the Thirty Years' War, drowned this bright promise in a sea of blood. From the time of Hans Sachs to the time of Lessing, German literature, as it is commonly understood—that is, secular literature, was at the lowest depth of insignificance and feebleness. And again, true to the thesis with which I introduced this somewhat too prolonged retrospect, it was now that the great hymnology of the Lutheran Church took shape—the names which really ennoble and illuminate the period are not those of Opitz and Hoffmanswaldau, they are those of Gerhardt and Paul Fleming.

The Peace of Westphalia, signed in 1648, marked in truth not the close of the Thirty Years' War, nor the close of any war, but it was a notable crisis and turning-point in a much longer war, the war in which Germany suffered her first defeat at Canossa, and won her final victory at Sedan. After the Peace of Westphalia, North Germany, Protestant Germany, may be regarded as practically independent, and the time when this

assertion of the national idea in politics and religion should evoke a corresponding outburst of energy in literature was approaching. But the final, the decisive, stimulus to this literature was still to come. The tortured nation, just released to light and freedom, was yet to feel something of the pride and glory as well as of the agony and desolation of war. The Thirty Years' War had been a war of desperation, waged very largely for Germany by non-German powers, and ceasing only when both parties were *saignés à blanc*. But the wars of Frederick the Great were wars of consolidation, wars of mighty achievement and mightier promise.

The form of a German nationality was indeed still to seek and was hardly thought of. Yet it is substantially true to say that at that time Prussia was Germany and carried the fortunes of Germany. When Frederick the Great drove the Croat before him at Leuthen or the French at Rossbach, every German was prouder of the name he bore. Here again, for the first time for many a century, a 'Teutonica Patria' began to take visible shape before the eyes of Europe, and Frederick the Hohenstaufen, as the old legend prophesied, returns to earth in the person of another Frederick, Frederick the Hohenzollern. And if, as seems to be now made out, the personality round which the legend originally gathered was not that of the rugged old Crusader, Frederick Barbarossa, but his grandson, the humanist Emperor, the philosopher, Frederick the Second, then the new avatar was not very unlike the old one. Frederick the Great, too, was subtle, mocking, sceptical, accomplished, full of intellectual life, a passionate lover of culture in every form. But he happily lacked that strain of moral depravity, the vicious self-indulgence,

the fantastic cruelty which stained the character and career of the Hohenstaufen, and beneath his veneer of French *politesse* and persiflage he had many of the stern virtues of Barbarossa. In particular he had his love of justice, his resolve that, cost what it might, justice and law should prevail throughout his dominions. The meanest Prussian who was wronged might make his direct personal appeal to Frederick, just as men did when Barbarossa's shield swung high above his tent in the fields of Lombardy. As a lawgiver, as a conqueror, as a reformer, he dominates the whole history of his day, and he rightly enjoys that title of 'Great' which is never granted save to monarchs who have been illustrious both in government and in arms.

If one should wish to see a veritable concrete example of what the influences of the hour and of the man did for German literature I think we may find it in the mere juxtaposition of two quotations from the works of a single writer, the poet Gleim. Gleim was a considerable literary figure in his time, though he is little heard of now. He wrote with eminent success in the fashion described as 'Anacreontic'—elegant, dexterous, and lifeless—which at that time infected all German poetry. Roses, kisses, wine; wine, kisses, roses—you have only to supply a certain vapid connective medium and there are German Anacreontics:—

'Rosen pflücke, Rosen hlühn,  
Morgen ist nicht heut!  
Keine Stunde lass entfliehn,  
Flüchtig ist die Zeit!  
Trinke, küsse! Sieh' es ist  
Heut' Gelegenheit!  
Weisst du, wo du morgen bist?  
Flüchtig ist die Zeit!'

There is Gleim, the ‘Anacreontiker.’ But listen now to Gleim in the character of a Prussian Grenadier, Gleim when his spirit had been fired by the tremendous events of the Seven Years’ War and he became the Tyrtaeus of Prussia:—

‘Was helfen Waffen und Geschütz  
Im ungerechten Krieg?  
Gott donnerte bei Lowositz  
Und unser war der Sieg!

\* \* \*

Und weigern sie auf diesen Tag  
Den Frieden vorzuziehn,  
So stürme Friedrich erst ihr Prag  
Und dann führ uns nach Wien!’

Surely we have here passed with one stride into another world of feeling and of utterance. Not for centuries had that note resounded in the German language, that note of passion and power. To quote that is to show at one glance what Frederick the Great did for German literature. He awakened it by the cannon of Rossbach. What does it matter that he never thought that literature worthy of the slightest direct encouragement—that to the last he consistently despised and ignored it? German literature in the hands of Lessing and his contemporaries was little likely to wither under the frown of royalty. One may even say, so profound, so naturally and inevitably beneficent is the action of a great personality, that Frederick helped the literature of his country as much by his contempt as he could have done by his favour. Power evokes power, the scornful glance of the great king was a summons and a challenge. The ‘Teutonica Patria’ sent a man to answer it, and that man was Lessing.

It is mainly of Lessing that I wish to treat, but of

which Lessing, of which side of Lessing's manifold activity? Travel back to the close of the eighteenth century, that day of great beginnings, by what road we will, and again and again we shall find Lessing as a pioneer at the head of it. He who reads *Modern Painters*, reads Lessing; he who reads *Essays and Reviews*, reads Lessing. Let us dwell for a moment on Lessing as the source of the movement which produced the last-named of these two epoch-making books. When he found himself forced to take part in the religious controversies of his day, Europe was divided into two hostile camps—there was on the one hand a barren and shallow Deism for which revelation simply meant imposture, and there was on the other hand a Bibliolatry hardly to be distinguished from fetish worship, which wrote above the portals of Christianity, 'Reason abandon, ye who enter here.' How quickly and how completely have these schools become things of the past, how spectral and unreal is the kind of existence which either of them still continues to enjoy! It is primarily to Lessing that we owe the immense advance in religious insight which has made a Voltaire or a Goeze alike impossible among men of culture at this hour. And it is very noticeable that Lessing had the penetration to anticipate one particular development which was not reached for more than a century later. Writings like those of Dr. Mivart among Roman Catholics, and of the authors of *Lux Mundi* among Anglicans, have revealed a remarkable and hitherto unsuspected harmony between what is called 'Catholic' theology, the 'Catholic' conception of Christianity, and the freest application of critical methods to the letter of the Scriptures. I venture to think the announcement

of this harmony the most significant event, the most pregnant with momentous consequence, which has taken place in the religious history of this day and land. Yet it was clearly announced a hundred years ago by Lessing. He saw that this alliance was a natural and necessary one, he saw that it must take place. 'There was a Christianity before there was a New Testament.' That was the ground taken by Lessing for his criticism of the Scriptures; it was the ground on which he defied the Lutheran Consistorium; and it was distinctly Catholic ground. I have often wondered how it is that in this country, where Lessing's great work of literary criticism, the *Laocoon*, has been so abundantly dealt with by translators, annotators, and editors, so little attempt, comparatively, has been made to bring to the knowledge of English readers his equally profound and stimulating religious thought. Many and many a time I think those who are in search of a link between the scientific intellect and religious faith will find that the very word which is capable of forming that link has been uttered with incomparable force and depth of insight by Lessing.

But it is not with Lessing as the critic, it is with Lessing as the creator, that the student of literature is mainly concerned. And even here we have more than one Lessing to deal with. There is the Lessing of the lyrics, and there is the Lessing of the dramas. And these are very different writers indeed. The lyrics, I venture to say, are read at this day by no human being, unless those whose business it is to read everything that a writer of such eminence has produced. They are simply the dreary, artificial, imitative products of the 'Anacreontic' school, dashed occasionally with

a satire of a rather 'derb' quality, but rarely giving us a note of music or a stroke of imagination. And they are curiously deficient in that feeling for nature which was one of the great characteristics of the new epoch. Like Socrates, Lessing thought he had 'nothing to learn from fields and trees, but from men in the city.' 'When you go to the fields,' he said to his friend, the poet of nature, Kleist, 'I go to the coffee-house.' But with 'men in the city' Lessing was thoroughly at home. The dramas—I do not speak of the works of Lessing's 'prentice-hand, but of the fruit of his ripened powers—can be neglected by no one who desires to have a general acquaintance with European culture. They hold the stage in Germany to this day, and in them Lessing speaks in that manner in which the great works of literature are written, the manner which can never grow antiquated, which is fresh and new in Homer, and fresh and new in Tennyson, because it springs direct from the sincere vision and the creative passion of the artist.

The fact is, that it was the hour of the drama in Germany, and it was not the hour of the lyric. England, France, Italy, Spain, had produced dramatic literatures of great and native power. Germany had begun to move in this direction after the Reformation, and the same impulse reappeared when movement was once more possible. Whenever we see any literary stir, any debate and effort, going on in Germany at this time, it is almost sure to be concerned with the drama. The movement had penetrated even into the little Saxon town where Lessing was born. The schoolmaster there, Heintz, greatly to the alarm of that very Puritanical community, lectured his pupils on the drama, and even

prepared pieces for them to act on days of festival. Yet no region of literature could have offered a more unpromising field than that to which so many of the finest minds in Germany, obeying the sway of some profound impulse, turned at this time. Lessing declares in plain terms that Germany possessed neither audiences, authors, nor actors. The playhouse was usually a wooden booth, the audiences were rude and uncultivated, or if cultivated, still ruder. It was the habit of fashionable people to sit in the two front rows and raise such a cloud of tobacco smoke as to obscure the stage from the rest of the audience, a form of diversion which some apparently yearn to make feasible in the present day. The performance itself was either a piece of stupid buffoonery, or one of the mechanical productions of the pseudo-French, the Gottsched, school, in which your drama was turned out in obedience to an unvarying scheme, the lover and the lady, the soubrette, the valet, and the clown, playing their part with dreary regularity. As for the actors, if we find among them now and then a Neuber, an Ackermann, an Eckhoff, the mass of the company were, in Lessing's language, people 'without knowledge, or cultivation, or talent: here a master-tailor, there a thing that a couple of months ago was a washerwoman.' But perhaps the most convincing sign of the absolute dearth of poetic feeling which prevailed in the German drama, and in German poetry generally, is the addiction of the poets of the day to the rhymed alexandrine. This was in German, as in French, the accepted and usual vesture for high tragic themes, as prose was for comedy. Now in French, *pace* Mr. Matthew Arnold, the rhythm of the language lends itself well to that metre—the pro-



longed, continuous, elastic sweep of the line has a rhythmical effect of a very satisfying kind. But in a strongly accented language like German, the rhymed alexandrine becomes absolute doggerel.

‘O, Bern ! O, Vaterland ! Ja, ja, Dein grosser Geist  
 Für Bern erzeugt weiss nicht was mindre Sorge heisst.  
 Wie selig, Henzi, ist’s fürs Vaterland sich grämen,  
 Und sein verlornes Wohl freiwillig auf sich nehmen !  
 Doch sei nicht ungerecht, und glaube dass in mir  
 Auch Schweizerblut noch fliesst und wirket wie in Dir.’

This was the vehicle for tragedy when Lessing began to write, the vehicle in which he himself wrote some of his early pieces ! And from that fact alone a discerning critic will understand the abject condition of dramatic poetry which then prevailed. But the stir of life was there, and a single generation saw a striking change, brought about mainly by the strength of a single man.

Our own English drama of to-day is far from being in so deplorable a condition, yet it seems to be generally felt that something better might be expected of it ; there is certainly something of the same intellectual stir and movement, the same search for new principles, and the same tendency to arraign old ones before the bar of criticism. Quite recently a number of distinguished authors in the department of poetry and fiction complied with the invitation of a popular newspaper to state the reasons why they did not write plays. They complied in a manner very slightly instructive. Apparently when a successful novelist is asked why he does not write plays, the last thing he thinks of replying is, ‘Because I don’t know how.’ Let us turn to the example of Lessing. Here was a writer who found the German drama in the lowest condition that it is

possible to conceive, and who made it a classical literature, fit for the stage and fit for the study. What was his training? What were the influences which shaped his inborn dramatic genius? I think we shall find that the foundations of his subsequent achievements were laid in his student days at Leipzig. Here it happened, fortunately for Germany, but to the intense alarm and distress of his parents, that Lessing fell in with the famous actress-manager, Frau Neuber, who had brought her company to that city. He had already been powerfully attracted by the dramatic literature of Rome; in his school-days at Meissen he had lived, he tells us, in the world of Plautus and Terence. The world of the imitation-French plays, which mainly composed the *répertoire* of Frau Neuber and her company, was not at all unlike this, and it was with wonder and delight that Lessing saw it visibly incorporate before him. He saved and he slaved to get admission to the theatre; he sought out the members of the company and became intimate with them. He drudged for them; he translated and adapted French plays for them—an invaluable piece of practical training. The world behind the scenes had no disillusionment for him, for behind the means of the illusion he sought its laws. He read, reflected, questioned, compared; he made himself thoroughly acquainted with the dramatic literatures, not of France only, but of Spain and Italy. He assisted at rehearsals; ere long his advice and suggestions were eagerly sought; he became a kind of informal stage-manager, and had abundant opportunities for turning to practical account the theories he was developing and the immense book-knowledge which he was amassing. It was currently reported that he intended to go on the stage himself.

Had he done so he could hardly have gained a more intimate knowledge of the principles of dramatic art than he did through his close connexion with Frau Neuber's company in Leipzig. He was no amateur; he served an arduous apprenticeship, mastering the style which he found prevalent before attempting to substitute another. That was the discipline of the man through whom the German drama underwent one of the most striking and sudden reforms that has ever taken place in any province of literature. Is it necessary to point the moral of the tale?

Thus behind Lessing's published work as a dramatic author there lies a vast amount of unpublished, fragmentary, unrecorded work done whilst he was rubbing shoulders with the actualities of the German stage. And again, behind the published work in which Germany became endowed with a classical literature, there lies a great deal of work which the reader will find in collected editions of Lessing's writings but which he need be at no pains to seek out. Lessing also wrote tragedies in rhymed alexandrines, *horresco referens*, and mechanical comedies. They were better than the similar productions of his contemporaries. But before he could write *Minna von Barnhelm* and *Emilia Galotti* he needed the vivifying contact of the greatest dramatic literatures the world has yet seen, that of Greece and that of England. These were the days before Winckelmann's memorable work, the *History of Ancient Art*, had given so powerful an impulse to the study of Greek in Germany; and Lessing's first real knowledge of the Greek drama appears to date from his residence in Berlin, 1757-1760, where we find him collecting materials for a life of Sophocles. About this time, as an

experiment in the severe Greek manner, he produced one short tragedy, *Philotas*, which showed very clearly that a new force had entered into German literature. Here the rhymed alexandrine is discarded and the daring experiment is made of treating a lofty tragic theme in prose. But it is Lessing's prose, a prose such as no German ever wrote before and but too few since, a prose which is swift, rhythmic, brilliant, and lucid, moving with an elastic, marching stride, instead of dragging forward an unmanageable bulk in a series of tortuous convulsions. *Philotas* shows that Lessing had learned from Sophocles to economize and control his power. The plot is bare and simple in the extreme. There are but four characters. The hero, Philotas, on whom attention is riveted throughout, is the young son of a Greek monarch: he has been slightly wounded and taken prisoner in his first skirmish with the forces of a rival, with whom his father was at war. From the outset Philotas reveals his character as one of great simplicity and great intensity, his soul is a pure flame of warlike and patriotic passion. He resolves to slay himself in captivity rather than allow the enemy to retain the advantage they have gained in being able to hold him to ransom on terms injurious to his country. His chivalrous captor, Aridaeus, visits him, endeavours by his courtesy and his praises to make the fiery young prince forget his shame, and at last, when the question of a ransom is talked of, informs him that the ransom will be simply a case of exchange on equal terms; his own son had been captured in the same engagement, and he will send a fellow captive of Philotas, the soldier Parmenio, to assure the father of Philotas that his son is alive and well, and to make arrangements for the

exchange. We now believe that the self-sacrifice of Philotas will not be consummated, and the young prince is himself relieved as he sees life with all its allurements again opened before him. 'Gods!' he cries, 'Nearer the thunderbolt could not have fallen, unless it had dashed me in pieces.'

But in the true Lessing manner the situation which, at first, seemed to sway the course of the plot away from the ordained end, in reality brings us nearer to it. He thinks of the terms which Aridaeus might have extorted had Philotas alone been taken. Even such might the father of Philotas now obtain if Philotas were no more. And so in a blaze of heroic passion the fiery young soul goes out; he obtains a sword by stratagem, and stabs himself in the presence of Aridaeus. 'King,' he gasps, 'we shall meet again'—

'ARIDAEUS. And meet as friends, O Prince!

'PHILOTAS. And so take my victorious soul, ye gods—and, goddess of peace, thy victim!

'ARIDAEUS. Prince, hear me!

'STRABO. He dies. Am I a traitor, King, if I weep for your enemy?

'ARIDAEUS. Aye, weep for him. And I too. Come! I must have my son again. [What a dramatic stroke that is!] But do not seek to dissuade me if I buy him too dear. In vain have we shed rivers of blood; in vain have we conquered territories. There he departs with our spoil, the greater victor! Come! Get me my son! And when I have him, I will be King no more. Man, do you think one cannot have too much of it?'

Shortly before *Philotas*, another experimental drama, as we may call it, had been written, by no means so successful as a work of art, but of much greater historic importance because much more fitted to be a determining force in the literary evolution of the time.

This was *Miss Sara Sampson*. The title is significant—in itself it is a summons to German authors to turn their eyes towards England. A tale of seduction, vengeance, and retribution laid entirely within the limits of middle-class life, a *tragédie bourgeoise*, in short, it marks in Germany that great break with the time-honoured traditions of tragedy, which in plays like *George Barnewell*, and the *Gamester*, and in tales like *Clarissa Harlowe* had already been accomplished in England. Lessing was now a close observer of everything that took place in that country. But if Lessing was Graicizing in *Philotas*, and Anglicizing in *Miss Sara Sampson*, he begins to be German in the immortal drama of *Minna von Barnhelm*, written while he was living in Breslau as the Secretary of the Governor of Silesia. The contemporary importance and significance of this play can hardly be exaggerated. The Seven Years' War had just closed, and the gigantic transformation which it announced in the fundamental conditions of German politics, the extraordinary and heroic adventures, the dazzling triumphs, the crushing defeats, the 'sudden making of splendid names,' with which its history teems, and with all this its markedly national character—no alien Gustavus Adolphus now fighting the battles of Germany, but a right German King with a German people at his back—all this had left the minds of men in the right temper to recognize true power and passion when they saw it; they were exalted, dilated, liberated. And Lessing's creative power, too, was now finally set free. *Minna von Barnhelm* rose from amid the disasters and glories of that age like a vision in which the spirit of the German nation took shape before the eyes of men. More than

all the victories of Frederick this noble drama gave men the right to say, 'There *is* then a Germany, a "Teutonica Patria"; in these robust, war-hardened limbs, there is indeed a soul.'

Goethe has somewhere spoken of the 'vast culture,' *die ungeheure Cultur*, displayed in Lessing's dramas, 'a culture,' he adds, 'beside which we all become barbarians again.' What does this culture mean? Lessing was a learned man, a scholar, but his scholarship is not displayed in his dramas as, for instance, that of Ben Jonson is. Goethe was speaking of a quality of which learning forms, indeed, a part, but not the whole. The essence of culture is not to know facts, but to perceive relations. It sees each thing, not isolated, but as part of an organic whole. Useless and barren without facts, it is to facts what Kant's categories are to phenomena, it gives them unity and significance. It is the mark of the dramatic writer who has this quality that the things which he makes us see and hear contain the suggestion of a world of things which we do not. His appreciation of the historical, social, religious, philosophical meaning of each episode governs, more or less consciously, his presentation of it, and hence his work has a richness and depth of interest such as passion alone, or the creative instinct alone, can never give us. The complete dramatist, in fact, has a power analogous to that possessed by a great actor, of making the visible suggest the invisible. I have often noticed that when Mr. Irving enters upon the stage he somehow suggests irresistibly the notion that he has come not from the wings or the green room, but from some region quite similar to that which we behold. To the illusion of the scenery which we see, he adds the illusion of a scenery

which we do not see, and which, in fact, is not there to be seen. If such an actor enters a room, we at once feel that this is a room in a house full of other rooms, he has just left one of them. If he is Orlando, he makes us feel, far better than the scene-painter can, that the stage is surrounded by the whole forest of Arden, he has walked through it for leagues. An analogous power of creating the spiritual background of the visible action is pre-eminently the power of the great dramatist, and it is pre-eminently the gift of culture, applied for the purposes of art. Through this power it is that the masters of the drama invariably make us feel that each character presented by them had a history, had experiences before we made his acquaintance, and that these experiences have helped to make him what he is. But a writer whose mind has covered so wide a field of study as Lessing's will do far more than this. He may suggest the complete character, not only of the individual but of the class, not only of the class but of the nation, not only of the nation but of the epoch; and he may, as Shakespeare so often does, suggest the relations of mankind at large to those great questions which are of no epoch and of no nationality.

*Minna von Barnhelm* is full of interest of this complex character. It is a picture painted in vivid and enduring colours of the period which had just closed, a period dominated, as the play itself is, by the towering personality of Frederick the Great. It is also a prophecy of the future, and a prophecy, so far as the union of Prussia and Saxony went, by no means within the reach of ordinary observation. For Saxony had sided with Austria in the great war, and had played her



unhappy part with fierce resolution. Again and again, when the Prussians were driving before them the wrecks of an Austrian army, they had found some battalion of Saxon infantry standing rock-fast amid the stream of defeat, and had found that they were not to be driven, only to be killed. Yet Lessing saw and declared that Prussia and Saxony were really one, and with his tale of a Prussian officer and his Saxon bride he overarched the vehement hatreds of the time with a word of reconciliation, 'word over all, beautiful as the sky.' This Lessing did in *Minna von Barnhelm* for the future of his country. What he did for the present was to ennoble the common, everyday life of the German nation. Beside the sweet and gracious humour which runs through this play, the most notable thing in it is its beautiful, unstrained, wholly untheatrical nobility of feeling. Hitherto German comedy had moved upon the level on which it is always found to move in countries backward in refinement and civilization. It was devoid of serious interest, of elevation; its laughter was a mockery and a degradation of the object. Even at the present day the eminent German historian Rudolph Gneist, in an essay written shortly before his death, deplored the barbarism of German comedy, and its habit of seeking its material purely on the base and ugly sides of life. But in Lessing's comedy the Russian proverb holds good: 'What you laugh at you love.' Lessing was a lover of Cervantes, and I imagine that Don Quixote, the most lovable of all laughable characters, suggested to him the conception of his disbanded Prussian officer. Tellheim is, of course, a perfectly rational and self-possessed human being. Yet his ideas are not without a certain dash of the fantastic element,

and beneath his exaggerated punctilio there beats a heart as simple and heroic as that of the Knight of La Mancha himself. How significant was the appearance of such a character on a stage which had never before seen a soldier, except in the character of some cowardly, swaggering Bobadil! How especially significant in the case of a great military nation like Prussia!

How fine, too, is the art by which the conduct of the plot is marked at every step! Goethe has described the opening scenes as a model of exposition. The conclusion is not less admirably contrived, and is particularly noticeable in this respect, that the exterior action is accompanied by an interior moral action which adds much to the depth of the interest. Tellheim, while his fortune and his reputation are clouded, rigidly refuses to allow the noble and wealthy maiden whose heart he has won in better days to link her fate with his. She has recourse to a stratagem; he is led to believe that she is disinherited, and cut off by her family, and immediately his instincts of protection and devotion start into eager life, and he feels himself ready to champion her against the world. But another unexpected turn takes place in the action—it is now *her* turn to be punctilious: to his dismay she reminds him of his own scruples, and asks if he will have her less sensitive, less honourable than himself. He has been fully cleared of the charge brought against him, and reinstated in the Prussian army; the king himself has sent his congratulations; and she bids him tread the path of glory unencumbered by a runaway Saxon girl of whom society will never forget that her relations disowned her. And so he learns to look through others' eyes as well as his own, to appreciate better the true proportions of things,

and when the pair are united at last, we know that their souls have met with a clear-eyed confidence born of a 'new acquist of true experience.'

The fact that Lessing's initiative was not followed up, and that the dramatic vein was never thoroughly worked out, was perhaps a greater misfortune for German literature than is commonly supposed. For in the evolution of literature age is linked to age, the future grows out of the present. And the discipline of the drama seems to give, as nothing else can give, a strong, athletic, sinewy fibre to the literature which has passed through it. It is easy to see how this comes about. A drama is a *doing*, an action. Place the poet under the necessity of making the passion with which he deals visible in *action*, and that an action which must strike an audience as natural and appropriate, and it is obvious that the passion is at once submitted to a severe test of its genuineness. Nothing that is artificial and hollow will pass muster here, and no mere magic of expression will avail to hide that hollowness if it exists. Hence the severe psychological study which the drama exacts—the wholesome necessity of keeping closely in touch with fact. Again, mark the conditions under which alone a drama can make a successful appeal to an audience—the variety it demands, and the conspicuous unity of action which it no less strictly demands—what a training in composition is here involved! Compare fiction as it exists at the present day in England and France with fiction as it exists, or tries to exist, in Germany, and we see what German literature lost when it turned away from the path pointed out by Lessing. Finally, it is an essential condition of the drama that the author shall keep himself out of sight.

He must not comment, he must not explain or justify ; he must gain the right moral and the right aesthetic effect by the bare presentation of what his audience will accept as a rendering of Nature. In dealing under these conditions with a great and moving theme, what a power of concentration, what a mastery of expression, what delicacy of judgement are involved ! As a piece of artistic training it has precisely the same effect as it has on a human character to be forced to wrestle with the grim realities of life. To be told, ' Words, intentions, will not avail you here—show what you can *do*,' is bracing to the strong in the measure of their strength, disastrous to the feeble in the measure of their weakness. And it is the drama above all forms of literary art which lays upon the poet that severe and wholesome ordeal.

All this Lessing knew well, and in his *Hamburgische Dramaturgie* he clearly pointed out the road which German literature would have to travel ; in *Minna von Barnhelm* and *Emilia Galotti* he led the way as far as it was given to him to go. But Germany at the last moment shrank from that rugged path, and instead of the strenuous wrestling with, and conquest of, a stubborn material, there came an opening of the floodgates and a limitless gush of lyrical sentiment. Not, of course, that German literature turned away from the stage. But it did turn away from the true dramatic form. Goethe became the dominating influence in German literature after Lessing's death ; and, unfortunately, there was nothing in the character of Goethe's genius which fitted him to carry on and complete the work of his predecessor. Nor would he, as Lessing has acknowledged himself to have done, make up for the lack of genius

by the exercise of a strenuous critical intelligence. Compare the methods of the two men : Lessing doing hack-work for a company which had to earn its living by filling the house, adapting, re-writing—just like Shakespeare, in fact—then writing on his own account tentative, crude performances, but always aiming at a true popular success (which he obtained abundantly), and always determined not to steal for a bad drama the admiration which might be paid to clever dialogue. Compare with this Goethe governing his subsidised theatre at Weimar, imposing upon the actors all manner of artificial and mistaken rules, clapping them into the guardroom if they presumed to know their own art better than he did, domineering over the audience, forbidding it to hiss, forbidding it to laugh, finally forbidding it to applaud ! Really it is not surprising that, after Weimar had for thirty years endured the misguided experiments of an irresponsible amateur, it should have welcomed with insuppressible delight the performances of that accomplished poodle, whose advent, as we know, was the occasion of Goethe's resignation.

The true position of that poodle in the history of German literature still remains to be vindicated. What its performances were like we know not—historians have contented themselves with levelling insulting observations at its innocent head. But let us glance at the performances it supplanted—at the dramatic works of Goethe himself. We need not speak of *Goetz* and *Clavigo*, on the one hand, which are hardly to be taken as serious dramatic efforts, nor of *Faust*, in which, as in Lessing's *Nathan*, the interest is avowedly philosophical. But consider *Iphigenie*, a poem, indeed, of serene and stately beauty, but a drama in which, as

Schiller observes, 'everything which specifically belongs to a dramatic work is wanting,' studiously avoided it would appear, lest it should clash with the moral interest which is the main concern of the piece. Or consider *Tasso*, where the tragic interest is made to turn upon a mental aberration, which at once removes the central figure from the range of normal human sympathies. One can pity Malvolio, but one cannot make him the hero of a tragedy. Or consider *Egmont*, where Goethe, unable to give us the right dramatic impression of an heroic figure triumphant in defeat, such as we find, for instance, in the Brutus of Shakespeare, has to reconcile the spectator to the tragic issue by means of a puerile vision, in which we behold the Genius of Freedom, who, after a long performance in dumb show, is to *andeyten*, to suggest (in some unexplained fashion) that the 'death of Egmont will secure the freedom of the Provinces.' Or consider the last speech of Egmont, an eloquent and moving appeal addressed to persons not one of whom is within earshot!

Now let us call to mind Lessing's treatment of a tragic situation in *Emilia Galotti*. She has been kidnapped by the Prince of Guastella, and is absolutely in his power. She knows his designs upon her honour, and entreats her father, who has gained access to her, to give her his dagger that she may slay herself. He shrinks from this dreadful issue, and she puts her hand to her head to search for the long dagger-pin which secures the coils of her hair, when she touches the rose she had placed there on her bridal morn.

"Thou still here?" she cries. "Down with thee; thou art not for the hair of one such as my father will have me."

ODOARDO: "O, my daughter——"

‘EMILIA: “Father, did I guess right? Yet no—you would not have that! But why did you then restrain me?” [*She plucks the rose to pieces.*] “Long ago, indeed, there was a father who, to save his daughter’s honour, seized the nearest blade his hand could find and drove it to her heart. He gave her life a second time. But all such deeds are of long ago. There are no such fathers now!”

‘ODOARDO: “There are, my daughter, there are [*stabbing her*]. God, what have I done?” [*She sinks to the ground in his arms.*]

‘EMILIA: “You have plucked a rose before the storm had stripped it of its leaves. Let me kiss it—this fatherly hand.”’

I do not speak of the manner in which this conclusion is motived and led up to; there, it appears to me, Lessing has been wanting in judgement. But the actual issue itself is satisfying—it is great dramatic art. We pity and we fear, but in our pity and fear there is a sense of exaltation and triumph; and we need the aid of no vision or other intrusive comment of the author to tell us that the pure soul of Emilia has taken the nobler and better part.

But if the dramas of Goethe tended to lead the development of German literature out of its true course, what, it may be asked, of those of Schiller, who made the drama quite as much an object of serious effort as Goethe did? Here we are certainly on different ground. Schiller had a genuine dramatic instinct. But unfortunately that instinct was never entirely successful in combating his overmastering tendency to prolixity and diffuseness. Page after page is filled with empty declamation—declamation which is sometimes very good in its way, but which does nothing either to advance the action or to illustrate character. Sometimes, as in the death of Gessler, he grasps with more or less unsteady hand a true dramatic situation. But how much in vain Lessing had written for him may be judged from the conclusion of *Tell*, where he inserts a long scene which

is a mere unsightly excrescence on the play, for the sole purpose of making it quite clear that he was not prepared to extend an absolutely unqualified approval to the practice of tyrannicide.

Every one knows the fine epigram devoted by Goethe and Schiller to the memory of Lessing :

‘Living we honoured thee, loved thee, we set thee among the  
Immortals.

Dead, and thy spirit still reigns over the spirits of men.’

Alas! the shade of Lessing, if this noble tribute could have reached its ears, might have murmured in reply the lines of the epigram in which he himself had long ago begged the German people to praise their poets less and study them more :

‘Wir wollen weniger erhoben  
Und fleissiger gelesen sein.’

In the preface to a recent volume of translations from the German I find Mr. Gladstone taken to task for declaring, in the columns of the *Speaker*, that the whole of German literature might be said to lie within the period covered by the lifetime of Goethe. Assuming that Mr. Gladstone intended to refer only to modern German poetry, written in the modern German tongue, this statement is still rather too sweeping. The limit must, at least, be extended to the death of Heinrich Heine, who outlived Goethe by some twenty years. But it is certainly true that in the present day the best powers of the German intellect are going into science, into politics, into music, into anything but creative literature. And this is the more remarkable, in that we should have expected the great war with France, which crowned the struggle of so many centuries, to



have given, as such events usually do give, a mighty impulse to that form of art which can mirror more intimately and more completely than any other the aspirations and passions of a people. Not that the German poets have neglected that subject. From Geibel downwards it has, of course, been taken possession of by every purveyor of poetical platitudes to the German people. I have read, or tried to read, one portentous work, much lauded by some German critics, which is nothing less than a history of the Franco-German war, written in a sonnet-sequence of five hundred sonnets. This is the kind of literature produced by the Franco-German war: the Seven Years' War produced *Minna von Barnhelm*. But the writer of *Minna von Barnhelm* had prepared the soil for the growth of a great literature in a way which no one attempts at present. And the preparation was of the nature of a very fierce and rigorous harrowing and tearing. In the *Laocoon* and the other well-known critical works of Lessing large questions of permanent interest are handled. But besides these works, which we all know more or less, there was a vast body of work of a more fugitive character, in the shape of the critical notices which for many years Lessing contributed to various German newspapers. In these notices Lessing covered the whole field of contemporary literature. In the great works he stated the great principles which have governed all aesthetic criticism ever since. In his journalistic work he applied those principles in the concrete, and drove the lesson home. The path to Parnassus under these circumstances was not an easy one in Germany; it was indeed raked by an artillery fire against which no complacent mediocrity could make head. With

human complacency, Lessing waged a relentless and truceless war. And he was endowed for this war with a style of extraordinary force and incisiveness, a spirit of the true leonine temper, loving to fly at the tallest quarry, a scholarship of which it seemed hopeless to discover the limit, and an all but unerring perception of what was fine and what was worthless, what was sense and what nonsense, what had the germs of life and power and what was mere windy pretension. That was the preparation for the renascence of German literature. And when we see such a force in German criticism again, we shall have seen the most hopeful sign of another renascence. German literature, creative and critical, is correct, erudite, complacent, prolix and anaemic. It has a host of excellent writers, but no one to whom truth, reason and beauty are sacred enough or their opposites detestable enough. What it needs, and what I doubt not the 'Teutonica Patria' will one day supply, is just that which it so eminently had in Lessing—a man.

1892.

## LA MUSIQUE ET LES LETTRES

**J**USQU'ICI et depuis longtemps, deux nations, l'Angleterre, la France, les seules, parallèlement ont montré la superstition d'une Littérature. L'une à l'autre tendant avec magnanimité le flambeau, ou le retirant et tour à tour éclaire l'influence ; mais c'est l'objet de ma constatation, moins cette alternative (expliquant un peu une présence, parmi vous, jusqu'à y parler ma langue) que, d'abord, la visée si spéciale d'une continuité dans les chefs-d'œuvre. A nul égard, le génie ne peut cesser d'être exceptionnel, altitude de fronton inopinée dont dépasse l'angle ; cependant, il ne projette, comme partout ailleurs, d'espaces vagues ou à l'abandon, entretenant au contraire une ordonnance et presque un remplissage admirable d'édicules moindres, colonnades, fontaines, statues—spirituels—pour produire, dans un ensemble, quelque palais ininterrompu et ouvert à la royauté de chacun, d'où naît le goût des patries : lequel en le double cas, hésitera, avec délice, devant une rivalité d'architectures comparables et sublimes.

UN intérêt de votre part, me conviant à des renseignements sur quelques circonstances de notre état littéraire, ne le fait pas à une date oiseuse.

J'APPORTE en effet des nouvelles. Les plus surprenantes. Même cas ne se vit encore.

— On a touché au vers.

Les gouvernements changent ; toujours la prosodie reste intacte : soit que, dans les révolutions, elle passe inaperçue ou que l'attentat ne s'impose pas avec l'opinion que ce dogme dernier puisse varier.

Il convient d'en parler déjà, ainsi qu'un invité voyageur tout de suite se décharge par traits haletants du témoignage d'un accident su et le poursuivant : en raison que le vers est tout, dès qu'on écrit. Style, versification s'il y a cadence et c'est pourquoi toute prose d'écrivain fastueux, soustraite à ce laisser-aller en usage, ornementale, vaut en tant qu'un vers rompu, jouant avec ses timbres et encore les rimes dissimulées ; selon un thyrsé plus complexe. Bien l'épanouissement de ce qui naguères obtint le titre de *poème en prose*.

Très strict, numérique, direct, à jeux conjoints, le mètre, antérieur, subsiste ; auprès.

Sûr, nous en sommes là, présentement. La séparation.

Au lieu qu'au début de ce siècle, l'ouïe puissante romantique combina l'élément jumeau en ses ondoyants alexandrins, ceux à coupe ponctuée et enjambements ; la fusion se défait vers l'intégrité. Une heureuse trouvaille avec quoi paraît à peu près close la recherche d'hier, aura été le *vers libre*, modulation (dis-je, souvenant) individuelle, parce que toute âme est un nœud rythmique.

Après, les dissensions. Quelques initiateurs, il le

fallait, sont partis loin, pensant en avoir fini avec un canon (que je nomme, pour sa garantie) officiel : il restera, aux grandes cérémonies. Audace, cette désaffectation, l'unique ; dont rabattre. . .

Ceux qui virent tout de mauvais œil estiment que du temps probablement vient d'être perdu.

Pas.

A cause que de vraies œuvres ont jailli, indépendamment d'un débat de forme et, ne les reconnût-on, la qualité du silence, qui les remplacerait, à l'entour d'un instrument surmené, est précieuse. Le vers, aux occasions, fulmine, rareté (quoiqu'ait été à l'instant vu que tout, mesuré, l'est) : comme la Littérature, malgré le besoin, propre à vous et à nous, de la perpétuer dans chaque âge, représente un produit singulier. Surtout la métrique française, délicate, serait d'emploi intermittent : maintenant, grâce à des repos balbutiants, voici que de nouveau peut s'élever, d'après une intonation parfaite, le vers de toujours, fluide, restauré, avec des compléments peut-être suprêmes.

ORAGE, lustral ; et, dans des bouleversements, tout à l'acquit de la génération récente, l'acte d'écrire se scruta jusqu'en l'origine. Très avant, au moins, quant à un point, je le formule :—A savoir s'il y a lieu d'écrire. Les monuments, la mer, la face humaine, dans leur plénitude, natifs, conservant une vertu autrement attrayante que ne les voilera une description, évocation dites, allusion je sais, suggestion : cette terminologie quelque peu de hasard atteste la tendance, une très décisive, peut-être, qu'ait subie l'art littéraire, elle le borne et l'exempte. Son sortilège, à lui, si ce n'est libérer, hors d'une poignée de poussière ou réalité sans l'enclure, au livre, même comme texte, la dispersion volatile soit

l'esprit, qui n'a que faire de rien outre la musicalité de tout.

Ainsi, quant au malaise ayant tantôt sévi, ses accès prompts et de nobles hésitations ; déjà vous en savez autant qu'aucun.

FAUT-IL s'arrêter là et d'où ai-je le sentiment que je suis venu relativement à un sujet beaucoup plus vaste peut-être à moi-même inconnu, que telle rénovation de rites et de rimes ; pour y atteindre, sinon le traiter. Tant de bienveillance comme une invite à parler sur ce que j'aime ; aussi la considérable appréhension d'une attente étrangère, me ramènent on ne sait quel ancien souhait maintes fois dénié par la solitude, quelque soir prodigieusement de me rendre compte à fond et haut de la crise idéale qui, autant qu'une autre, sociale, éprouve certains : ou, tout de suite, malgré ce qu'une telle question devant un auditoire voué aux élégances scripturales a de soudain, poursuivre :—Quelque chose comme les Lettres existe-t-il ; autre (une convention fut, aux époques classiques, cela) que l'affinement, vers leur expression burinée, des notions, en tout domaine. L'observance qu'un architecte, un légiste, un médecin pour parfaire la construction ou la découverte, les élève au discours : bref, que tout ce qui émane de l'esprit, se réintègre. Généralement, n'importe les matières.

Très peu se sont dressé cette énigme, qui assombrit, ainsi que je le fais, sur le tard, pris par un brusque doute concernant ce dont je voudrais parler avec élan. Ce genre d'investigation peut-être a été éludé, en paix, comme dangereux, par ceux-là qui, sommés d'une faculté, se ruèrent à son injonction ; craignant de la diminuer au clair de la réponse. Tout dessein dure ; à quoi on impose d'être par une foi ou des facilités, qui

font que c'est, selon soi. Admirez le berger, dont la voix, heurtée à des rochers malins jamais ne lui revient selon le trouble d'un ricanement. Tant mieux : il y a d'autre part aise, et maturité, à demander un soleil, même couchant, sur les causes d'une vocation.

Or, voici qu'à cette mise en demeure extraordinaire, tout à l'heure, révoquant les titres d'une fonction notoire, quand s'agissait, plutôt, d'enguirlander l'autel ; à ce subit envahissement, comme d'une sorte indéfinissable de défiance (pas même devant mes forces), je réponds par une exagération, certes, et vous en prévenant. — Oui, que la Littérature existe et, si l'on veut, seule, à l'exclusion de tout. Accomplissement, du moins, à qui ne va nom mieux donné.

Un homme peut advenir, en tout oublié—jamais ne sied d'ignorer qu'exprès—de l'encombrement intellectuel chez les contemporains ; afin de savoir, selon quelque recours très simple et primitif, par exemple la symphonique équation propre aux saisons, habitude de rayon et de nuée ; deux remarques ou trois d'ordre analogue à ces ardeurs, à ces intempéries par où notre passion relève des divers ciels : s'il a, recréé par lui-même, pris soin de conserver de son débarras strictement une piété aux vingt-quatre lettres comme elles se sont, par le miracle de l'infinité, fixées en quelque langue la sienne, puis un sens pour leurs symétries, action, reflet, jusqu'à une transfiguration en le terme surnaturel, qu'est le vers ; il possède, ce civilisé édenique, au-dessus d'autre bien, l'élément de félicités, une doctrine en même temps qu'une contrée. Quand son initiative, ou la force virtuelle des caractères divins lui enseigne de les mettre en œuvre.

Avec l'ingénuité de notre fonds, ce legs, l'ortho-

graphe, des antiques grimoires, isole, en tant que Littérature, spontanément elle, une façon de noter. Moyen, que plus! principe. Le tour de telle phrase ou le lac d'un distique, copiés sur notre conformation, aident l'écllosion, en nous, d'aperçus et de correspondances.

STRICTEMENT j'envisage, écartés vos folios d'études, rubriques, parchemin, la lecture comme une pratique désespérée. Ainsi toute industrie a-t-elle failli à la fabrication du bonheur, que l'agencement ne s'en trouve à portée: je connais des instants où quoi que ce soit, au nom d'une disposition secrète, ne doit satisfaire.

*Autre chose* . . . ce semble que l'épars frémissent d'une page ne veuille sinon surseoir ou palpite d'impatience, à la possibilité d'autre chose.

Nous savons, captifs d'une formule absolue, que, certes, n'est que ce qui est. Incontinent écarter cependant, sous un prétexte, le leurre, accuserait notre inconséquence, niant le plaisir que nous voulons prendre: car cet *au-delà* en est l'agent, et le moteur dirais-je si je ne répugnais à opérer, en public, le démontage impie de la fiction et conséquemment du mécanisme littéraire, pour étaler la pièce principale ou rien. Mais, je vénère comment, par une supercherie, on projette, à quelque élévation défendue et de foudre! le conscient manque chez nous de ce qui là-haut éclate.

A quoi sert cela—

A un jeu.

En vue qu'une attirance supérieure comme d'un vide, nous avons droit, le tirant de nous par de l'ennui à l'égard des choses si elles s'établissaient solides et prépondérantes — éperdument les détache jusqu'à s'en remplir et aussi les douer de resplendissement,



à travers l'espace vacant, en des fêtes à volonté et solitaires.

Quant à moi, je ne demande pas moins à l'écriture et vais prouver ce postulat.

LA NATURE a lieu, on n'y ajoutera pas ; que des cités, les voies ferrées et plusieurs inventions formant notre matériel.

Tout l'acte disponible, à jamais et seulement, reste de saisir les rapports, entre temps, rares ou multipliés ; d'après quelque état intérieur et que l'on veuille à son gré étendre, simplifier le monde.

A l'égal de créer : la notion d'un objet, échappant, qui fait défaut.

Semblable occupation suffit, comparer les aspects et leur nombre tel qu'il frôle notre négligence : y éveillant, pour décor, l'ambiguïté de quelques figures belles, aux intersections. La totale arabesque, qui les relie, a de vertigineuses sautes en un effroi que reconnue ; et d'anxieux accords. Avertissant par tel écart, au lieu de déconcerter, ou que sa similitude avec elle-même, la soustraie en la confondant. Chiffration mélodique tue, de ces motifs qui composent une logique, avec nos fibres. Quelle agonie, aussi, qu'agite la Chimère versant par ses blessures d'or l'évidence de tout l'être pareil, nulle torsion vaincue ne fausse ni ne transgresse l'omniprésente Ligne espacée de tout point à tout autre pour instituer l'Idée ; sinon sous le visage humain, mystérieuse, en tant qu'une Harmonie est pure.

Surprendre habituellement cela, le marquer, me frappe comme une obligation de qui déchaîna l'Infini ; dont le rythme, parmi les touches du clavier verbal, se rend, comme sous l'interrogation d'un doigté, à l'emploi des mots, aptes, quotidiens.

Avec véracité, qu'est-ce, les Lettres, que cette mentale poursuite, menée, en tant que le discours, afin de définir ou de faire, à l'égard de soi-même, preuve que le spectacle répond à une imaginative compréhension, il est vrai, dans l'espoir de s'y mirer.

Je sais que la Musique ou ce qu'on est convenu de nommer ainsi, dans l'acception ordinaire, la limitant aux exécutions concertantes avec le secours, des cordes, des cuivres et des bois et cette licence, en outre, qu'elle s'adjoigne la parole, cache une ambition, la même; sauf à n'en rien dire, parce qu'elle ne se confie pas volontiers. Par contre, à ce tracé, il y a une minute, des sinueuses et mobiles variations de l'Idée, que l'écrit revendique de fixer, y eut-il, peut-être, chez quelques-uns de vous, lieu de confronter à telles phrases une réminiscence de l'orchestre; où succède à des rentrées en l'ombre, après un remous soucieux, tout à coup l'éruptif multiple sursautement de la clarté, comme les proches irradiations d'un lever de jour: vain, si le langage, par la retrempe et l'essor purifiants du chant, n'y confère un sens.

CONSIDÉREZ, notre investigation aboutit: un échange peut, ou plutôt il doit survenir, en retour du triomphal appoint, le verbe, que coûte que coûte ou plaintivement à un moment même bref accepte l'instrumentation, afin de ne demeurer les forces de la vie aveugles à leur splendeur, latentes ou sans issue. Je réclame la restitution, au silence impartial, pour que l'esprit essaie à se rapatrier, de tout—chocs, glissements, les trajectoires illimitées et sûres, tel état opulent aussitôt évasif, une inaptitude délicate à finir, ce raccourci, ce trait—l'appareil; moins le tumulte des sonorités, transfusibles, encore, en du songe.

Les grands, de magiques écrivains, apportent une persuasion de cette conformité.

ALORS, on possède, avec justesse, les moyens réciproques du Mystère—oublions la vieille distinction, entre la Musique et les Lettres, n'étant que le partage, voulu, pour sa rencontre ultérieure, du cas premier : l'une évocatoire de prestiges situés à ce point de l'ouïe et presque de la vision abstrait, devenu l'entendement ; qui, spacieux, accorde au feuillet d'imprimerie une portée égale.

Je pose, à mes risques esthétiquement, cette conclusion (si par quelque grâce, absente, toujours, d'un exposé, je vous amenai à la ratifier, ce serait pour moi l'honneur cherché ce soir) : que la Musique et les Lettres sont la face alternative ici élargie vers l'obscur ; scintillante là, avec certitude, d'un phénomène, le seul, je l'appelai l'Idée.

L'un des modes incline à l'autre et y disparaissant, ressort avec emprunts : deux fois, se parachève, oscillant, un genre entier. Théâtralement, pour la foule qui assiste, sans conscience, à l'audition de sa grandeur : ou, l'individu requiert la lucidité, du livre explicatif et familier.

MAINTENANT que je respire dégagé de l'inquiétude, moindre que mon remords pour vous y avoir initiés, celle, en commençant un entretien, de ne pas se trouver certain si le sujet, dont on veut discourir, implique une authenticité, nécessaire à l'acceptation ; et que, ce fondement, du moins, vous l'accordâtes, par la solennité de votre sympathie pendant que se hâtaient, avec un cours fatal et quasi impersonnel des divulgations, neuves pour moi ou durables si on y acquiesce : il me paraît qu'inespérément je vous aperçois en plus d'intimité,

selon le vague dissipé. Alors causer comme entre gens, pour qui le charme fut de se réunir, notre dessein, me séduirait; pardon d'un retard à m'y complaire: j'accuse l'ombre sérieuse qui fond, des nuits de votre ville où règne la désuétude de tout excepté de penser, vers cette salle particulièrement sonore au rêve. Ai-je, quand s'offrait une causerie, disserté, ajoutant cette suite à vos cours des matinées; enfin, fait une leçon? La spécieuse appellation de chef d'école vite décernée par la rumeur à qui s'exerce seul et de ce fait groupe les juvéniles et chers désintéressements, a pu, précédant votre '*lecturer,*' ne sonner faux. Rien pourtant; certes, du tout. Si reclus que médite dans le laboratoire de sa dilection, en mystagogue, j'accepte, un, qui joue sa part sur quelques rêveries à déterminer; la démarche capable de l'en tirer, loyauté, presque devoir, s'impose d'épancher à l'adolescence une ferveur tenue d'aînés; j'affectionne cette habitude: il ne faut, dans mon pays ni au vôtre, convînmes-nous, qu'une lacune se déclare dans la succession du fait littéraire, même un désaccord. Renouer la tradition à des souhaits précurseurs, comme une hantise m'aura valu de me retrouver peu dépaysé, ici; devant cette assemblée de maîtres illustres et d'une jeune élite.

A BON escient, que prendre, pour notre distraction si ce n'est la comédie, amusante jusqu'au quiproquo, des malentendus?

Le pire, sans sortir d'ici-même, celui-là fâcheux, je l'indique pour le rejeter, serait que flottât, dans cette atmosphère, quelque déception née de vous, Mesdames et mes vaillantes auditrices. Si vous avez attendu un commentaire murmuré et brillant à votre piano; ou encore me vîtes-vous, peut-être, incompetent sur le cas

de volumes, romans, feuilletés par vos loisirs. A quoi bon : toutes, employant le don d'écrire, à sa source ? Je pensais, en chemin de fer, dans ce déplacement, à des chefs-d'œuvre inédits, la correspondance de chaque nuit, emportée par les sacs de poste, comme un chargement de prix, par excellence, derrière la locomotive. Vous en êtes les auteurs privilégiés ; et je me disais que, pour devenir songeuses, éloquents ou bonnes aussi selon la plume et y susciter avec tous ses feux une beauté tournée au-dedans, ce vous est superflu de recourir à des considérations abstruses : vous détachez une blancheur de papier, comme luit votre sourire, écrivez, voilà.

LA SITUATION, celle du poète, rêvé-je d'énoncer, ne laisse pas de découvrir quelque difficulté, ou du comique.

Un lamentable seigneur exilant son spectre de ruines lentes à l'ensevelir, en la légende et le mélodrame, c'est lui, dans l'ordre journalier : lui, ce l'est, tout de même, à qui on fait remonter la présentation, en tant qu'explosif, d'un concept trop vierge, à la Société.

DES coupures d'articles un peu chuchotent ma part, oh ! pas assez modeste, au scandale que propage un tome, paraît-il, le premier d'un libelle obstiné à l'abatage des fronts principaux d'aujourd'hui presque partout ; et la fréquence des termes d'idiot et de fou rarement tempérés en imbécile ou dément, comme autant de pierres lancées à l'importunité hautaine d'une féodalité d'esprit qui menace apparemment l'Europe, ne serait pas de tout point pour déplaire ; eu égard à trop de bonne volonté, je n'ose la railler, chez les gens, à s'enthousiasmer en faveur de vacants symptômes, tant n'importe quoi veut se construire. Le malheur,

dans l'espèce, que la science s'en mêle ; ou qu'on l'y mêle. *Dégénérescence*, le titre, *Entartung*, cela vient d'Allemagne, est l'ouvrage, soyons explicite, de M. Nordau : je m'étais interdit, pour garder à des dires une généralité, de nommer personne et ne crois pas avoir, présentement, enfreint mon souci. Ce vulgarisateur a observé un fait. La nature n'engendre le génie immédiat et complet, il répondrait au type de l'homme et ne serait aucun ; mais pratiquement, occultement touche d'un pouce indemne, et presque l'abolit, telle faculté, chez celui, à qui elle propose une munificence contraire : ce sont là des arts pieux ou de maternelles perpétrations conjurant une clairvoyance de critique et de juge exempt non de tendresse. Suivez, que se passe-t-il ? Tirant une force de sa privation, croît, vers des intentions plénières, l'infirme élu, qui laisse, certes, après lui, comme un innombrable déchet, ses frères, cas étiquetés par la médecine ou les bulletins d'un suffrage le vote fini. L'erreur du pamphlétaire en question est d'avoir traité tout comme un déchet. Ainsi il ne faut pas que des arcanes subtils de la physiologie, et de la destinée, s'égarant à des mains, grosses pour les manier, de contremaître excellent ou de probe ajusteur. Lequel s'arrête à mi-but et voyez ! pour de la divination en sus, il aurait compris, sur un point, de pauvres et sacrés procédés naturels et n'eût pas fait son livre.

L'injure, opposée, bégaie en des journaux, faute de hardiesse : un soupçon prêt à poindre, pourquoi la réticence ? Les engins, dont le bris illumine les parlements d'une lueur sommaire, mais estropié, aussi à faire grand'pitié, des badauds, je m'y intéresserais, en raison de la lueur—sans la brièveté de son enseignement qui permet au législateur d'alléguer une

définitive incompréhension ; mais j'y récuse l'adjonction de balles à tir et de clous. Tel un avis ; et, incriminer de tout dommage ceci uniquement qu'il y ait des écrivains à l'écart tenant, ou pas, pour le vers libre, me captive, surtout par de l'ingéniosité. Près, eux, se réservent, au loin, comme pour une occasion, ils offensent le fait divers : que dérobent-ils, toujours jettent-ils ainsi du discrédit, moins qu'une bombe, sur ce que de mieux, indisputablement et à grands frais, fournit une capitale comme rédaction courante de ses apothéoses : à condition qu'elle ne le décrète pas dernier mot, ni le premier, relativement à certains éblouissements, aussi, que peut d'elle-même tirer la parole. Je souhaiterais qu'on poussât un avis jusqu'à délaissier l'insinuation ; proclamant, salutaire, la retraite chaste de plusieurs. Il importe que dans tout concours de la multitude quelque part vers l'intérêt, l'amusement, ou la commodité, de rares amateurs, respectueux du motif commun en tant que façon d'y montrer de l'indifférence, instituent par cet air à côté, une minorité ; attendu, quelle divergence que creuse le conflit furieux des citoyens, tous, sous l'œil souverain, font une unanimité—d'accord, au moins, que ce à propos de quoi on s'entre-dévore, compte : or, posé le besoin d'exception, comme de sel ! la vraie qui, indéfectiblement, fonctionne, gît dans ce séjour de quelques esprits, je ne sais, à leur éloge, comment les désigner, gratuits, étrangers, peut-être vains—ou littéraires.

NULLE—la tentative d'égayer un ton, plutôt sévère, que prit l'entretien et sa pointe de dogmatisme, par quelque badinage envers l'incohérence dont la rue assaille quiconque, à part le profit, thésaurise les richesses extrêmes, ne les gâche : est-ce miasme ou

que, certains sujets touchés, en persiste la vibration grave ? mais il semble que ma pièce d'artifice, allumée par une concession ici inutile, a fait long feu.

Préféablement.

Sans feinte, il me devient loisible de terminer, avec impénitence ; gardant un étonnement que leur cas, à tels poètes, ait été considéré, seulement, sous une équivoque pour y opposer inintelligence double.

TANDIS que le regard intuitif se plaît à discerner la justice, dans une contradiction enjoignant parmi l'ébat, à maîtriser, des gloires en leur recul—que l'interprète, par gageure, ni même en virtuose, mais charitablement, aille comme matériaux pour rendre l'illusion, choisir les mots, les aptes mots, de l'école, du logis et du marché. Le vers va s'émouvoir de quelque balancement, terrible et suave, comme l'orchestre, aile tendue ; mais avec des serres enracinées à vous. Là-bas, où que ce soit, nier l'indicible, qui ment.

UN HUMBLE, mon semblable, dont le verbe occupe les lèvres, peut, selon ce moyen médiocre, pas ! si consent à se joindre, en accompagnement, un écho inentendu, communiquer, dans le vocabulaire, à toute pompe et à toute lumière ; car, pour chaque, sied que la vérité se révèle, comme elle est, magnifique. Contribuable soumis, ensuite, il paie de son assentiment l'impôt conforme au trésor d'une patrie envers ses enfants.

*Parce que*, péremptoirement—je l'infère de cette célébration de la Poésie, dont nous avons parlé, sans l'invoquer presque une heure en les attributs de Musique et de Lettres : appelez-la Mystère ou n'est-ce pas ? le contexte évolutif de l'Idée—je disais *parce que* . . .

*Un grand dommage a été causé* à l'association terrestre, séculairement, de lui indiquer le mirage



brutal, la cité, ses gouvernements, le code, autrement que comme emblèmes ou, quant à notre état, ce que des nécropoles sont au paradis qu'elles évaporent : un terre-plein, presque pas vil. Péage, élections, ce n'est ici-bas, où semble s'en résumer l'application, que se passent, augustement, les formalités édictant un culte populaire, comme représentatives—de la Loi, sise en toute transparence, nudité et merveille.

Minez ces substructions, quand l'obscurité en offense la perspective, non—alignez-y des lampions, pour voir : il s'agit que vos pensées exigent du sol un simulacre.

SI, dans l'avenir, en France, ressurgit une religion, ce sera l'amplification à mille joies de l'instinct de ciel en chacun ; plutôt qu'une autre menace, réduire ce jet au niveau élémentaire de la politique. Voter, même pour soi, ne contente pas, en tant qu'expansion d'hymne avec trompettes intimant l'allégresse de n'émettre aucun nom ; ni l'émeute, suffisamment, n'enveloppe de la tourmente nécessaire à ruisseler, se confondre, et renaître, héros.

JE m'interromps, d'abord en vue de n'élargir, outre mesure pour une fois, ce sujet où tout se rattache, l'art littéraire : et moi-même inhabile à la plaisanterie, voulant éviter, du moins, le ridicule à votre sens comme au mien (permettez-moi de dire cela tout un) qu'il y aurait, Messieurs, à vaticiner.

1893.

LA transparence de pensée s'unifie, entre public et causeur, comme une glace, qui se fend, la voix tue : on me pardonnera si je collectionne, pour la lucidité, ici tels débris au coupant vif, omissions, conséquences, ou les regards inexprimés. Ce sera ces Notes.

Page 131. . . . Comme partout ailleurs, d'espaces vagues. Discontinuité en l'Italie, l'Espagne, du moins pour l'œil de dehors, ébloui d'un Dante, un Cervantes ; l'Allemagne même accepte des intervalles entre ses éclats.

Je maintiens le dire.

P. 132, § 7. . . . La séparation. Le vers par flèches jeté moins avec succession que presque simultanément pour l'idée, réduit la durée à une division spirituelle propre au sujet : diffère de la phrase ou développement temporaire, dont la prose joue, le dissimulant, selon mille tours.

A l'un, sa pieuse majuscule ou clé allitérative, et la rime, pour le régler : l'autre genre, d'un élan précipité et sensitif tournoie et se case, au gré d'une ponctuation qui disposée sur papier blanc, déjà y signifie.

Avec le vers libre (envers lui je ne me répéterai) on prose à coupe méditée, je ne sais pas d'autre emploi du langage que ceux-ci redevenus parallèles : excepté l'affiche, lapidaire, envahissant le journal—souvent elle me fit songer comme devant un parler nouveau et l'originalité de la Presse.

Les articles, dits premier-Paris, admirables et la seule forme contemporaine parce que de toute éternité, sont des poèmes, voilà, plus ou moins bien simplement ; riches, nuls, en cloisonné ou sur fond à la colle.

On a le tort critique, selon moi, dans les salles de rédaction, d'y voir un genre à part.

P. 133, § 4. . . . **A l'entour d'un instrument surmené, est précieuse.** Tout à coup se clôt par la liberté, en dedans, de l'alexandrin, césure à volonté y compris l'hémistiche, la visée, où resta le Parnasse, si décrié: il instaura le vers énoncé seul sans participation d'un souffle préalable chez le lecteur ou mû par la vertu de la place et de la dimension des mots. Son retard, avec un mécanisme à peu près définitif, de n'en avoir précisé l'opération ou la poétique. Que, l'agencement évoluât à vide depuis, selon des bruits perçus de volant et de courroie, trop immédiats, n'est pas le pis; mais, à mon sens, la prétention d'enfermer, en l'expression, la matière des objets. Le temps a parfait l'œuvre: et qui parle, entre nous, de scission? Au vers impersonnel ou pur s'adaptera l'instinct qui dégage, du monde, un chant, pour en illuminer le rythme fondamental et rejette, vain, le résidu.

P. 133, § 4. . . . **Serait d'emploi intermittent.** Je ne blâme, ne dédaigne les périodes d'éclipse où l'art, instructif, a ceci que l'usure divulgue les pieuses manies de sa trame.

P. 136, § 7. . . . **En vue qu'une attirance supérieure . . .** Pyrotechnique non moins que métaphysique, ce point de vue; mais un feu d'artifice, à la hauteur et à l'exemple de la pensée, épanouit la réjouissance idéale.

P. 139, § 4. . . . **Requiert la lucidité, du livre explicatif et familier.** La vérité si on s'ingénie aux tracés, ordonne Industrie aboutissant à Finance, comme Musique à Lettres, pour circonscrire un domaine de Fiction, parfait terme compréhensif.

La Musique sans les Lettres se présente comme très subtil nuage: seules, elles, une monnaie si courante.

Il convenait de ne pas disjoindre davantage. Le titre, proposé à l'issue d'une causerie, jadis, devant le messenger oxonien, indiqua *Music and Letters*, moitié de sujet, intacte : sa contre-partie sociale omise. Nœud de la harangue, me voici fournir ce morceau, tout d'une pièce, aux auditeurs, sur fond de mise en scène ou de dramatisation spéculatives : entre les préliminaires cursifs et la détente de commérages ramenée au souci du jour précisément en vue de combler le manque d'intérêt extra-esthétique. — Tout se résume dans l'Esthétique et l'Économie politique.

Le motif traité d'ensemble (au lieu de scinder et offrir sciemment une fraction), j'eusse évité, encore, de gréciser avec le nom très haut de Platon ; sans intention, moi, que d'un moderne venu directement exprimer comme l'arcane léger, dont le vêt, en public, son habit noir.

P. 144, § 5. . . Un humble, mon semblable. Mythe, l'éternel : la communion, par le livre. A chacun part totale.

P. 145, § 2. . . Exigent du sol un simulacre. Un gouvernement mirera, pour valoir, celui de l'univers ; lequel, est-il monarchique, anarchique . . . Aux conjectures.

La Cité, si je ne m'abuse en mon sens de citoyen, reconstruit un lieu abstrait, supérieur, nulle part situé, ici séjour pour l'homme. — Simple épure d'une grandiose aquarelle, ceci ne se lave, marginalement, en renvoi ou bas de page.

## L'ESPAGNE DU DON QUIJOTE

IL est particulièrement agréable d'avoir à parler de Cervantes et du *Don Quichotte* devant un auditoire anglais. Aucune nation étrangère, en effet, n'a égalé l'Angleterre dans l'intelligence du mérite de Cervantes et de sa spirituelle fiction. Ceci n'est pas une flatterie à votre adresse, ce sont les propres paroles d'un savant espagnol, D. Martin Fernandez de Navarrete, l'auteur de la meilleure biographie que nous possédions du grand romancier <sup>1</sup>.

Permettez-moi de vous rappeler quand le *cervantisme* a pris naissance chez vous.

Vers le commencement du siècle dernier, la réputation de Cervantes, assez grande de son vivant, avait beaucoup baissé parmi ses compatriotes. Sans doute, le *Don Quichotte* trouvait encore de nombreux lecteurs en Espagne et continuait de charmer la nation dont il présente à la fois un portrait si fidèle et une si piquante

<sup>1</sup> 'Ninguna nacion extrangera ha igualado á la Inglaterra en apreciar el mérito de Cervantes y su ingeniosa fábula del *Quijote*' (*Vida de Cervantes*, p. 509).

satire, il demeurait un des livres de passe-temps (*entretenimiento*) les plus goûtés par toutes les classes de la société ; mais de l'auteur même de ce chef-d'œuvre personne ne s'occupait plus : on ignorait en Castille les incidents de la vie de Cervantes, si essentiels à connaître cependant, puisqu'ils se reflètent souvent dans ses écrits, et de ses ouvrages, autres que le *Don Quichotte* et quelques nouvelles, nul n'avait cure. Aussi les critiques espagnols, qui alors régentaient la littérature nationale, dédaignaient-ils cet amuseur et omettaient-ils de l'inscrire au catalogue des grands écrivains de l'âge d'or. Hors d'Espagne, au contraire<sup>1</sup>, la gloire de Cervantes ne faisait que croître et le *Don Quichotte*, adopté et consacré grâce à une légion de traducteurs, avait conquis sa place dans ce petit groupe d'œuvres de choix que les Allemands appellent la *littérature universelle*. De plus en plus, il supplantait toutes les fictions qui à différentes époques avaient réussi à se frayer un chemin à travers les Pyrénées, *Amadis*, *Célestines* et romans picaresques ; il tendait à devenir chez les nations étrangères l'unique représentant du génie littéraire des Espagnols, et Montesquieu allait pouvoir risquer sa fameuse boutade : ' Le seul de leurs livres qui soit bon est celui qui a fait voir le ridicule de tous les autres.'

<sup>1</sup> Au xvii<sup>e</sup> siècle déjà, W. Temple parle avec admiration de Cervantes (*the matchless writer of Don Quixote*) et regarde son roman comme la plus belle œuvre d'imagination des temps modernes (*The Works of Sir William Temple*, Londres, 1757, t. iii. p. 422). Temple nous rapporte aussi les propos d'un 'ingenious Spaniard,' de Bruxelles, qui prétendait que le *Don Quichotte* ruina la monarchie espagnole en jetant le ridicule sur les principes d'honneur chevaleresque qui avaient fait sa force (*Ibid.*, p. 469). Opinion défendue aussi en Espagne au xviii<sup>e</sup> siècle par D. Juan Maruján (M. Menéndez Pelayo, *Historia de las ideas estéticas en España*, t. iii. 1, p. 380).

Quand un ouvrage d'imagination acquiert une telle notoriété et passe à ce point pour la quintessence de l'esprit et du talent de tout un peuple, il n'est pas surprenant qu'on cherche à le comprendre à fond, à en élucider les passages les plus difficiles ou les allusions les plus cachées et qu'on s'efforce aussi de savoir ce que fut son auteur, comment il vécut et quel rôle il tint dans son milieu : curiosité bien légitime et à laquelle aucun des premiers traducteurs n'avait été en mesure de répondre. Il était réservé à l'Angleterre de lui donner satisfaction, et ce n'est pas un mince honneur pour elle qu'un de ses hommes politiques les plus considérables de la première moitié du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle et des plus lettrés ait su prendre l'initiative d'un grand travail littéraire au profit de Cervantes. En faisant publier à ses frais à Londres, en 1738, une belle édition du *Don Quichotte* qu'il dédia à la comtesse del Montijo, dont le mari avait été ambassadeur à la cour d'Angleterre, en demandant à Don Gregorio Mayans, l'un des meilleurs savants espagnols de l'époque, d'écrire spécialement pour cette édition une biographie de Cervantes, entreprise qui n'avait pas été encore tentée et que l'érudite valencien exécuta de son mieux, lord John Carteret a pour toujours uni son nom à celui du maître de la littérature d'imagination en Espagne et a contribué à fonder dans son pays l'étude critique et savante du *Don Quichotte*.

L'exemple de lord Carteret devait porter ses fruits : il suscita l'admirable *Don Quichotte* du Rév. John Bowle, que cet ancien élève d'Oriel College publia en 1781, le dédiant à Francis comte de Huntington. Pour la première fois, le célèbre roman trouvait un vrai commentateur, pour la première fois ce livre était expliqué histori-

quement et grammaticalement et traité avec le même respect qu'une œuvre de l'antiquité classique. Ce *Don Quichotte* si doctement illustré n'obtint pas tout d'abord en Angleterre le succès qu'il méritait, car nul n'est prophète en son pays, mais il fut accueilli avec enthousiasme par les Espagnols, très flattés du splendide hommage rendu à leurs lettres. Il piqua d'émulation divers érudits castillans, qui, un peu honteux de s'être laissé devancer par un étranger, se mirent à l'œuvre pour parfaire le travail de l'ecclésiastique anglais. On ne saurait assez le dire : la promotion de Cervantes à la dignité de 'prince des écrivains' en Espagne et le culte qu'on lui voua dans ce pays datent de Bowle dont les notes ont largement inspiré les commentateurs castillans, Pellicer, Clemencin, qui n'ont pas toujours reconnu les dettes contractées envers leur prédécesseur. Depuis Bowle, l'interprétation du *Don Quichotte* a fait des progrès, mais le fond de l'exégèse du roman reste l'œuvre de l'Anglais, sans compter qu'une partie accessoire mais fort utile de son livre, j'entends le lexique de la langue du *Don Quichotte*, n'a été remplacée par rien et conservera sa valeur, tant qu'on ne lui aura pas substitué un répertoire plus complet et plus digne de nos connaissances actuelles en matière de philologie castillane. Béni soit donc ce brave ecclésiastique, ce *Don Bowle*, comme l'appelaient volontiers ses amis qui plaisantaient son savant amour pour le chevalier de la Manche : il a ouvert la voie, il a été, au sens propre du mot, le premier des cervantistes.

L'intérêt qu'inspire en Angleterre l'œuvre de Cervantes, s'il ne s'est pas traduit dans notre siècle par des travaux aussi considérables et méritoires que ceux de Bowle, continue cependant de se manifester de temps



à autre par de nouvelles traductions ou des essais littéraires qui visent, soit à rendre de plus en plus fidèlement la pensée de l'auteur, soit à tenir le public au courant des recherches de l'érudition espagnole.

Celle-ci traite maintenant Cervantes comme l'Italie son Dante ou le Portugal son Camoëns, quoiqu'elle soit loin d'apporter à l'étude du héros national le zèle et la critique dont font preuve les Italiens et les Portugais quand ils s'occupent du leur. Le cervantisme en Espagne, depuis une trentaine d'années, oscille entre une profonde apathie et de soudains accès d'activité fébrile et mal dirigée qui ne valent guère mieux que l'abstention complète, car, à trop vouloir exalter l'homme et l'œuvre, beaucoup dépassent le but et s'égarant dans la déclamation ou les puérités. Un culte, quel qu'il soit, perd de sa vertu, s'il tourne à l'idolâtrie.

Cervantes, qui, dans le domaine de l'imagination, de l'humour, de l'ironie aimable, de la peinture vivante et spirituelle des mœurs nationales, dépasse de bien des coudées tous ses compatriotes, n'a peut-être pas droit à tous les honneurs qu'on s'est empressé depuis un siècle à lui rendre, sans assez de discernement. Assurément les Grâces dansèrent autour de son berceau et il reçut de la nature des dons charmants ; mais quelques dons aussi lui manquèrent et il en est qu'il ne sut pas développer, faute d'une plus solide éducation littéraire. Il n'y a qu'à ouvrir le *Don Quichotte*, pour y trouver des faiblesses de raisonnement, des idées mal exprimées ou confuses, toutes les fois que le récit s'interrompt, que l'auteur se guinde et se risque à prendre le ton du philosophe et du moraliste. Lui-même ne s'y est pas trompé, il a parfaitement défini le propre de son talent et ne s'est ingénûment vanté que d'une seule supériorité

incontestable: le pouvoir créateur, le don de l'invention: 'Je suis celui qui par l'invention l'emporte sur beaucoup<sup>1</sup>.' Et quand Mercure, qui s'y connaissait, vient à sa rencontre, c'est en ces termes qu'il l'interpelle: 'Avance-toi, rare inventeur<sup>2</sup>.'

Une fâcheuse manie de quelques critiques modernes a été de prétendre découvrir en lui un précurseur à vues hardies en matière de religion ou de politique, d'abuser de certains passages de ses œuvres en leur prêtant une intention frondeuse, une signification prophétique. Or, nul écrivain n'a été plus de son temps que Cervantes; il ne l'a pas devancé d'une ligne. Bien certainement, il n'a jamais eu à se contenir pour ne pas aborder certaines questions délicates qui préoccupaient quelques-uns de ses contemporains, car il s'y intéressait peu; et quand le hasard l'a mis en présence de graves problèmes sociaux qu'un esprit indépendant aurait peut-être résolu dans un sens assez conforme à nos idées d'aujourd'hui, lui les a traités en pur Espagnol du xvii<sup>e</sup> siècle. Évitions donc de faire de Cervantes un génie universel, un être d'exception, presque surhumain, doué de tous les mérites et de toutes les vertus, évitions en particulier d'en faire un esprit fort. Au lieu de le dénaturer, efforçons-nous de le comprendre, aimons-le pour ce qu'il a été: un très habile conteur et un honnête homme. Certes, il demeure bien assez grand dans ses œuvres, telles qu'il a voulu les écrire, et dans sa vie toute de dévouement et de sacrifices, sans qu'il soit nécessaire de l'élever sur un piédestal trop majestueux pour lui et dont il aurait été le premier à sourire: mieux vaut

<sup>1</sup> 'Yo soy aquel que en la invencion excede á muchos' (*Viaje del Parnaso*, cap. iv).

<sup>2</sup> 'Pasa, raro inventor, pasa adelante' (*Ibid.*, cap. i).

restreindre le champ de l'admiration et la concentrer sur les parties de l'homme et de l'auteur qui vraiment sont supérieures.

De même que beaucoup d'œuvres d'imagination qui se sont véritablement emparées du public, le *Don Quichotte* est un livre de tous les âges : il intéresse et amuse l'enfant, il charme et fait réfléchir l'homme mûr. La fable du roman et ses étonnantes fantaisies suffisent aux uns ; d'autres goûtent la philosophie et les idées générales qu'on en peut extraire ou se plaisent à y contempler comme dans un miroir les sentiments dont s'inspiraient et se nourrissaient les Espagnols de la grande époque ; d'autres enfin cherchent à y démêler un sens caché, à y déchiffrer des énigmes, des allusions aux événements contemporains, s'ingéniant à trouver la clef de ce qu'un émule de Cervantes appelait les 'synonymes volontaires' du livre<sup>1</sup>. Et dans ce vaste tableau qu'on a si souvent regardé avec amour et qu'on croit connaître, il reste toujours de nouveaux détails à surprendre, lesquels n'apparaissent clairement et avec toute leur valeur que lorsqu'un examen plus attentif les a dégagés du fond où ils se cachaient.

Quelle qu'ait été la conception du livre, conception qui d'ailleurs a pu se modifier au cours de la composition, que Cervantes ait eu en vue seulement, comme il le laisse entendre, de ruiner par un certain ridicule la littérature chevaleresque<sup>2</sup>, ou que, sous ce couvert, il ait visé un autre but, comme l'ont prétendu plusieurs de ceux qui, de nos jours, se sont proposés de pénétrer son dessein, il ressort en tout cas de la lecture du roman

<sup>1</sup> Avellaneda dans le prologue de son *Don Quichotte*.

<sup>2</sup> 'La mira puesta á derribar la máquina mal fundada destes caballerescos libros.' (Prologue du *D. Q.*)

que son cadre primitif n'a pas tardé à s'élargir et à comprendre infiniment plus de choses qu'il ne devait en contenir à l'origine. Du point de départ au point d'arrivée, que de chemins parcourus où il n'était pas nécessaire de nous conduire pour ajouter au discrédit de ces pauvres livres de chevaleries, que de méandres et de zig-zags où nous perdons de vue complètement *Amadis* et sa secte !

'Je pensais,' dit de son maître le fidèle écuyer Sancho Panza, 'je pensais bonnement qu'il ne savait que ce qui a trait à ses chevaleries, mais maintenant je vois qu'il n'y a plat où il ne pique et ne laisse de mettre sa cuillère<sup>1</sup>.' Cervantes, de même que son héros, a piqué dans tous les plats. Sous sa plume vagabonde et que gouverne l'inspiration du moment, son *Don Quichotte*, issu d'une idée simple et dont on n'attendait pas beaucoup de développements, est devenu peu à peu le grand roman social de l'Espagne du commencement du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle, où tout ce qui marque cette époque, sentiments, passions, préjugés, mœurs et institutions, a fini par trouver sa place. De là le puissant intérêt du livre, qui, indépendamment de sa valeur comme œuvre d'imagination et traité admirable de philosophie pratique, possède en outre l'avantage de fixer l'état de la civilisation d'un peuple à un moment précis de son existence et de nous livrer le fond de sa conscience.

Ce côté historique et social du *Don Quichotte* est ce que je me propose d'examiner ; je voudrais vous montrer, si possible, ce que nous avons à apprendre dans ce roman célèbre envisagé comme une peinture

<sup>1</sup> 'Yo pensaba en mi ánima que solo podía saber aquello que tocaba á sus caballerías, pero no hay cosa donde no pique y deje de meter su cucharada.' (*D. Q.*, ii. 22.)

fidèle de la société à laquelle appartenait son auteur et qu'il a décrite ainsi que seul pouvait le faire un homme doué d'une si large connaissance du monde et un artiste capable de donner aux objets la couleur et le relief voulus.

Le chapitre de la religion est un de ceux où les commentateurs ont le plus librement exercé leur imagination. Une fois proclamé esprit profond autant qu'excellent écrivain, il restait à prêter à Cervantes des opinions avancées et frisant l'impiété. On n'y manqua pas. Il n'est que de savoir lire entre les lignes et celui que vous teniez pour le plus orthodoxe des romanciers chrétiens se transformera aisément en un adversaire décidé du fanatisme et de l'Inquisition, même en un philosophe *libertin*, au sens que le XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle donnait à ce mot. La thèse malheureusement s'effondre sitôt qu'on renonce à solliciter les textes et qu'on examine sans idée préconçue les quelques passages dont ces trop ingénieux interprètes ont pensé tirer bon parti. Bien entendu, il s'agit de distinguer ici avec soin ce que notre époque, devenue plus rigoriste parce qu'elle a moins de foi, confond volontiers : le dogme et la doctrine de l'Église d'une part, et puis ce qui s'est greffé sur le divin, le prêtre et ses acolytes, la gendarmerie ecclésiastique qui en Espagne a nom Inquisition, les ordres religieux, les associations pieuses, etc., en un mot tout ce qui sert et protège la religion et tout ce qui en vit. Or, sur ces accessoires du culte, maint Espagnol, même au temps du plus lourd fanatisme, eut parfois son franc-parler et la police du Saint-Office, sûre de sa force, toléra nombre d'assez vertes plaisanteries à l'adresse notamment du bas clergé, aussi méprisé en Espagne du vivant de Cervantes qu'il peut

l'être actuellement en Russie. La mesure, il est vrai, qu'il convenait de ne pas dépasser dépendait du caprice du juge, et tel qui avait pu risquer bien des hardiesses impunément, a pâti un jour d'un mot imprudent, sans doute parce que le mot parut dirigé contre un des mandarins de la caste privilégiée : le caractère personnel de l'injure en augmentait beaucoup la gravité.

Comme nous allons le voir, Cervantes, en ces matières, n'a pas été plus audacieux que tant d'autres ; l'eût-il été, que cela n'autoriserait encore personne à lui supposer une liberté d'esprit exceptionnelle et à douter de son orthodoxie. Catholique fervent, d'autant plus fervent qu'il avait eu à éprouver la solidité de sa croyance au contact de l'infidèle et là précisément où la lutte entre les deux fois était la plus vive, respectueusement soumis à la doctrine de l'Église comme tous les Espagnols de son temps, sauf de bien rares exceptions, étranger aussi par tempérament et par éducation aux subtilités de la théologie, qu'aurait-il pu écrire qui sentît le fagot ?

À l'endroit du clergé, Cervantes se montre assez réservé ; mais cette réserve ne résulte pas de précautions qu'il se serait cru obligé de prendre, car, à l'occasion, ses sentiments ne témoignent pas d'une grande bienveillance et d'un mot il sait marquer que l'habit clérical ne lui impose pas. Le curé de village qui joue un rôle important dans son livre en tant que conseiller et redresseur du pauvre hidalgo détraqué, cet humble représentant de la grande hiérarchie, Cervantes le traite bien ; il lui a donné quelque chose de mesuré et d'affable, avec cela un jugement sain, un parler correct. Jamais dans les propos du licencié Pero Perez,

n'apparaissent la pédanterie un peu lourde et le manque de tact si fréquents chez le prêtre campagnard. Sans doute ce type agréait assez au romancier. En revanche, l'ecclésiastique qui ne vit pas dans sa cure et au milieu de ses ouailles, l'ecclésiastique qu'on rencontrait à tout instant dans les antichambres et sur les chemins, parce qu'alors la robe du prêtre était une protection et assurait une foule de prérogatives, de celui-là il n'en fait assurément pas grand cas. Dans l'aventure de ce corps mort escorté par des clercs que Don Quichotte prend pour des fantômes et que Sancho dépouille consciencieusement de leurs victuailles empilées sur un mulet, il y a une petite phrase jetée en passant à l'adresse de 'Messieurs les ecclésiastiques qui rarement oublient de se donner toutes leurs aises <sup>1</sup>,' dont il ne faudrait pas exagérer la portée, mais qui prouve au moins que Cervantes était homme à très bien discerner le fond d'égoïsme et de sensualité que pouvait recouvrir une soutane. Il savait encore que le vœu de chasteté ne s'observait pas toujours dans ce milieu-là avec la rigueur voulue, et c'est pourquoi il laisse raconter sans le moindre scrupule par Don Quichotte l'histoire de certaine veuve, assez délurée, qui aurait pu se choisir un amant parmi de savants théologiens de son entourage, au lieu de s'adresser à un frère lai bien dodu, mais qui préféra ce dernier, l'estimant, pour ce qu'elle en attendait, tout aussi savant qu'Aristote <sup>2</sup>.

Une variété d'ecclésiastiques que Cervantes n'a pas ménagée, qu'il a même cinglée avec la plus entière satisfaction, est celle du parasite de robe longue, du

<sup>1</sup> 'Los señores clérigos . . . que pocas veces se dejan mal pasar.' (D. Q., i. 19.)

<sup>2</sup> D. Q., i. 25.

confesseur et factotum des maisons de l'aristocratie, du prêtre intrus qui prétend gouverner le grand seigneur et lui apprendre son métier, mesurant la libéralité du maître à l'étroitesse de sa propre âme et rendant ce maître misérable à force de vouloir restreindre sa dépense<sup>1</sup>. 'Que nous veulent, s'écrie-t-il, ces gens qui, nourris dans la misère d'une pension d'étudiants, sans avoir vu plus de monde que n'en contiennent vingt ou trente lieues, pensent qu'il suffit de s'introduire dans les maisons des grands pour trancher de tout,' etc.<sup>2</sup>. L'homme d'épée paraît ici. Cervantes, comme la plupart des écrivains d'alors, avait dû chercher un appui auprès des puissants et s'abriter à leur ombre, aussi ne peut-il contenir sa colère à l'aspect de ces échappés de collège, de ces séminaristes présomptueux et pédants, que leur éducation et leur ignorance de la vie rendent si impropres au rôle qu'on leur donne à tenir. Il se demande pourquoi de tels emplois sont confiés à de telles gens, quand il serait si facile d'en pourvoir des laïques, des hommes ayant acquis l'expérience des choses, frayé longtemps avec leurs semblables, vu des pays étrangers, combattu et souffert, des hommes comme lui-même, enfin ! Ceux-là seraient capables de conseiller le grand, de le rapprocher des faibles et des humbles et de le diriger dans l'administration judicieuse de son pouvoir et de sa fortune. Possible que cette verte réprimande ait été dictée à Cervantes par quelque ressentiment personnel, possible qu'il ait visé quelque ecclésiastique qui l'aurait desservi auprès d'un de ses protecteurs : cela n'enlèverait rien à la portée de ses paroles qui, par-dessus l'individu, atteignent l'espèce.

<sup>1</sup> D. Q., ii. 31.

<sup>2</sup> D. Q., ii. 32.



De certains ordres religieux assez décriés en Espagne, à cause des vices qui leur étaient propres ou qu'on leur prêtait volontiers, Cervantes n'a rien dit dans son roman ; mais il n'a pas omis d'y faire figurer un type d'exploiteur de la religion fort répandu de son temps : l'ermite, sorte de malandrin à longue barbe vénérable, à figure béate, dont tant d'auteurs nous ont dénoncé les honteuses pratiques et la cynique existence. 'Nos ermites d'aujourd'hui, observe Don Quichotte, savent se sustenter de volailles, ils ne ressemblent pas à ceux des déserts d'Égypte qui se vêtaient de feuilles de palmier et se nourrissaient des racines de la terre<sup>1</sup>.' Et Cervantes a beau pallier cette critique en déclarant que, puisque tout va mal, mieux vaut encore l'hypocrite qui affecte la vertu que le pécheur qui étale son indignité, il ne parvient pas à nous donner le change sur ses sentiments ; rien ne devait autant répugner à sa nature droite et vaillante que l'oisiveté vicieuse de cette catégorie abjecte de faux dévots.

Ainsi, non seulement Cervantes n'a jamais rien écrit, touchant la doctrine, qui prêtât au moindre reproche d'impiété ou de libertinage d'esprit, mais on ne peut même pas dire qu'en s'en prenant occasionnellement à quelques travers des serviteurs du culte, ou à certaines façons d'abuser de la religion et du caractère sacré qu'elle confère, il ait eu la main très dure ou le trait particulièrement acéré. Au reste, divers incidents des dernières années de sa vie accusent la sincérité de ses convictions et même le respect dont il se croyait tenu d'entourer telles pratiques dévotes usitées parmi les mondains d'alors. Son affiliation, en 1609, à la confrérie de la rue de l'Olivier, qui lui valut le titre

<sup>1</sup> D. Q., ii. 24.

d' 'esclave du Très Saint Sacrement,' son entrée, quatre ans plus tard, dans le tiers-ordre de saint François, voilà des démonstrations, à ce qu'il semble, significatives. Je sais bien que beaucoup entraient dans ces confréries, moins pour y accomplir des actes de contrition que pour se donner de l'importance, pour y briller, étaler leur train et leur faste, lorsque par exemple de grandes cérémonies offraient aux confrères l'occasion de défilér processionnellement dans les rues de la capitale, sous les regards du public le plus choisi<sup>1</sup>. Une confrérie représentait en Espagne au xvii<sup>e</sup> siècle ce que représente aujourd'hui un club ; les gens d'un certain monde appartenaient à telle *cofradia*, et l'on se qualifiait en ajoutant à son nom celui de la coterie pieuse qui vous avait admis. L'on se qualifiait ; en même temps l'on se garantissait contre de fâcheuses suspensions, et, parfois aussi, contre les coups de la fortune adverse. Les confrères étaient en quelque sorte solidaires, obligés par point d'honneur de s'entraider : une *cofradia* bien organisée devait tenir un peu de nos sociétés de secours mutuels. C'est ce qui explique pourquoi tant de gens de lettres briguaient l'honneur d'être reçus membres des congrégations du chevalier de Gracia ou de la rue de l'Olivier, les plus connues du Madrid de Philippe III. Cervantes fit comme Lope, comme Quevedo, comme Calderon et tant d'autres. Vieux, fatigué et pauvre, il chercha un milieu où rencontrer des protecteurs, coudoyer des personnages influents, étendre ses rela-

<sup>1</sup> 'No puede ser dañoso tener plaza en alguna de las Congregaciones y Esclavitudes de la Corte, y en ella oficio de mayordomo o consiliario, para poder en dias festivos señalaros con más particularidad con el baston dorado o con qualquier otra insignia propria del cargo que tuvieredes.' (Suarez de Figueroa, *El Pasajero*, alivio ix.)

tions, le tout sous les plis d'une pieuse bannière. Mais quels qu'aient pu être les motifs intéressés de cette détermination prise sur le tard, l'acte même de l'affiliation, le fait qu'il se présenta et fut agréé, montre surabondamment que ceux qui avaient à l'admettre ou à l'écarter et qui, jaloux de leurs droits, ne devaient pas être enclins à l'indulgence, ne lui tinrent pas rigueur pour quelques propos risqués de son *Don Quichotte* et n'hésitèrent pas à lui délivrer le diplôme de confrère des mieux pensants.

Cette puissante machine gouvernementale, administrative et judiciaire, construite avec tant de peine par les Rois Catholiques, renforcée par les ministres de Charles-Quint, puis amplifiée et compliquée à l'excès par Philippe II, le prince méticuleux et paperassier, qu'en pense Cervantes et comment la juge-t-il? Il ne s'agit pas de vues d'ensemble, d'appréciations générales qui, si elles avaient pu trouver place dans le *Don Quichotte*, seraient vraisemblablement des banalités sans intérêt. Nous ne demandons pas à Cervantes de nous exposer un plan de gouvernement et de nous déduire la meilleure méthode d'administrer un peuple en assurant son bonheur; nous ne lui demandons pas une dissertation en forme touchant les mérites et les inconvénients du système mis en pratique par les maîtres du jour. Non, nous ne saurions réclamer de lui que des aperçus, des impressions personnelles sur certaines parties de la machine qu'il connaît pour les avoir visitées de près et touchées du doigt. Cela, nous le lui demanderons, car il ne se peut pas qu'un homme qui fut acteur, ou figurant tout au moins, dans plusieurs scènes du grand drame politique espagnol du xvi<sup>e</sup> siècle et que le hasard initia à quelques-uns de ses dessous, n'ait rien de

curieux à nous révéler sur le fonctionnement de l'appareil, les complications et les défauts de plus d'un de ses rouages.

La conviction que le gouverneur et le magistrat sont des ennemis nés du faible et du pauvre, qu'ils appartiennent corps et âme au premier qui prend à tâche de les suborner et que leurs actes n'ont d'autre mobile que l'intérêt; la conviction que les emplois ne se donnent qu'à la faveur et à l'argent, qu'on entre dans une charge uniquement pour s'y engraisser et qu'on s'efforce de n'en sortir que repu, cette conviction était ancrée chez Cervantes comme d'ailleurs chez la plupart de ses compatriotes. Un juge intègre, un administrateur désintéressé, cela n'existe qu'à titre d'exception. La règle est la vénalité, la corruption et aussi l'incapacité, car à quoi bon le mérite, puisque tout s'obtient sans lui? 'Nous savons, dit Don Quichotte, qu'il n'est pas besoin de beaucoup d'habileté ni de beaucoup de lettres pour être gouverneur, et tous nous en connaissons de ces ministres qui peuvent à peine lire et gouvernent nonobstant comme des gerfauts<sup>1</sup>.' Cervantes est si tranquillement persuadé que les fonctions publiques ne s'exercent qu'au détriment des vertus privées et qu'il faut laisser à la porte, en y entrant, ce qui fait l'honnête homme et lui vaut l'estime de ses semblables, qu'on n'aperçoit aucune acrimonie dans ses jugements sur les divers suppôts de l'autorité royale: les choses sont ainsi. Même il est près d'ajouter: sans doute elles furent ainsi de tout temps et nous ne sommes pas pires que nos pères. Aussi ne se montre-t-il nulle part *laudator temporis acti*; jamais il n'oppose sérieusement le passé au présent, les vertus d'un âge d'or aux mœurs

<sup>1</sup> D. Q., ii. 32.

de son époque. Il croirait plutôt que son temps vaut un peu mieux que les autres : n'oublions pas qu'il a servi sous Philippe II et qu'il n'a pas pu être insensible à certaines mesures rigoureuses prises par ce souverain pour redresser bien des torts. Philippe II eut une sollicitude immense pour ses sujets, c'est le beau côté de son action gouvernementale, et quand il réussit à être exactement informé et à atteindre le mal, jamais il n'hésita à y porter la sonde. L'aisance avec laquelle il sacrifiait les plus hauts dignitaires de l'État lorsqu'ils avaient failli, l'estime dont il entourait de modestes fonctionnaires, depuis les 'secrétaires biscayens,' ces bureaucrates accomplis, jusqu'aux corregidores des plus petites villes, enfin de promptes exécutions, des châtimens exemplaires, sans aucune considération pour la personne du délinquant, quand l'injustice avait été dévoilée, voilà des faits singulièrement méritoires et que n'eût pas désavoués la grande Isabelle la Catholique. Mais l'administration de l'immense empire ressemblait assez au tonneau des Danaïdes. Philippe II avait beau lire tout ce que ses agents lui écrivaient de tous les points du globe, noircir des rames de papier et annoter de sa main des liasses de rapports, il avait beau, comme un comptable surchargé de besogne, s'aider de la reine et des infantes, ses filles, pour verser le sable sur les lettres et porter les plis au fidèle Santoyo qui les transmettait aux secrétaires<sup>1</sup>, cette prodigieuse activité

<sup>1</sup> Nous devons à l'historien Cabrera ce joli tableau d'intérieur : 'Le Roi Catholique vint passer l'été au monastère de Saint-Laurent, et il s'y appliquait à l'expédition des affaires, grandement aidé par la reine et les infantes. Lui écrivait et signait, la reine jetait du sable sur les lettres et les infantes les portaient à une table où Sébastien de Santoyo, le valet de chambre commis aux papiers, fidèle, de grande discrétion et bien vu du roi, faisait les paquets et

d'administrateur et de scribe, dont il n'y a pas d'autre exemple dans l'histoire, résultait vaine la plupart du temps. Plus la chancellerie expédiait d'ordres, et plus elle recevait d'enquêtes, de pétitions et de mémoires ; les papiers s'amoncelaient sur les tables des commis qui ne pouvaient suffire à la tâche effroyable. Le maître, renseigné trop tard, ne prenait pas de décisions au moment opportun, et, comme il était de sa nature timoré et hésitant, ce qu'il décrétait manquait son but et s'évanouissait en fumée. A vrai dire, l'empire était trop vaste, le travail trop au-dessus des forces humaines, et, d'autre part, le mal trop profond, trop difficile à extirper.

On a prétendu voir dans la description du gouvernement de l'île Barataria par Sancho Panza une satire du système administratif de l'Espagne au temps de Cervantes ; ce serait dans ce chapitre que l'auteur du *Don Quichotte* aurait exprimé avec le plus de franchise ses idées sur le maniement des affaires publiques. Je n'y contredis pas absolument. Toutefois, je ne remarque rien là qui caractérise avec netteté le gouvernement de Philippe II ou celui des premières années de son successeur. La morale de l'expérience tentée par le duc au profit de l'écuyer de Don Quichotte est conçue dans des termes très généraux et se résume à peu près en ceci : il n'y a pas de science politique, un vulgaire bon sens suffit pour trancher les questions les plus délicates, et le premier paysan venu, avec son flair naturel, en sait plus long que le juriste patenté de Salamanque ; la volonté du gouvernant, son désir d'opérer des réformes utiles succombent devant la

les plis et les envoyait aux secrétaires.' (*Historia de Felipe II*, t. ii. p. 198.) On se croirait chez un notaire de province.

routine des bureaux et l'hostilité de l'entourage, défenseurs obligés des vieux errements et des abus; le désintéressement, vertu louable en soi, n'a pas de raison d'être dans ces situations, car il ne vous vaut ni estime ni reconnaissance; lorsque le gouverneur sort riche, on dit que c'est un voleur, mais en revanche quand il sort pauvre, on dit que c'est un niais, etc. De tels aporismes s'appliquent à tous les temps, à ceux qui ont précédé comme à ceux qui ont suivi l'apparition du *Don Quichotte*. Aucune des modifications apportées par Philippe II au régime antérieur et aucune des mesures qui signalèrent l'avènement de Philippe III et le règne des favoris ne sont ici visées. Au demeurant, nul cri d'indignation, nul trait virulent, nulle aspiration à un idéal quelconque, nulle Salente entrevue dans un rêve. Cervantes ne croit pas en principe aux innovations en matière d'économie sociale ou de politique, et il est prêt à traiter d'utopiste quiconque cherche le mal dans les institutions, au lieu de le chercher où il est, chez les hommes<sup>1</sup>.

Les réformateurs lui font tous un peu l'impression de cet idéologue d'une de ses nouvelles qui, pour parer au déficit des finances royales, proposait au roi de contraindre ses sujets à se nourrir une fois par mois de pain et d'eau et à verser dans son trésor la somme qu'ils auraient employée ce jour-là à se mieux sustenter. Remède ingénieux sans doute, mais, dit le chien Berganza : 'N'avez-vous pas remarqué que ceux qui préconisent de semblables panacées s'en vont tous mourir dans les hôpitaux<sup>2</sup> ?'

<sup>1</sup> 'Coheche V. M., señor tiniente, coheche y tendrá dineros, y no haga usos nuevos, que morirá de hambre,' tel est le conseil de la Gitanilla qui en savait long.

<sup>2</sup> *Coloquio de los perros*.

Un des graves problèmes de l'Espagne du xvii<sup>e</sup> siècle fut, on le sait, la conduite à tenir vis-à-vis de la population d'origine musulmane, à demi assimilée depuis longtemps au régime chrétien, mais qui, sur certains points du royaume, en Aragon surtout et dans le pays de Valence, regimbait encore contre l'ardente propagande des prêtres et des administrateurs, maintenait par une sorte de respect traditionnel beaucoup d'usages particuliers à sa race et à sa religion et faisait ainsi tache au sein du peuple élu, de la nation catholique. Comment ensuite résoudre une autre question étroitement liée à la première, comment se comporter à l'égard des états barbaresques de l'Afrique du nord, ennemis jurés de la monarchie espagnole, danger permanent pour elle, puisque leurs corsaires entravaient journellement les relations avec l'Italie, dévastaient le littoral péninsulaire et tâchaient d'établir une certaine correspondance avec leurs anciens coreligionnaires demeurés en Espagne? Le duc de Lerme, soutenu par le clergé, mais combattu par la grande noblesse territoriale qui comptait de nombreux vassaux morisques, trancha la première difficulté en expulsant tous les musulmans d'Espagne, mais il laissa subsister la seconde. L'Espagne se priva, en quelques années, d'une population laborieuse et honnête qu'elle exporta chez ses ennemis et ne put jamais remplacer par des éléments indigènes; d'autre part, elle ne réussit pas à assurer la sécurité de ses côtes et à arrêter les progrès de la piraterie barbaresque. De nos jours, la conduite de Lerme a été sévèrement jugée en Espagne: l'expulsion des Morisques y passe pour une lourde faute économique, et l'abandon de toute politique expansive en Afrique y trouve d'autant plus de censeurs que les Espagnols ont bien souvent à regretter de n'avoir pas



assis solidement leur domination sur l'autre côté du détroit quand ils en possédaient les moyens.

Sur le fait de cette lutte entre la croix et le croissant, Cervantes se jugeait compétent. Il connaissait l'infidèle, il l'avait heurté les armes à la main à Lépante, il avait subi son joug à Alger. Rentré en Espagne, la tête pleine de ses prouesses guerrières et des pénibles incidents de sa captivité, il gardait au fond du cœur, plus intense que beaucoup d'autres qui n'avaient pas été soumis aux mêmes épreuves, la haine sainte du mécréant, ce credo de la vieille Espagne. Le Turc est le danger extérieur, le Morisque est le fléau du dedans. Combattons le premier et extirpons le second. Dans son épître à Mateo Vazquez, le ministre de Philippe II, écrite alors qu'il se trouvait encore enchaîné au bagne, il annonce l'intention, aussitôt racheté, de se jeter aux pieds du roi et de lui tenir le langage suivant : ' Puissant monarque, qui avez asservi mille peuples barbares, qui recevez le tribut même des nègres de l'Inde, comment tolérez-vous qu'une misérable bicoque vous résiste ? Ses défenseurs sont nombreux, mais faibles et mal équipés, et la muraille s'écroule. Qu'attendez-vous ? Vous avez en vos mains la clef qui doit ouvrir l'obscur prison où gémissent dans les souffrances et les tourments plus de vingt mille chrétiens. Écoutez-les, ils vous implorent à genoux. Ah ! puissiez-vous accomplir ce qu'a commencé votre valeureux père ! Montrez-vous et la seule annonce de votre intervention remplira de stupeur et d'effroi ces bourreaux qui tremblent en attendant leur châtement.' L'éloquente supplique ne fut pas entendue. Philippe II avait d'autres soucis. Au moment où Cervantes l'invoquait, il préparait l'annexion du Portugal, cherchait à 'recoudre le lambeau

jadis arraché à la robe de l'illustre Castille<sup>1</sup>.<sup>2</sup> Après, il forma des projets plus ambitieux encore, il prémédita une sorte de monarchie universelle catholique dont la vision s'évanouit dans le désastre de l'Armada. Les dernières années du règne s'écoulèrent sombres et furent traversées par beaucoup de difficultés intérieures. Il mourut ne comptant même pas que son faible successeur tiendrait tête aux ennemis du dedans et du dehors ni ne réussirait à conserver intact l'immense héritage. La croisade tant désirée par Cervantes n'eut jamais lieu, les bagnes retentirent longtemps encore des cris de douleur des captifs et les pères rédempteurs recommencèrent leurs lamentables pérégrinations.

Des Morisques, Cervantes a été amené à parler à plusieurs reprises, dans le *Don Quichotte*, dans les *Nouvelles*, dans le *Persiles*<sup>2</sup>, et toujours il l'a fait sur un ton de mépris et de haine. Point de grâce pour cette canaille moresque qui est notre vermine ! Voyez-les : ils sont sobres et engendrent beaucoup, car la sobriété augmente les causes de la génération ; ils travaillent et, comme ils travaillent, ils gagnent et nous prennent tout notre argent monnayé ; leurs filles n'entrent pas en religion et ne demeurent pas comme les nôtres stériles ; leurs fils ne vont pas à la guerre et n'en reviennent pas comme les nôtres estropiés ou fourbus ; ils n'étudient pas, car qu'ont-ils d'autre à apprendre sinon l'art de nous voler, et cet art leur est inné. Bénie soit l'héroïque résolution de notre saint

<sup>1</sup> 'El giron lusitano tan famoso,  
Que un tiempo se cortó de los vestidos  
De la ilustre Castilla, ha de zurcirse  
De nuevo . . . .'

(*Numancia*, acte I.)

<sup>2</sup> *D. Q.*, ii. 54 et 65 ; *Coloquio de los perros* ; *Persiles*, livre iii, ch. xi.

roi Philippe, qui, dans sa sagesse, a pris sur lui de déraciner cette plante venimeuse, de purger l'Espagne de cette peste maudite ! Un père dominicain n'eût pas mieux dit. Pauvre Cervantes ! Ce qu'il avait réclamé à juste titre contre le musulman d'Afrique n'eut aucun écho et ne se fit point ; ce qu'il conseilla et approuva, au mépris de l'équité et du bon sens, contre le musulman d'Espagne ne se fit que trop complètement, hélas ! et pour le plus grand mal de ceux-là même qui espéraient en tirer profit.

Mais n'est-il pas piquant de constater que cet ennemi farouche de l'infidèle est parfois contraint de reconnaître loyalement la supériorité de certaines institutions des adeptes de Mahomet ? Dieu sait s'il a raillé les pratiques de la justice de son pays, son formalisme, ses lenteurs, ses atermoiements, ses grimoires, ses frais si lourds, l'entente coupable entre avocats des parties, sans parler de la vénalité de ces juges dont il aimait à dire qu' 'il faut savoir les oindre pour ne pas les entendre grincer comme une charrette à bœufs<sup>1</sup>. ' Et c'est le même homme qui nous confesse qu'il n'en est pas de même chez les Mores ! ' Ici point de transfert à la partie, point de plus ample informé. . . . Le cadí est juge compétent et souverain et il décide en prud'-homme, réduisant les causes au minimum et les jugeant en un clin-d'œil, sans qu'on puisse jamais appeler de sa sentence<sup>2</sup>. ' Voilà un aveu qu'il a trop oublié dans d'autres occasions et qui aurait pour le moins dû tempérer quelque peu sa féroce intolérance.

Grâce précisément au scepticisme résigné dont je

<sup>1</sup> 'Si no están untados, gruñen mas que carretas de bueyes.' (*La ilustre fregona.*)

<sup>2</sup> *D. Q.*, ii. 26 ; *El Amante liberal.*

parlais tout à l'heure qui le portait à voir dans le gouvernement, l'administration, la justice, des institutions dont les hommes de tous les temps abusent et qu'il serait puéril en conséquence de prétendre réformer, Cervantes n'a pas eu de motif sérieux de pressentir que cette grande monarchie s'acheminait à son déclin et que la pourriture de certains membres non amputés à temps envahirait le corps entier. Il avait vu l'apogée du système et il aimait à vivre sur ses souvenirs. La puissance militaire espagnole lui apparaissait toujours dans le splendide décor de Lépante où rayonnait le dieu Mars lui-même sous les traits de ce fougueux et fringant Don Juan d'Autriche. Les *tercios*, lorsqu'il mourut, faisaient ferme encore et les tambours n'avaient pas battu la chamade. Le grand empire, avec ses infinies dépendances, avait l'air de tenir debout, les galions continuaient d'apporter l'or des Indes à Séville, les vice-rois régnaient toujours à Naples et en Sicile, le Portugais n'avait pas pris sa revanche, l'art et la littérature brillaient d'un vif éclat. Comment eût-il prévu la décadence irrémédiable et prochaine? Il lui aurait fallu pour cela une inquiétude d'esprit en même temps qu'une perspicacité rare qui n'étaient pas dans sa nature. Il mourut donc convaincu de la grandeur de sa nation, et ce dut lui être, dans ses heures dernières, une suprême consolation que de pouvoir se dire qu'il s'en allait citoyen du premier empire du monde.

Voyons maintenant comment, au témoignage de notre écrivain, vit et s'agit, dans le cadre que lui a tracé l'histoire, cette société espagnole, qui, au moment même de la plus grande expansion territoriale de l'État, semble se rétrécir et s'étioler sous la pression du fanatisme religieux, du pouvoir absolu et de certains prin-

cipes jadis vivifiants, mais devenus avec le temps de simples préjugés.

Au sommet, une noblesse titrée et à plusieurs étages, depuis la grandesse jusqu'aux anoblis par le roi, classe sans signification politique et ne subsistant qu'en vertu du prestige qu'elle s'est acquis, des richesses qu'elle a amassées ou des faveurs qu'elle sait encore se faire octroyer pour des services quelconques. Cette noblesse ne peut se vanter d'appartenir à une race supérieure et dans ses veines ne coule pas un sang plus pur que dans la masse du peuple : ici point de ces distinctions tranchées, de ces antagonismes comme il en existe ailleurs entre Franc et Latin, entre Normand et Saxon. Tout le monde est Goth ou croit l'être.

Le trait caractéristique de cette classe noble, ce que montre bien le nom de *ricohombre* que se donnèrent d'abord ses membres, est la fortune, la possession d'une terre, d'un fief, la jouissance de faveurs royales. On n'est reconnu noble et on ne peut le demeurer qu'à la condition d'être riche. Telle est bien l'opinion générale et en particulier celle de la nièce de Don Quichotte. 'Comment, répond-elle à son oncle, comment, vous qui n'êtes qu'hidalgo, pouvez-vous vous dire chevalier, car on voit à la vérité des hidalgos le devenir, mais il faut pour cela qu'ils ne soient pas pauvres<sup>1</sup>.'

Selon les temps, cette première noblesse castillane, à laquelle se mêlaient des bâtards de la maison royale, a exercé dans l'État une influence plus ou moins grande. Elle a eu des moments de splendeur, par exemple au xv<sup>e</sup> siècle, où ses turbulents chefs contrebalançaient le pouvoir royal et le sapent. Refrénée et tenue en laisse par les Rois Catholiques, ces opiniâtres restaurateurs

<sup>1</sup> D. Q., ii. 6.

du *régalisme*, elle reprend de l'importance sous Philippe d'Autriche et Charles-Quint, pour en perdre de nouveau beaucoup avec Philippe II, qui l'abaisse tant qu'il peut, la musèle et la sacrifie à l'homme de robe longue, au légiste des universités dont il peuple ses chancelleries et ses conseils. Philippe III lui rend une partie de son prestige et de son pouvoir, et le xvii<sup>e</sup> siècle devient le règne des favoris de grandes maisons. C'est alors, bien mieux qu'au moyen âge, que le nom de *riche homme* définit exactement l'espèce: toutes les hautes dignités, toutes les charges profitables, toutes les grasses vice-royautés d'Italie et des Indes, tout ce qui rapporte et enrichit lui appartiennent.

Cervantes a assisté à la rentrée en faveur de la noblesse titrée et à l'énorme curée qui marqua l'avènement de Lerme au poste de premier ministre. Il peut sembler surprenant qu'il n'ait pas dessiné quelques silhouettes de ces grands cyniquement glorieux du produit de leurs rapines, si bouffis de morgue hautaine, si indignes pour la plupart des emplois qu'ils arrachent à la faiblesse du souverain. C'est qu'il en avait besoin, c'est qu'il était, comme tous les gens de lettres d'alors, leur domestique, c'est qu'il devait employer une partie de son talent à solliciter leurs bonnes grâces. Tracer des portraits trop ressemblants et où l'un d'eux se serait reconnu eût ruiné le pauvre écrivain. Aussi, quand il s'est décidé à peindre un grand, a-t-il pris soin de l'extraire de son milieu, de l'éloigner de la cour, de l'exiler dans ses terres. Le duc et la duchesse qui recueillent Don Quichotte et s'en amusent, pour tromper l'ennui d'une longue villégiature rendue nécessaire peut-être par quelque revers de fortune ou quelque disgrâce, ces types de la grandesse espagnole sont présentés sous

un jour aimable et enguirlandés de ces flatteries délicates si habituelles dans le langage courant de l'époque. Quelques piquères toutefois çà et là attestent que l'auteur n'a pas aliéné son indépendance et ne renonce pas tout à fait à son franc parler. Le bavardage médisant de la duègne qui révèle à Don Quichotte le secret du teint de lis et de roses de la duchesse n'est qu'une drôlerie sans conséquence. Plus mordante est une autre confidence de la même respectable commère. Sa fille, séduite par le fils d'un riche paysan, n'obtient pas du duc qu'il intervienne pour contraindre le séducteur à réparer sa faute. Le maître ferme les yeux et fait la sourde oreille. C'est, dit la duègne, que le père paysan, fort cossu, prête de l'argent au duc et le tire de ses embarras souvent en se portant caution pour lui<sup>1</sup>. La plupart des maisons de la grandesse en étaient là. L'argent acquis par des malversations s'en allait par l'incurie et le plaisir, payait la représentation fastueuse, s'éparpillait à l'infini entre une domesticité innombrable, des commis rapaces, des administrateurs infidèles. Alors il fallait recourir aux prêteurs, vivre d'expédients, aliéner ses droits à des agents inférieurs qui en profitaient pour piller la terre, pressurer les vassaux, exercer une véritable tyrannie locale. Ce gouvernement improvisé de Sancho Panza dans l'île Barataria, qu'on a pris, je l'ai dit, pour une attaque dirigée contre le régime politique intérieur de l'Espagne, me paraît être bien plutôt une parodie et une critique du régime seigneurial. L'aisance avec laquelle le duc entre dans le projet de divertissement imaginé par la duchesse, trouve fort plaisant d'élire l'écuyer d'un fou gouverneur d'une partie de ses états—autant celui-là

<sup>1</sup> *D. Q.*, ii. 48.

qu'un autre, a-t-il l'air de se dire, — les incidents comiques du règne de Sancho, depuis les doléances des vassaux jusqu'aux ruses des courtisans pour circonvenir le maître, l'endormir dans une douce sécurité, l'empêcher d'apercevoir les abus ou lui en démontrer l'inévitable nécessité, tous ces traits habilement groupés forment une caricature très complète de l'administration féodale telle qu'elle florissait en Espagne au xvi<sup>e</sup> siècle et justifient pleinement cet adage castillan si populaire : ' En terre de seigneur, ne fais pas ton nid.'

Chacun voudrait être noble, c'est la grande maladie de l'Espagne. On veut être noble pour vivre noblement, c'est-à-dire, en somme, pour ne pas payer l'impôt personnel, lequel retombe de tout son poids sur les plus infimes, sur ceux qui, ayant quelque tache originelle, trop d'ascendants juifs ou mores, n'osent revendiquer une place parmi les élus. Il existe même des provinces qui se sont anoblies de leur propre autorité, où tout le monde naît noble, la Biscaye, les Asturies, berceau de la monarchie chrétienne restaurée : 'Hidalgo comme le roi, parce que montagnard,' dit de son mari la duègne D<sup>a</sup> Rodriguez<sup>1</sup>. En Castille on ne va pas si loin, aussi toutes les villes, les villages et les hameaux sont-ils encombrés de procès, car ici pour se soustraire aux charges du commun, il faut prouver sa noblesse, établir sa généalogie. Quand le postulant est riche, l'enquête marche vite, des témoins recrutés avec soin et convenablement subornés affirment tout ce qu'on veut et le tour est joué. Après le procès, l'hidalgo reçoit son brevet, une *executoria*, gros cahier en parchemin, décoré de ses armes et où sont longuement déduites en beau style de procédure les preuves de sa noblesse.

<sup>1</sup> 'Hidalgo como el rey, porque era montañés.' (D. Q., ii. 48.)



Le pauvre est moins heureux ; son enquête traîne et comme il ne peut pas payer les témoins, ceux-ci disent la vérité. Des taches apparaissent que le temps avait recouvertes de sa mousse, des marques d'infamie sont mises au jour, de gros scandales éclatent. La victime regimbe et, pour se venger, salit à son tour ceux qui, pourvus du brevet, se croyaient définitivement classés nobles. De là de terribles rancunes, des haines de famille que les pères transmettent aux enfants, des partis hostiles qui se guettent et se combattent en toute rencontre, au grand préjudice naturellement du bien public.

A la cour, dans les grandes villes, l'hidalgo réussit à peu près à soutenir son rang. Il y a des métiers qui ne font pas déroger et nourrissent leur homme, par exemple la domesticité chez les grands, l'emploi d'écuyer porte-respect, et, pour les femmes, celui de duègne. Mais à la campagne, rien. L'hidalgo vit chichement sur un lopin de terre oisif et glorieux. Glorieux, car il est beau de se sentir noble ; oisif, car il est déshonorant de travailler. Et de cette orgueilleuse fainéantise, résultait nécessairement une misère lamentable. Cervantes, qui l'avait souvent ressentie, mais l'avait dignement combattue grâce à son intrépide énergie, — ‘ Adieu, faim pénétrante de l'hidalgo, pour n'y pas succomber, j'aime mieux sortir de mon pays et de moi-même, ’ s'écrie-t-il dans son *Voyage au Parnasse*<sup>1</sup>, — Cervantes était porté par le sujet même de son livre à y faire bien des fois allusion. L'hidalgo déchiré et décousu, qui

<sup>1</sup> ‘ Adios, hambre sutil de algun hidalgo,  
Que, por no verme ante tus puertas muerto,  
Hoy de mi patria y de mi mismo salgo.’

(Chant I.)

cire ses souliers avec de la suie, reprise ses bas noirs avec de la soie verte et se cure les dents pour donner à entendre qu'il a dîné alors que son ventre est creux comme un tambour<sup>1</sup>, l'hidalgo 'insipide à force d'être gueux<sup>2</sup>, cet exemplaire de parent pauvre de la noblesse castillane, revient d'autant plus fréquemment chez Cervantes qu'il est, à tout prendre, un peu le portrait de son héros.

Ce ne saurait être par hasard qu'il a fait de Don Quichotte un hidalgo de campagne. Il fallait que le chevalier de la Manche appartînt à cette classe sociale, dans ce milieu-là seulement pouvait prendre naissance et se développer le genre spécial de folie que l'auteur entendait nous décrire. Le désœuvrement absolu et la pauvreté dans un hameau perdu de la province la plus désolée d'Espagne, joints à l'état d'âme du petit gentilhomme qui se croit formé d'un limon supérieur, se mire tout le jour dans le brevet qu'il a accroché au mur de sa chambre et s'enfonce dans la rêverie fantastique pour échapper, ne fût-ce qu'en pensée, à la fâcheuse réalité, tels sont les facteurs essentiels de la terrible manie chevaleresque. Cervantes a rendu évidente la cause de la maladie de Don Quichotte, sans forcer le trait, sans rabaisser son héros jusqu'aux parodies grossières des farces populaires. Don Quichotte est pauvre, mais non misérable, il soigne sa personne, s'habille correctement, et quand Sancho lui récite les propos qui circulent à son sujet dans le village, les reproches qu'on lui adresse de le porter bien haut pour un hidalgo râpé

<sup>1</sup> *D. Q.*, ii. 2 et 44. Le trait du cure-dent a été emprunté au *Lazarille*.

<sup>2</sup> 'Pues ya por pobres son tan enfadosos los hidalgos.' (*Entremes del juez de los divorcios*.)

de son espèce, il se récrie : ‘ Ces critiques ne m’atteignent pas ; mes vêtements sont toujours convenables et non raccommodés<sup>1</sup>.’ Souvenez-vous aussi quelle poignante tristesse l’envahit quand chez le duc il découvre, un soir en se couchant, que ses bas sont troués, que leurs mailles s’échappent. Que n’eût-il donné alors pour tenir un écheveau de soie verte ou posséder l’once d’argent qui en est le prix<sup>2</sup> ! En le préservant ainsi des souillures particulières à l’hidalgo tombé dans la misère sordide, en l’élevant moralement très au-dessus des gens de sa condition, Cervantes d’abord nous oblige à l’aimer, malgré ses ridicules, et il le rend ensuite plus vraisemblable. Voilà bien, en effet, ce qu’étaient exposés à devenir, dans leur solitude, leur ennui et leur dénuement, ces gentillâtres de province, quand, comme Don Quichotte, ils avaient, avec le respect d’eux-mêmes et la correction de la tenue, l’âme haute, des sentiments délicats, des aspirations généreuses ; ils devenaient maniaques. Et combien il est facile alors de concevoir qu’une lecture habituelle de fictions merveilleuses suffit pour détraquer à jamais ces étroites cervelles naïvement éprises d’un idéal inaccessible de vertu et d’honneur ! C’est en réfléchissant à la condition de Don Quichotte et en le replaçant exactement dans son centre qu’on arrive à démêler ce que je pense être l’intention principale du livre : la critique de l’*hidalguisme*, cette plaie de la société espagnole dont Cervantes mieux que beaucoup d’autres a su mesurer la profondeur ; critique d’autant plus forte qu’il ne l’a nulle part formellement énoncée, qu’il l’a même dissimulée d’une façon très habile en parant son héros de qualités de cœur exquises et de traits de caractère adorables. Cervantes a entre-

<sup>1</sup> D. Q., ii. 2.

<sup>2</sup> D. Q., ii. 44.

pris de tuer l'*hidalguisme* en nous faisant doucement rire du plus sympathique des hidalgos.

A l'hidalgo écuyer répond, dans l'autre sexe, la duègne, personnage que le théâtre a popularisé hors d'Espagne où il est devenu un emploi. Vieille fille ou veuve noble, qui a la garde du gynécée, la surveillance de la domesticité féminine et 'autorise' par sa présence et sa coiffe le salon de la dame du logis, la duègne a passé je ne sais combien de fois par les baguettes de la critique la plus malicieuse, mais jamais elle n'avait encore servi de plastron à une moquerie aussi impitoyable et bouffonne que celle qui fait l'enchantement de plusieurs chapitres du *Don Quichotte*<sup>1</sup>. Ici Cervantes s'est surpassé et a prodigué les trésors de son étonnante fantaisie. Sa Doña Rodriguez de Grijalba ne sort plus de la mémoire ; c'est une caricature immortelle aussi achevée dans son genre que les portraits de Don Quichotte et de Sancho. Ses prétentions nobiliaires, car elle descend, vous le pensez bien, d'un haut lignage des Asturies d'Oviedo ; le récit qu'elle conte à voix basse de sa jeunesse indigente dont elle cherche avec toutes sortes de jolies précautions à atténuer les faiblesses et les erreurs ; ses minauderies vieillottes et ses affectations de pudeur effarouchée quand elle se trouve en présence de Don Quichotte gravement assis sur son lit et qu'elle lui demande sur un ton inexprimable : 'Suis-je en sûreté ?' les petites perfidies qui peu à peu se glissent dans ses confidences, gouttes de fiel que distille son cœur aigri et tout gonflé de rancune, la médisance hésitante d'abord, puis hardie, éclatante et qui s'acharne sur sa victime, le tout couronné par cette mémorable 'vapulation,' infligée de main de maîtresse

<sup>1</sup> D. Q., ii. 31 à 33, 37 et 48.

et dont il semble qu'on entende encore retentir les claques dans le silence de la nuit : quel ensemble de nuances fines et adroitement superposées !

D'autres ridicules propres à ce prurit de noblesse qui dévore la nation ont encore été signalés par Cervantes : la manie par exemple de prendre le *Don*. Rigoureusement un hidalgo n'avait pas droit à ce titre honorifique et le *Don* que s'octroyait le sieur Alonso Quijano, changeant son nom en Don Quichotte, ne plaisait qu'à demi aux gros bonnets de l'endroit, notamment aux autres hidalgos qui entrevoyaient là une intention de les primer. 'On voudrait bien savoir qui lui a donné ce *Don* que n'a porté aucun de ses parents ni ancêtres,' dit la Thérèse Panza à son mari Sancho<sup>1</sup>. A quoi Don Quichotte aurait pu répondre qu'il ne se *donifiait* qu'en chevalerie et pour se conformer aux usages établis par les plus illustres 'errants' dont il faisait profession de suivre jusqu'aux moindres préceptes. Au reste, peu lui importaient les criaileries des médisants et des jaloux ; son esprit large planait au-dessus de pareilles misères. Sancho lui se montre plus circonspect ; il sait ce qu'il en coûte de s'affubler de titres trop pompeux, même quand un tour de roue de la fortune nous a élevé au-dessus de notre condition. Il se méfie, il craint les risées de ses proches. 'Qui se nomme ici Don Sancho Panza ?' demande-t-il au majordome de l'île qui l'a respectueusement salué de ce titre. 'Sachez, ami, que je ne porte pas le *Don* et que personne dans ma famille ne l'a porté. Je me nomme Sancho Panza tout court ; mon père s'est nommé Sancho, et mon grand-père Sancho, tous furent Panza, sans addition de *Dons* ni de *Doñas*. J'imagine qu'ici

<sup>1</sup> D. Q., ii. 5.

il doit y avoir plus de *Dons* que de pierres ; mais suffit et à bon entendeur, salut. Si je dure plus de quatre jours dans ce gouvernement, peut-être m'occuperai-je à écharbonner ces *Dons*<sup>1</sup>, etc. Ainsi faisait justice de ce tic puéril le sens droit et avisé du paysan. Son avis ne fut pas écouté alors et la *donification* continua de fleurir et de prospérer ; mais l'Espagnol finit par donner raison à Sancho. En étendant à tout le monde, comme il l'a fait, ce titre, devenu à la longue une simple formule de courtoisie, il lui a du même coup retiré ce qu'il avait de prétentieux. Quand chacun est *Don*, il n'y a plus de jaloux.

L'*hidalguisme* cependant n'a pas tout envahi. Si peu que ce soit, il est des Espagnols qui s'occupent, se donnent de la peine, travaillent de leurs membres ou de leur cerveau. Les nobles pauvres même ne se résignent pas tous à croupir dans l'oisiveté misérable de la vie rurale ou à tapisser à la cour les antichambres des grands seigneurs.

Aux *hidalgos* s'ouvre la carrière des armes, le métier noble par excellence, que Cervantes embrassa dans sa jeunesse, moins de propos délibéré que par occasion. Se trouvant en Italie, où il avait suivi le cardinal Acquaviva en qualité de camérier, il fut séduit par le clinquant de la soldatesque, s'enrôla et fit sous Don Juan les mémorables campagnes de la Sainte Ligue. Il ne faudrait pas juger de ce que Cervantes pense du métier militaire seulement d'après son célèbre parallèle entre les armes et les lettres qui conclut à la prééminence absolue des premières sur les secondes<sup>2</sup>. Ce parallèle n'est qu'un morceau de bravoure, comme Cervantes aimait à en écrire de temps à autre, afin de montrer qu'il n'était pas incapable de haute littérature

<sup>1</sup> D. Q., ii. 45.

<sup>2</sup> D. Q., i. 37 et 38.

et savait s'élever aux idées générales. Sans doute il professait pour la milice l'estime que lui en avaient fait concevoir les chefs glorieux sous lesquels il servit, Don Juan, Alvaro de Bazan, Lope de Figueroa ; l'épisode de Lépante, il l'a toujours tenu et avec raison pour l'honneur de sa vie. En plusieurs occasions il s'est noblement vanté de sa blessure et a réduit au silence par une riposte d'une généreuse indignation celui qui avait eu la bassesse de la lui reprocher ; mais en même temps il ne se méprenait pas sur les déboires nombreux du métier, et les fumées de la gloire ne lui ont jamais caché les injustices et les vilenies dont avait tant à souffrir de son temps le soldat de fortune. Même dans ce parallèle, que d'amères réflexions sur le sort précaire du soldat comparé à la bonne vie paisible du magistrat, confortablement assis dans son fauteuil d'où il gouverne le monde, quelles plaintes à propos de ceux qui ont cent fois risqué leur vie dans la tranchée ou sur la brèche et n'ont jamais obtenu la plus maigre récompense ! Là Cervantes ne pouvait parler de lui-même, mais on sent bien qu'il pense à ses propres mécomptes, se remémore ce qu'il a peiné pendant ses années de campagne et constate tristement combien peu lui a servi d'avoir participé, en vainqueur, à la plus fameuse journée des temps modernes. On sent qu'il est sur le point de s'écrier comme ce soldat d'une chanson : ' Je ne me plains pas d'avoir tout perdu pour mon roi, pour la loi et Madame Isabelle, mais je me plains de rentrer vieux, pauvre, estropié et de mourir aux mains des secrétaires<sup>1</sup>. ' Le beau temps de la milice est passé, celui de la paperasse commence. Le grand empereur n'est plus là pour défendre et récompenser ses com-

<sup>1</sup> *Carta del soldado*. Chanson inédite du xvi<sup>e</sup> siècle.

pagnons d'armes. Philippe II, malheureusement, n'hérita pas de son père ses vertus guerrières; il se servait des soldats, mais ne les aimait point. Quant au troisième Philippe, sorte de moine couronné, il ne comprit même jamais qu'il est du devoir d'un roi d'affecter au moins quelque peu d'esprit militaire. Sous son règne, seul le noble titré et le cadet de grande maison pouvaient espérer faire dans l'armée une carrière, obtenir de l'avancement et, après des campagnes, recevoir comme rémunération un *habit* de Saint-Jacques, de Calatrava ou d'Alcantara. C'est l'époque où les grandes routes sont infestées de militaires en congé ou licenciés, qui traînent leurs guenilles et implorent la charité des passants en exhibant des blessures vraies ou feintes, quand ils ne l'extorquent pas brutalement en les couchant en joue; l'époque aussi où les secrétaires des ministères sont assiégées par des troupes faméliques de soldats en haillons, tous tendant en suppliants leurs 'états de services' au commis qui passe sans seulement les regarder. Cervantes avait été témoin de beaucoup de ces misères; et il avait souvent passé devant les marches de l'église de Saint-Philippe à Madrid<sup>1</sup>, rendez-vous de ces victimes de la bureaucratie triomphante, qui, pour tromper la faim, exhalaient bruyamment leurs plaintes, s'excitaient les uns les autres, et, au grand ébahissement des civils attirés par leurs vociférations, énuméraient pompeusement des prouesses qu'aurait eu de la peine à accomplir le Grand Capitaine en personne<sup>2</sup>. Il s'est souvenu de telles

<sup>1</sup> 'Adios a San Felipe el gran paseo...' (*Viaje del Parnaso*, chant I.)

'Mil estropeados capitanes

Que ruegan y amenazan todo junto,

Cuando nos encarecen sus afanes.'

(Bart. Leonardo de Argensola.)



scènes en écrivant, et c'est pourquoi le *señor soldado* apparaît surtout dans ses œuvres sous les traits du *miles gloriosus* ou du vieux militaire dépenaillé, souffreteux et tristement ridicule. Voyez ce Vicente de la Roca, qui, de retour au pays, parade dans son uniforme éclatant dont il renouvelle sans cesse les galons, frise sa moustache, conte qu'il a tué plus de Mores que n'en ont jamais vu naître Alger et Tunis, découvre des égratignures qu'il donne pour des arquebusades, tutoie les hommes et séduit les filles<sup>1</sup>. Voyez, à la porte de l'hôpital de la Résurrection, cet enseigne Campuzano, appuyé sur son épée qui lui sert de bâton, amaigri et jauni; il paye cher son allure bravache, ses élégances soldatesques (*galas de soldado*) et les plumes de son chapeau dont une friponne madrée a feint de s'éprendre pour le planter là promptement, sans sou ni maille et, qui plus est, sans cheveux et sans dents<sup>2</sup>. Voyez le soldat gueux de la *Guarda cuidadosa*: celui-là sacre et jure, exhibe vingt-deux certificats de vingt-deux généraux sous les étendards desquels il a servi, écrit à sa belle sur le revers d'une pétition accordée et qui lui vaudrait bien quatre ou cinq réaux s'il la présentait au grand-aumônier (notable sacrifice!), poursuit son aventure amoureuse en capitaine Fracasse, bousculant tout sur son passage, et se heurte à un sacristain, aussi gueux mais plus heureux que lui, qui se fait agréer et lui souffle la demoiselle. De tels croquis, qui rappellent par moment, quoiqu'en moins noir, les *Misères de la guerre* de Callot, témoignent à coup sûr d'une grande désillusion sur le compte de cette carrière des armes que Cervantes avait d'abord vue si brillante, mais dont beaucoup d'amertumes et de criants passe-droits l'avaient ensuite dégoûté.

<sup>1</sup> D. Q., i. 51.

<sup>2</sup> *El casamiento engañoso*, nouvelle.

A côté de la noblesse militaire, il y a celle de robe. Les lettres aussi qualifient, mais il faut y entrer par certaines portes réservées : les grands collèges notamment dont les membres doivent faire leurs preuves ; en second lieu, les universités, car le clerc gradué est encore une façon de noble, tout au moins c'est un privilégié<sup>1</sup>. Cervantes, nul ne l'ignore, ne fit pas d'études universitaires, il ne passa point par Salamanque ou Alcalá, il ne se baigna point, comme on dit à l'espagnole, dans les ondes savantes du Tormes ou du Henares. Il étudia dans un collège municipal et apprit le peu de latin qu'il sut jamais sous la férule de maître Lopez de Hoyos, un professeur d'humanités entrete nu par la ville de Madrid. Plusieurs de ses contemporains ont censuré sa culture trop laïque, l'ont exclu du bataillon sacré des *scientifiques*, l'ont traité de profane (*ingenio lego*). Par un retour naturel des choses, les cervantistes, à partir de la fin du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, se sont élevés contre le dédain des universitaires et n'ont pas eu assez de sarcasmes à l'adresse de ces pédants, de ces cuistres dont les prétentions leur semblaient ridicules. Assurément, ceux qui ont attaqué Cervantes sur le fait de son éducation ne le valaient pas et tous leurs grades ne les ont pas rendus capables d'écrire un seul chapitre du *Don Quichotte*. Le génie a des prérogatives que ne remplaceront jamais des études quelles qu'elles soient, à plus forte raison des études poussées dans le sens scolastique espagnol. Ce qui est génial dans l'œuvre de Cervantes ne dépend pas de ce qu'il a pu apprendre

<sup>1</sup> 'El estado medio ocupan los hidalgos que viven de su renta breve, y los ciudadanos y escuderos dichosos, y los hombres de letras y armas constituydos en dignidad : digo, en las letras, los grados, y, en las armas, los oficios.' (Alonso Lopez Pinciano, *Philosophia antiqua poetica*, Madrid, 1596, p. 252.)

et n'aurait pas été meilleur si, au lieu de s'initier aux bonnes lettres à Madrid, notre Miguel s'était imbu de la doctrine enseignée dans les universités. Je dirai même que parmi les docteurs ou licenciés qui ont pris des airs de supériorité vis-à-vis de Cervantes, on en trouverait difficilement un qui fût exempt de la plupart des faiblesses reprochées aux non-scientifiques, aux écrivains insuffisamment pourvus d'humanités. Toutefois, il ne faudrait pas que cette protestation légitime, et à laquelle il convient de s'associer, contre certaines attaques de contemporains fort inaptés à ce rôle de censeurs, nous dissimulât les lacunes évidentes de l'éducation littéraire de Cervantes. De plus fortes humanités, une connaissance plus approfondie du latin,—sans parler du grec qu'on apprenait à peine en Espagne et dont Lope de Vega, qui n'en voulait pas pour son fils, disait qu'il 'rend les hommes orgueilleux<sup>1</sup>,—des lectures plus étendues d'auteurs anciens n'auraient nui en rien à cet esprit si richement doué, bien au contraire l'auraient poli, affiné, l'auraient prémuni contre certaines fautes de goût et de style. Arioste n'a rien perdu de sa fantaisie charmante pour avoir su écrire de jolis vers latins. Mieux instruit, Cervantes aurait, je le crois, dans quelques occasions, mieux raisonné et mieux écrit, et comme il possédait précisément ce qui faisait défaut à ses détracteurs, le génie, une plus ample culture littéraire lui aurait assuré cette supériorité incontestable en tout et sur tous qu'on lui souhaiterait, mais que l'équité empêche de lui reconnaître absolument.

*Lego*, dans le monde où il vivait, pouvait passer pour une insulte ; il la ressentit évidemment et n'oublia pas

<sup>1</sup> Dédicace de *El verdadero amante*.

d'y répondre. La gent universitaire, bruyante et encombrante, fournissait maint prétexte à sa critique et il n'eut pas de peine à en placer plusieurs spécimens sur le chemin de son *hidalgo*. D'abord quelques gradués des petites universités provinciales, licenciés de pacotille, qu'on ne prenait pas au sérieux, fixé qu'on était sur la valeur de leurs diplômes. Tel le curé du village de Don Quichotte, 'homme docte, gradué de Sigüenza<sup>1</sup>;' tel le pensionnaire de l'hôpital des fous de Séville, 'gradué en canons de l'université d'Osuna et qui, dit Cervantes, s'il l'avait été de Salamanque, n'eût pas été moins fou, à ce que beaucoup prétendent<sup>2</sup>;' tel encore le médecin de l'île Barataria, docteur d'Osuna, qui prescrit à Sancho cette fameuse diète dont le bon gouverneur est si navré. Ces mots, gradué de Sigüenza, licencié ou docteur d'Osuna ne manquaient jamais leur effet et amenaient en ce temps-là un sourire sur toutes les lèvres. Puis ce sont certaines pratiques relatives à l'obtention des grades que Cervantes souligne d'un trait: 'Je vous conseille,' dit Don Quichotte à un jeune poète qui se proposait de prendre part à quelque concours littéraire, 'je vous conseille de prétendre au second prix, car le premier se donne toujours à la faveur ou à la qualité de la personne; le second revient au mérite: *telles les licences qui s'octroient dans les universités*<sup>3</sup>.' Pareillement, il n'a garde d'omettre les petites supercheries dont se rendaient coupables des universitaires en se décorant de titres auxquels ils n'avaient point droit, usage si répandu que l'autorité compétente décida de le sanctionner: c'est ainsi que le Conseil de Castille délivrait, moyennant finances, des brevets permettant à un bachelier de signer

<sup>1</sup> D. Q., i. 1.<sup>2</sup> D. Q., ii. 1.<sup>3</sup> D. Q., ii. 18.

licencié<sup>1</sup>. Apparemment le pauvre Alonso Lopez, l'un des clercs de l'escorte du corps mort, avait oublié de se pourvoir d'un brevet de ce genre, car, lorsque renversé de sa monture, il sent la lance de Don Quichotte s'enfoncer dans sa poitrine, son premier cri est pour nous confesser qu'il a eu grand tort de se dire licencié, n'étant en fait que simple bachelier<sup>2</sup>.

De l'étudiant, de cet étudiant famélique qui déshonore la science par sa misère, sa crasse, ses haillons, ses expédients, ses escroqueries, il restait peu de chose à dire après les pièces du théâtre populaire : l'étudiant galeux, querelleur et fripon est un des emplois de l'*entremes* ou du *sainete*, comme l'alcade villageois, le médecin, le greffier, le biscayen ou l'aveugle. Cervantes ne fait que l'effleurer dans le parallèle entre les armes et les lettres qu'il place dans la bouche de Don Quichotte<sup>3</sup>. Là il parle des souffrances de ces pauvres hères, de cet *aller à la soupe* qui les assimilait aux mendiants des carrefours, aux loqueteux de la dernière catégorie, mais il ne les entreprend pas sur leur dépravation et leurs vices : c'est qu'il se trouve en présence de malheureux et que le malheur, quel qu'il soit, impose silence à sa critique. De tous les représentants de la carrière universitaire, l'étudiant pauvre, qui, pour vivre, quand il vivait honnêtement, devait s'accrocher aux basques de l'étudiant noble, du cadet de famille et lui servir de valet, ce famulus à la soutane râpée, hâve et défait, est le seul pour lequel Cervantes conçoit quelque sympathie. De bon cœur, l'écrivain *lego* pardonne au *sopista* la faim et la gale,

<sup>1</sup> 'Licencia á un bachiller para que se pueda firmar licenciado.' Formulaire du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle (A. Morel-Fatio, *L'Espagne au XVI<sup>e</sup> et au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, p. 206).

<sup>2</sup> D. Q., i. 19.

<sup>3</sup> D. Q., i. 37.

ses inséparables compagnes<sup>1</sup>; il le préfère encore au docteur bien renté et infatué de son grade ou au présomptueux et pédant *scientifique*.

L'université pourvoit à bien des carrières; elle forme surtout des médecins et des juristes. Cervantes n'a mis qu'une seule fois les médecins sur la sellette, mais cette fois-là suffit. Sa raillerie vaut celle de Molière, elle produit même un plus grand effet, parce qu'elle est plus concentrée. Le docteur Pedro Recio de Agüero, natif de Tirteafuera, — ce qui signifie 'Mets-toi dehors' — lieu situé à main droite entre Caracuel et Almodobar del Campo, est médecin ordinaire de Son Excellence Don Sancho Panza, gouverneur de l'île Barataria. Son emploi consiste à assister aux repas du maître et à lui prescrire le régime approprié à sa complexion. Et il se prend au sérieux. Tout ce qu'on apporte sur la table est impitoyablement renvoyé: les fruits, parce que la substance aqueuse est indigeste; tel mets très cuit et fortement épicé, parce que les épices provoquent la soif et que celui qui trop boit tue et consume le radical humide d'où procède la vie; les perdrix bien rôties, les lapins bien sautés, le veau en daube, tout est mis à l'index. *Absit! absit!* crie l'homme docte à l'entrée de chaque service. Sancho, persuadé lui que l'emploi du gouverneur est de manger à sa faim, voudrait bien retenir quelques-uns de ces plats dont le fumet seul le ravit d'aise: il n'ose, car les terribles aphorismes du praticien s'abattent sur lui comme grêle et le réduisent au silence. Mais quand apparaît l'*olla*, la vraie *olla podrida*, bourrée de tous les bons ingrédients qui en font le mets divin qu'on sait, et que le gradué d'Osuna,

<sup>1</sup> 'Si la sarna y la hambre no fuesen tan unas con los estudiantes, en las vidas no habria otra de mas gusto.' (*Coloquio de los perros*.)

reprenant sa cantilène, explique que le pot-pourri, d'ailleurs indigne de la table d'un gouverneur, est un aliment fort dangereux vu sa nature éminemment composée, Sancho n'y tient plus. Suffoqué de colère, il se renverse sur sa chaise, et, se tournant vers le médecin, lui envoie en plein visage cette bordée retentissante : ' Monsieur le docteur Pedro Recio de Mauvais Augure, natif de Mets-toi dehors, lieu situé à main droite, quand on va de Caracuel à Almodobar del Campo, gradué d'Osuna, ôtez-vous de devant moi, ou sinon, je jure par le soleil de prendre un bâton et d'en assommer tous les médecins qui se pourront trouver dans cette île et que je saurai être des ignorants, à commencer par vous . . . Oui, docteur Pedro Recio, ôtez-vous de ma présence, ou bien je prendrai cette chaise sur laquelle je suis assis et vous l'aplatirai sur la tête. Et qu'on m'en demande compte, après ma gestion ! Je répondrai, pour ma décharge, que j'ai rendu service à Dieu en tuant un méchant médecin, bourreau de la république. Et qu'on me donne à manger ou qu'on me retire le gouvernement, car un emploi qui ne nourrit pas ne vaut pas deux fèves <sup>1</sup>. ' Il est permis de supposer après cela que Cervantes n'avait pas eu à se louer des diagnostics et des soins qu'il avait réclamés des Esculapes de son pays : pas plus qu'il n'était édifié sur leur désintéressement et leur délicatesse, à en juger du moins par un passage du *Persiles* où il est question de chirurgiens peu scrupuleux qui se font payer deux fois leurs consultations <sup>2</sup>.

Du juriste en tant que magistrat, du *lettré*, comme on disait jadis en Castille, pourvu de quelque office important de judicature, nous avons déjà vu ce que

<sup>1</sup> D. Q., ii. 47.

<sup>2</sup> *Persiles*, livre iii. ch. xv.

Cervantes en pense ; mais il est dans les rangs inférieurs de la carrière, tout près, quoique un peu au-dessus de l'huissier et du recors, un humble robin qui ne pouvait échapper à la lunette braquée par l'écrivain sur la société de son temps : ce robin est le greffier ou notaire. Véritable bouc émissaire de la haine et du mépris qu'inspire aux Espagnols le ministère de la loi en général, le pauvre *escribano* est vilipendé comme pas un, on le met à toutes les sauces. Il a reçu au théâtre certainement autant de coups de bâton que l'alguazil, et les plaisanteries qu'excitent toujours ses manèges et ses rubriques sont devenues, à force d'être répétées, des lieux communs insipides<sup>1</sup>. Cervantes aussi a maltraité 'ce satrape de la plume,' comme il le nomme<sup>2</sup>, moins toutefois dans le *Don Quichotte* que dans une de ses nouvelles, le *Coloquio de los perros*, où, après en avoir laissé dire pis que pendre, il feint de se charger de sa défense, ce qui est une manière de lui porter le coup de grâce. 'Oui, il y a beaucoup de notaires, beaucoup, vous dis-je, qui sont honnêtes, consciencieux et loyaux, disposés à être agréables sans faire tort au prochain ; oui, tous ne traînent pas les procès en longueur, n'avisent pas les parties, n'épient et n'espionnent pas la vie des autres pour y trouver matière à instrumenter ; tous ne s'entendent pas avec le juge : passez-moi la rhubarbe et je vous passerai le séné.' Enumérer ainsi soigneusement les vilenies dont certains notaires ne se rendaient pas coupables, n'est-ce pas nous dénoncer, par un détour habile et avec une cruelle

<sup>1</sup> Un juriste espagnol a réuni une collection de ces quolibets ; voy. M. Torres Campos, *Estudios de bibliografía española y extranjera del derecho y del notariado*, Madrid, 1878, p. 156.

<sup>2</sup> *Persiles*, livre iii. ch. iv.



précision, celles que tous les autres commettaient habituellement ?

Des régions supérieures de la société où habitent les Espagnols classés soit par leur naissance soit par l'exercice de quelque profession honorable ou au moins avouable, descendons, à la façon de Dante, dans les cercles inférieurs où vit la gent chétive, allons jusqu'aux bas fonds. Le *Don Quichotte* n'est pas une revue critique dans le genre, par exemple, des *Songes* de Quevedo. Chez Cervantes on ne peut s'attendre à voir défiler une à une, comme des pénitents en procession, toutes les espèces sociales que le moraliste de métier aime à pousser sous sa loupe pour les disséquer à loisir. Le *Don Quichotte* est un voyage fantaisiste à travers la société espagnole que nous faisons guidés par l'imagination capricieuse de son auteur. Celui-ci ne nous mène que là où il lui plaît de promener son héros. Comme d'ailleurs les aventures du chevalier se passent en plein champ et dans les parties même les plus désertes du pays, les plaines sans fin de la Manche, il en résulte que bon nombre de types, et entre autres l'habitant des villes, ne figureront pas dans le livre. Nous y verrons surtout ce qu'on rencontre sur les routes, quand on les suit comme Don Quichotte et Sancho, à petites journées, et qu'on se plaît, comme eux, à questionner les passants; nous y verrons des hôteliers, des muletiers, des filles, des pages en quête d'un maître à servir, des gendarmes, des brigands, des comédiens ambulants, des montreurs de marionnettes, des pèlerins, des vagabonds et même des galériens.

Examinons de plus près quelques exemplaires de ces tenanciers du grand chemin et de ces nomades.

L'hôtelier, d'abord, seigneur dans son auberge comme

le chevalier l'était jadis dans son donjon ; la route est son fief, personne n'y passe qui ne lui paye sa dîme et, bon gré mal gré, qu'elle plaise ou non, il faut s'arrêter dans sa demeure. Notez aussi que l'hôtelier d'Espagne est une manière de fonctionnaire ; affilié à la Sainte-Hermandad, il tient du gendarme et quiconque a la conscience lourde et la bourse trop légère pour acheter son silence se sent surveillé par lui. Le voici sur le pas de sa porte, flanqué de sa Maritorne : les deux font la paire. Lui épais, bourru, grondeur, parfois aussi jovial, bruyamment épanoui, quand il a réussi à étriller consciencieusement des voyageurs de qualité ; elle, la Galicienne, trapue et débordante, aussi large que haute, les petits yeux écarquillés, la bouche fendue jusqu'aux oreilles, le nez écrasé, sale, dépeignée et encore ruisse-lante de quelque gros labeur accompli, au demeurant brave fille, compatissante au pauvre monde, de mœurs faciles, ce dont ne se plaignent pas les charretiers. Voyez-les, ceux-ci et les muletiers qui traversent lentement ces terribles déserts de la Castille où le soleil, dardant tout de ses rayons, rend l'homme coléreux, brutal, sauvage. Ils arrivent à la *venta*, ayant en croupe quelque 'traînée<sup>1</sup>' recueillie à la précédente étape. L'auberge retentit de leurs cris et de leurs jurons ; puis vient l'heure du souper et puis du jeu qui jamais ne s'achève sans quelque dispute furieuse, que l'hôte calme en jetant ces forcenés sur les bâts de leurs mulets où ils s'endorment du lourd sommeil de la brute avinée et harassée.

Autre rencontre : les comédiens de la troupe ambulante d'Angulo le Méchant, empilés dans une charrette ; ils vont à la ville voisine représenter l'*auto* des 'Assises

<sup>1</sup> 'Traidás y llevadas.' (D. Q., i, 2.)

de la mort.' Tous ont revêtu, pour s'épargner du temps, les habits de leur emploi. Le cocher est costumé en Diable. Derrière lui se pressent la Mort, à la face trop réjouie et qui dément le rôle, un ange dont on voit pointer les longues ailes, puis un empereur couronné ; dans le fond surgit un petit Cupidon qui a enlevé son bandeau, mais qui tient embrassés son arc, son carquois et ses flèches. Quelles figures et imaginez ce qu'elles vont suggérer de ténébreux et d'effroyable à l'esprit toujours en ébullition de Don Quichotte ! Dieu soit loué ! il accepte les explications des comédiens, il les prend pour ce qu'ils sont, il ne les pourfendra pas. Mais laissons cette aventure qui finit mal d'ailleurs.

Passons au faiseur de tours, au montreur de marionnettes. Celui-là nous le connaissons déjà. C'est l'ancien forçat Ginés de Passamonte, à l'astuce duquel le pauvre Sancho dut d'être privé longtemps de son âne chéri : un type de ces 'forains,' comme, au dire de Cervantes, on en voyait tant en Espagne, qui avaient l'air de vivre du métier qu'ils avouaient, mais qui, en réalité, couvraient du voile de ce métier toutes sortes de friponneries dont ils s'entretenaient grassement en joyeuse compagnie<sup>1</sup>. Ginés put paraître mal inspiré le jour où il choisit dans son répertoire les aventures de la belle Melisandre pour les représenter devant Don

<sup>1</sup> 'Esto del ganar de comer holgando tiene muchos aficionados y golosos: por esto hay tantos titereros en España, tantos que muestran retablos, tantos que venden alfileres y coplas, que todo su caudal, aunque le vendiesen todo, no llega á poderse sustentar un día; y con esto los unos y los otros no salen de los bodegones y tabernas en todo el año, por do me doy á entender que de otra parte que de la de sus oficios sale la corriente de sus borracheras.' (*Coloquio de los perros.*)

Quichotte. Ces noms de Don Gaïferos, de Marsile, de Charlemagne et de Paris, tous ces souvenirs de la grande épopée carolingienne devaient fatalement réveiller la folie du chevalier et la réveillèrent en effet, en lui mettant l'épée à la main. De là le massacre de tant de belles marionnettes ; un roi Marsile décapité, un Charlemagne fendu de la tête aux pieds, une Melisendre avec un œil en moins, désastres qu'il fallut réparer argent comptant, au grand désespoir de Sancho, mais non point au détriment du malin Ginés qui sut tirer parti de la fureur intempestive du fougueux redresseur de torts.

Enfin l'écume sociale, l'armée du vice et du crime, dont un abrégé suffisant nous est offert dans cette chaîne des forçats, que Don Quichotte rompt avec la superbe assurance d'un homme qui croit accomplir l'action la plus généreuse et la plus équitable. Ce morceau a une belle allure et jamais l'ironie de Cervantes ne s'est jouée avec autant de hardiesse et de grâce tout à la fois. La mise en scène d'abord est des plus réussies. La chaîne s'avance, escortée par les gardes. Don Quichotte l'aperçoit de loin. Ces gens-là sont enchaînés et ne peuvent l'être de leur propre volonté, se dit-il ; il ne voit que cela : une nouvelle injustice. Et dès lors cette idée fixe l'absorbe, malgré les objurgations de Sancho, malgré les remontrances brèves et nettes des gardes. Il s'approche et demande à chacun des forçats les motifs de sa condamnation. Les réponses de ces gens, les unes plaisantes et fanfaronnées assaisonnées de mots d'argot de voleur que Don Quichotte ne comprend pas et se fait expliquer, les autres tristement embarrassées et qu'il faut presque arracher à la honte et au désespoir ; ces réponses et

l'interprétation que Don Quichotte, de plus en plus enfoncé dans son idée, en donne; la conviction qui peu à peu se forme en lui que ces hommes sont, sinon innocents, au moins injustement persécutés, que l'un a sans doute manqué d'argent pour corrompre son juge, l'autre de protection pour l'adoucir, bref que la plupart sont certainement victimes de l'arbitraire d'un magistrat peut-être inique: tout cela combiné détermine sa volonté, arme son bras. Il fond sur les gardes et délivre les galériens qui le payent comme on sait. Les principales variétés de l'infamie en général et des vices plus particulièrement espagnols ont été habilement groupés par Cervantes dans cette chaîne: depuis le simple voleur, qui, mis à la question, a eu la naïveté et la faiblesse d'avouer son délit, jusqu'au récidiviste endurci, au bandit de haute volée dont les forfaits célèbres sont chantés dans les romances et que ses compagnons admirent et vénèrent comme un maître, jusqu'à l'abject vieillard proxénète, *l'alcahuete*, dont la confession suggère à Don Quichotte cet étrange paradoxe sur la vertu et l'utilité du métier d'entremetteur. Malgré ce déploiement d'ironie et de cynisme plaisant qui déroute un peu, on démêle facilement que Cervantes était, au fond, de l'avis de Don Quichotte, j'entends qu'il n'était point persuadé que les plus coupables fussent toujours ceux qu'on traînait aux galères: à ses yeux la criminalité d'un acte ne dépendait nullement d'une condamnation prononcée par des juges tels qu'il en avait vus à l'œuvre en maintes occasions. Nouvelle et dernière confirmation de ses idées très arrêtées en matière de justice pénale.

Cervantes n'a guère montré de types provinciaux: quelques Biscayens au parler maladroit pareil à celui

des nègres et au jugement si borné (*corto*), quelques arrieros andalous, quelques souillons galiciennes, sans parler du paysan de la Manche, dont Sancho est l'inoublable modèle. En somme, rien de saillant dans les descriptions de ces différentes espèces d'homme, nulle intention d'indiquer par des détails appropriés de physionomie, de costume et de mœurs ce qui distingue les Espagnols des diverses parties du territoire. Il est vrai que Cervantes n'a pas mené son chevalier dans la province d'Espagne qu'il connaissait le mieux après la sienne, cette grande Andalousie qu'il avait parcourue en long et en large pour y recouvrer l'argent du fisc, et qu'il a racontée et fouillée avec un art si consommé dans plusieurs de ses nouvelles. Peut-être, par coquetterie d'auteur et pour ne pas se répéter, a-t-il voulu promener Don Quichotte de préférence dans d'autres régions moins fréquentées et moins connues des Espagnols du centre. Mais que n'a-t-il dépeint leurs habitants, comme il avait fait les Andalous et en particulier les Sévillans ? Quand Don Quichotte quitte la Castille, entre en Aragon, puis en Catalogne, il ne semble pas qu'il change de milieu : nulle part les hommes de ces provinces ne nous apparaissent marqués du cachet de leur sol et de leur race. En Catalogne, le chevalier ne rencontre que des *bandouliers*, un produit du terroir à la vérité et qu'il décrit assez heureusement : aussi bien ce banditisme à allures chevaleresques, ces voleurs de grand chemin qui ont des façons de gentilshommes, ces hors la loi qui se piquent de point d'honneur<sup>1</sup> n'étaient pas pour déplaire à l'historien de Don Quichotte. Mais

<sup>1</sup> 'Los bandos de Cataluña, de Aragon y de Valencia, en todo el mundo se sabe que salen á la sierra de puro honrados.' (*Zapata, Miscelanea*, p. 469.)

c'est tout. A Barcelone, ville qu'il connaissait et aimait particulièrement, qu'il a nommée ' fleur des belles cités du monde<sup>1</sup>, ' il ne voit que les dehors et la superficie des choses : les galères du port, l'affluence du peuple dans les rues, la richesse des habitants. Comment n'a-t-il pas cherché à nous initier un peu à la vie mouvementée de ces actifs et laborieux Catalans, si différente de l'existence monotone, figée, presque contemplative du Castillan ? Comment n'a-t-il pas extrait du fourmillement de la grande cité industrielle et commerçante quelques types parlants et significatifs qui lui eussent fourni une merveilleuse antithèse aux deux héros de son livre et suggéré peut-être de nouveaux et fort réjouissants épisodes ? A vrai dire, ce séjour de Don Quichotte à Barcelone laisse une assez pénible impression. Le côté ridicule de sa manie s'accroît trop au contact de la vie civilisée d'une ville ; ses divagations, si délicieuses sous le ciel de la Castille et dans les steppes de la Manche, détonnent ici et tournent au grotesque ; ses chevauchées et ses coups de lance ont un air de carnaval qui n'amuse que les gamins accourus pour voir passer cette triste figure de masque. Il semble que Cervantes aurait pu corriger l'impression fâcheuse que nous cause cette dégradation de son héros en restreignant ici son rôle, en peignant surtout le milieu, de façon à noyer en quelque sorte la personne du noble chevalier sous des détails descriptifs et de couleur locale. Nous y aurions gagné quelques scènes de mœurs catalanes d'un prix inestimable.

Reste à décrire un groupe à part qui n'a pas de place fixe dans la hiérarchie sociale, pas de compartiment à soi, je veux parler des gens de lettres. La littérature

<sup>1</sup> *Las dos doncellas*, nouvelle.

qui n'est pas soit la théologie, soit la science pure ou appliquée, la littérature d'agrément n'est pas une carrière. Alors, le poète ou le romancier, le dramaturge ou l'essayiste, l'historien même, quand il ne remplit pas l'emploi d'historiographe officiel, ne peut s'adonner à son art que par occasion, c'est-à-dire s'il exerce en même temps quelque métier lucratif, s'il jouit de quelque bénéfice ou si un grand le protège et l'entretient. En un mot, la littérature ne nourrit pas ; tout au plus aide-t-elle à vivre. Ajoutez que l'homme de lettres n'a pas en Espagne la ressource qu'offrent les pays libres d'écrire sur les matières politiques, de louer sa plume aux partis qui alternativement dirigent les affaires de l'État et détiennent les clefs du trésor. Le pouvoir absolu ne s'accommode guère de ce genre de littérature et quiconque a l'audace de contrôler ses actes et d'y trouver à redire est prié de prendre domicile en Hollande ou ailleurs. Si quelque pamphlet politique circule, car la compression a ses limites et ne peut tout atteindre, c'est sous le manteau ; or, un tel moyen de publicité n'a jamais rapporté que des coups de bâton, plusieurs années de séjour dans un préside marécageux ou l'exercice prolongé de la rame à bord des galères du roi. Seul, de tous les genres littéraires cultivés en Espagne, le théâtre, au moment de la plus grande vogue de la *comedia*, a été presque une profession, mais uniquement pour le très petit nombre de ceux qui exercèrent un véritable sacerdoce, comme Calderon, nanti longtemps du monopole exclusif des *autos* de la Fête-Dieu à Madrid, comme Lope de Vega dont la manufacture dramatique, toujours fumante, approvisionnait largement les impresarios de l'Espagne entière. Encore l'un et l'autre ont-ils dû tirer plus de



profit de leurs prébendes ou de la générosité de leurs patrons que de leurs droits d'auteur.

Cervantes n'a pas été plus favorisé que tant d'autres : ses nouvelles, son *Don Quichotte*, son théâtre n'ont jamais suffi à pourvoir à ses besoins. Dès sa première jeunesse, lorsqu'il quitta l'Espagne pour suivre un cardinal en Italie, jusqu'à ses derniers instants, il dut ou servir, ou peiner dans quelque emploi. Tour à tour camérier, soldat, commis des finances royales ou agent d'affaires privées, il ne prenait sa plume de conteur que dans ses moments perdus et ne sacrifiait aux Muses qu'après avoir fourni le labeur quotidien et fort terre à terre qui lui assurait le pain de sa famille. N'ayant jamais eu beaucoup à se louer des grands, il ne s'est pas gêné pour leur dire ce qu'il pensait de leurs devoirs envers les hommes de lettres. Dans sa pensée, il y a comme un contrat tacite entre l'auteur dédiant son ouvrage au prince et ce prince qui bénéficie de l'encens brûlé en son honneur. Donnant donnant : une dédicace vaut une pension, et le grand loué et qui ne paye pas manque au contrat<sup>1</sup>. Après tout, l'illustration que tire le patron de l'œuvre de son client, quand elle a réussi, est une valeur appréciable et dont le prix se laisse débattre. Il va plus loin : la littérature ne subsistant qu'en raison de la faveur qui lui est ainsi octroyée, les grands sont en une certaine mesure responsables du sort des œuvres, ils créent les réputations, dirigent le goût du public porté à recevoir de confiance

<sup>1</sup> 'No quieren admitirlos (les ouvrages dédiés) por no obligarse á la satisfacion que se debe al trabajo y cortesia de sus autores.' (*D. Q.*, ii. 24.) Voyez aussi le passage de la *Galatea* (livre vi) où Cervantes déplore la *poca estimacion* dont jouissent les meilleurs *ingenios* auprès des princes et du public.

ce qui lui vient recommandé de si haut lieu. Aux grands donc de bien choisir, de ne pas repousser les hommages des gens de mérite, de ne pas accueillir les méchants écrivains et les poètes crottés. Ainsi cette manière de parasitisme, que les nécessités de la vie imposaient alors à beaucoup de littérateurs, pouvait fort bien ne pas s'accompagner de formes dégradantes et serviles, elle s'accommodait même parfois d'une franchise non dépourvue de noblesse et de nature à nous réconcilier avec ces mœurs dont nous avons de la peine à ne pas être aujourd'hui un peu froissés.

La critique littéraire, comme c'était à prévoir, occupe une assez grande place dans le *Don Quichotte*, Cervantes ayant profité du va-et-vient des personnages de son roman, de leurs rencontres et de leurs conversations, pour émettre certaines théories littéraires qui lui tenaient au cœur et pour dire sa pensée sur quelques contemporains. Critique littéraire, non pas telle que nous la concevons depuis qu'elle est devenue un art et une science, critique un peu trop dogmatique ou trop sommaire, mais non dépourvue d'intérêt assurément. A l'époque de Cervantes, les arbitres du goût, les donneurs de préceptes, les distributeurs de palmes aux plus méritants, ou bien commentent Aristote, délayent surtout les commentateurs italiens du maître, ou bien composent des arts poétiques sur le patron de celui d'Horace, ou enfin écrivent des panégyriques, des *Temples de mémoire*. Ce dernier genre a la vogue. On loue les autres pour être loué à son tour, on soigne sa propre réputation en prônant celle du voisin. Cervantes s'y est essayé dans le *Chant de Calliope* de la *Galatée*. Rien de plus fade que ces coups d'encensoir donnés à tort et à travers, que ces pluies d'épithètes

laudatives qui finissent par n'avoir plus de sens tant elles sont prodiguées. Aucune nuance dans l'éloge qui s'abat indistinctement sur tous, le plus médiocre comme le plus illustre étant toujours admirable, excellent, divin. Qu'apprenons-nous de précis dans ces stances, ou dans l'interminable rapsodie de Lope de Vega intitulée *Laurier d'Apollon*, sur les qualités propres des poètes d'alors, sur la marque de leur invention, la facture de leur style, le rythme de leurs vers ? Bien peu de chose. Le *Voyage au Parnasse* vaut mieux ; ici le ton burlesque, la tendance satirique autorisaient Cervantes à mêler la critique à l'éloge, à cacher quelques serpents sous des fleurs, à aiguiser des traits contre les personnes. Mais la personnalité dans la critique est un autre écueil. Trop souvent la dispute littéraire dégénère en une diatribe où l'adversaire seul est visé : ce ne sont plus les fautes de l'écrivain, ce sont les travers de l'homme qu'on dénonce et qu'on persifle. Aujourd'hui même un étranger s'étonne de la place considérable que les questions personnelles, les piques entre écrivains de partis politiques ou religieux opposés prennent dans les discussions littéraires en Espagne<sup>1</sup>.

Les divers morceaux de critique insérés dans le *Don Quichotte* n'ont pas tous une égale valeur. Tel roman de chevalerie loué ou déprécié, telle pastorale ou tel poème épique dont Cervantes explique les mérites ou les faiblesses ne nous occupent pas. Ces œuvres fanées nul ne les lira plus ; partant ce qu'en pense notre auteur nous importe infiniment peu. Les jugements de Cervantes qui ont conservé leur intérêt sont relatifs au théâtre ; mais, avant de les examiner, il convient de nous rendre compte de sa doctrine. Cervantes est

<sup>1</sup> Voyez, par exemple, les *Ripios* de Valbuena.

avant tout un disciple de l'Italie, un élève enthousiaste de celui qu'il nomme le divin Arioste<sup>1</sup>. Ce maître lui a enseigné, avec certains artifices de style, le procédé qui a fait sa force et sa gloire et dont vit le *Don Quichotte* : l'ironie aimable, enjouée, presque indulgente, l'opposé de cette ironie froide, cruelle, accablante des premiers picaresques espagnols. Cervantes est tout pénétré d'Italie, les citations des grands auteurs italiens se pressent sous sa plume, l'italien, si l'on peut ainsi dire, lui sort par tous les pores. Il s'est moqué, en un passage du *Don Quichotte*, des traducteurs de son temps qui calquaient les livres toscans au lieu de les transposer<sup>2</sup> ; mais lui-même n'est pas exempt d'italianismes, comme l'ont déjà noté ses commentateurs. Et l'Italie a non seulement transmis à Cervantes tout le suc de ses meilleurs prosateurs et poètes, elle lui a par surcroît découvert l'antiquité : il ne possède vraiment des auteurs anciens que ce qui en a passé dans la circulation grâce surtout aux nombreux *vulgarisateurs* italiens qu'on pratiquait extraordinairement en Espagne.

A propos du théâtre, il épouse naturellement les opinions de ceux qui en Italie interprètent la *Poétique* d'Aristote et la réduisent en formules à l'usage des poètes non versés dans les lettres savantes ; il se soumet respectueusement, comme Lope, au Minturne, au Castelvetro, à Robortello d'Udine ; il croit au dogme des unités à peu près autant qu'y croyait Corneille. En théorie ; mais la pratique donne un démenti flagrant à ces belles spéculations.

Cervantes a écrit pour le théâtre à deux reprises, une première fois à l'âge de trente-cinq à quarante ans, — et les pièces qu'il composa alors furent, dit-il, représentées

<sup>1</sup> *Galatea*, livre vi.

<sup>2</sup> *D. Q.*, ii. 62.

avec succès, — une seconde fois dans les dernières années de sa vie et longtemps après que Lope, reconnu souverain maître du théâtre, 'eut mis sous sa juridiction tous les comédiens d'Espagne<sup>1</sup>.' Des drames de la première époque, il ne nous reste que la *Numancia*, belle déclamation patriotique dialoguée, et la *Vie à Alger*, sorte de tableau curieux et parfois éloquent de la captivité et des bagnes, l'une et l'autre plutôt des tragédies de salon, intéressantes à lire, difficiles à représenter. Le vrai théâtre de Cervantes consiste donc essentiellement dans les huit *comedias* et les huit intermèdes de la seconde époque qui furent publiés en 1615. Ces pièces, et j'entends ici exclusivement les huit *comedias*, étant à mettre au nombre des productions les plus extravagantes de la Thalie espagnole, en même temps qu'au nombre des plus contraires aux règles admises et recommandées par Cervantes dans ses écrits, on s'est demandé comment il avait pu les composer d'abord, puis les imprimer, les garantissant bonnes ou au moins passables. Désireux de résoudre ce problème, un écrivain fantasque du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, Blas de Nasarre, a soutenu que Cervantes avait agi à l'égard du théâtre de son pays comme à l'égard des livres de chevaleries, qu'il s'était proposé de le tuer sous le ridicule, en le parodiant<sup>2</sup>. Boutade que personne n'a prise au sérieux. Une parodie demande à être spirituelle, amusante, comme le *Don Quichotte*, et quelle parodie que huit pièces mortellement ennuyeuses et absurdes où pas un trait n'avertit qu'il s'agit d'une plaisanterie et qu'on se moque de nous ! Non, la vérité est que Cervantes les

<sup>1</sup> Prologue des *Comedias* de Cervantes.

<sup>2</sup> Voyez la préface qu'il a mise à l'édition des *Comedias* de Cervantes publiée en 1749.

a écrites telles quelles et sans se soucier le moins du monde des règles, — pas plus de celles d'Aristote que de celles du bon sens et du goût, — parce qu'il n'a pas eu le loisir de les écrire autrement, et qu'il les a vendues à un libraire parce qu'il avait besoin d'argent. On ne peut pas demander beaucoup de logique à un artiste qui a une famille à nourrir et des dettes à payer. Au reste, le fameux Lope avait déjà donné l'exemple d'une contradiction aussi choquante, plus choquante même, vu sa qualité d'inventeur de la *comedia* nouvelle, en condamnant sans rémission dans son *Art poétique*, au nom des principes de l'école, toute sa littérature dramatique, à l'exception de six pièces qu'il jugeait composées *selon l'art*.

A tout prendre et sauf quelques observations judicieuses sur les copies puérilement exactes de détails historiques et de couleur locale<sup>1</sup>, ou sur les tours de force que devaient accomplir les auteurs pour accommoder leur sujet au cadre immuable de la *comedia* et à ses emplois obligés<sup>2</sup>, sauf cela la critique dramatique, exposée dans le chapitre XLVIII de la première partie du *Don Quichotte* et qu'il faut compléter par quelques passages des *Nouvelles*, du *Persiles* et du *Voyage au Parnasse*, est singulièrement étroite et bornée. Cervantes n'a pas démêlé les vraies causes des faiblesses du théâtre espagnol classique ; il a cru que ces faiblesses

<sup>1</sup> Voyez ce que le poète ridicule du *Coloquio de los perros* dit du costume de ses cardinaux : 'Y así en todas maneras conviene para guardar la propiedad que estos mis cardonales salgan de morado, y este es un punto que hace mucho al caso para la comedia.'

<sup>2</sup> Bon gré, mal gré, toute *comedia* doit avoir son confident plaisant (*gracioso*) : 'Lo que más le fatigaba era pensar como podría encajar un lacayo consejero y gracioso en el mar y entre tantas iasas, fuego y nievea.' (*Persiles*, livre iii, ch. ii.)

tenaient à l'inobservance des règles, alors qu'elles résultent essentiellement d'une psychologie insuffisante, d'une étude trop sommaire des caractères et des passions, d'une composition beaucoup trop rapide et négligée. D'autre part, il n'a pas senti la force et la grandeur de ce théâtre, il n'a pas vu qu'il représente la manifestation la plus puissante du sentiment national qu'ait connue la littérature espagnole depuis la grande époque des romances.

Telles sont les principales échappées que Cervantes nous a ouvertes sur son temps et sur sa nation.

Assurément, il ne nous fait pas tout voir et ne nous conduit pas partout ; il butine de droite et de gauche, il choisit, parmi les figures et les faits qu'il a sous les yeux, ceux qui s'encadrent le mieux dans sa fiction et il néglige les autres ; mais ce qu'il peint ressort avec tant de relief et de vie qu'on supplée volontiers à ce qu'il laisse dans l'ombre et qu'on retient de la lecture de son roman une image d'ensemble de l'Espagne du xvi<sup>e</sup> et du xvii<sup>e</sup> siècle dont il n'y a pas lieu de suspecter la ressemblance. A lui seul le *Don Quichotte* vaut beaucoup de livres de moralistes ou d'historiens qui ont prétendu juger ou décrire ex professo cette Espagne, et l'on a pu dire, sans trop d'exagération, que, si de toute la littérature castillane de la grande époque il ne nous restait que le *Don Quichotte*, cet incomparable livre nous instruirait suffisamment de tout ce qu'il nous importe le plus de savoir de ce monde disparu.

La valeur historique d'une œuvre d'imagination n'apparaît pas toujours à la première lecture ; on se laisse d'abord captiver par le côté romanesque, on suit

avec passion les incidents de la fable, on ne pense qu'au héros lui-même et à ses aventures. Mais revenez-y et vous comprendrez alors l'intérêt que présentent les parties accessoires, le fond très réel et très historique sur lequel se détache la fiction. Le *Don Quichotte* est donc un roman qu'il faut relire, relire souvent, si l'on veut jouir pleinement de tout ce qui constitue sa haute valeur littéraire, morale et sociale. Certes, il n'est pas besoin de prétexte pour rouvrir ce livre et s'en délecter à nouveau ; si cependant les aperçus qui viennent de vous être présentés sur Cervantes, en tant que peintre et critique de son pays, ravivaient votre curiosité et réchauffaient votre admiration, je n'aurais pas à regretter de vous avoir un peu longuement entretenu du charmant écrivain, et vous-mêmes me sauriez peut-être quelque gré de vous avoir fourni l'occasion de relire une fois de plus son immortel chef-d'œuvre.



## PAOLO SARPI

**T**HERE is a Scotch proverb which says, *It's ill work chapping at a dead man's yatt.* Whatever may have been the intention of the man who framed that aphorism, its truth will come home to all who, out of the fragmentary records bequeathed by contemporaries, and the voiceless pages of epistolary correspondence, have endeavoured first to recover and then to display the living portrait of a man long dead and gone. The proverb is peculiarly true in the case of Fra Paolo Sarpi, for not only is he dead and buried nigh upon three hundred years, but during his very lifetime he suffered a species of burial. He entered a monastery at the age of thirteen, and made open profession of his vows before he was twenty. Under the rigid rule of monastic life one day resembles another, and we are deprived of all those little touches of humour, of temper, of sentiment which, in the early lives of distinguished persons, so clearly indicate the manner of men they will come to be.

Nevertheless with the help of his own writings, his official opinions presented to the Government in his

capacity of Counsellor to the State, his informal letters to friends, in which, as he himself declares, *I write as I would speak*<sup>1</sup>, in the current opinions about him expressed by contemporaries, above all, thanks to that labour of loving hands, Fra Fulgenzio's life of his friend and master, we may reconstruct for ourselves some likeness of the great Servite friar.

Sarpi was born on August 14, 1552. His father was Francesco Sarpi, of San Vito, in Friuli, who had migrated to Venice; his mother, Elizabeth Morelli, a lady of good, though not of noble, Venetian family. Sarpi took after his mother; was a delicate child, thoughtful, silent, studious. His father died when he was young, and his mother entrusted the boy's education to her brother, Don Ambrogio, a priest who kept a school. Here the boy was worked too hard for his slender constitution, and suffered in consequence. He grew shy, retiring, melancholy. His companions called him 'La Sposa,' and paid him the compliment of avoiding loose conversation when he appeared, but he was not popular. At the age of twelve Don Ambrogio could teach him no more, and he was passed on to Gian Maria Capella, a Servite friar, master in theology, mathematics and philosophy. Under Gian Maria's teaching young Sarpi discovered the real bent of his intellect, towards mathematics and the exact sciences, and doubtless acquired that liking for the Servite Order which led him, in spite of his mother and his uncle, to take the habit in November, 1566.

A period of close application to his studies was followed by a journey to Mantua, where Sarpi won the

<sup>1</sup> 'Scrivo . . . il mio concetto come lo parlerei a bocca.' *Lettere di Fra Paolo Sarpi*, i. 112. Firenze, 1863.

favour of Duke William, who was never tired of putting difficult and sometimes ridiculous questions to the young student (though Sarpi soon wearied of the game). Under this powerful patronage, however, he became Theologian to the Duke, and the Bishop of Mantua gave him the chair of Theology with a readership in Casuistry and Canon Law. And here, in the process of teaching, Sarpi learned the use of those weapons with which he subsequently made such sprightly play.

His studies continued at a high pressure. Eight hours a day of Greek, Hebrew, Chaldee, Mathematics, Medicine, Anatomy, Botany. The pile of his note-books grew in height. He never allowed a difficulty to escape him; he would follow it up till he was able to say, *I've beaten it, now I'll think no more on it*<sup>1</sup>.

His sojourn at Mantua was not spent entirely among books, however. The bishop, Boldrino, was his personal friend; so was Fra Girolamo Bernerio, the Dominican Inquisitor; so was Camillo Oliva, Secretary to Cardinal Gonzaga. But the death of Boldrino, the perpetual questions of the Duke, and the buffoonery of his attendants, rendered life at the Court of Mantua distasteful; and in 1574 Sarpi left that city for Milan, where he found the great Carlo Borromeo engaged in reforming his diocese.

Sarpi was soon in high favour with the Cardinal Archbishop; but that did not shield him from the first of the many attacks which he was destined to experience in the course of his life. He was accused of heresy because he confessed that he could not find the complete Trinity in the first verse of Genesis. His

<sup>1</sup> 'L'ho pur vinta, or più non ci voglio pensare.' *Vita del Padre Paolo Sarpi, Opere*, vi. 6. Helmstat, 1765.

defence is characteristic and noteworthy, showing a legal rather than a theological turn of mind. He alleged that there was connivance between his accuser—a jealous friar—and his judge, the Inquisitor of Milan; he asserted, and proved, that the judge was incompetent, through his ignorance of Hebrew. On these grounds he refused to answer in Milan, and appealed to Rome, where the case was quashed.

In the following year Sarpi received a call to teach philosophy in the Servite monastery in Venice. He set out. It was summer; on the way, between Vicenza and Padua, along those hot and dusty roads, he was seized with heat apoplexy. He sent for a barber to bleed him: the man refused without the presence of a doctor; Sarpi said, ‘Go and fetch one; but just let me see if your lancet is sharp.’ When the man returned the operation was over.

For the next four years Sarpi continued to lecture and study in his monastery at Santa Fosca, where he steadily won for himself a foremost place in the ranks of his Order. In 1579 he was elected Provincial, and named to serve on the committee appointed to bring the rules of the Order into unison with the Tridentine decrees. This necessitated a journey to Rome to consult with the Cardinal Protector of the Order and with the Pope. Sarpi drew up the chapter on Judgements. The work was considered a masterpiece, and one dictum in it has attracted the attention and admiration of jurists. Sarpi declares, and perhaps for the first time, that the prison ought to be reformatory, not merely punitive.

The new constitutions were approved, and Sarpi returned to his duties as Provincial of his Order. His

rule was severe, incorruptible, sound. No judgement of his was ever reversed on appeal, and the Cardinal Protector, Santa Severina, declared to an appellant that 'the findings of your Provincial admit of no reply.'

During these Roman visits Fra Paolo made the acquaintance of many distinguished persons, of Farnese, of Santa Severina, head of the Inquisition, of Castagna, afterwards Pope Urban VII, of Dr. Navarro who had known Loyola, above all, of Cardinal Bellarmine, with whom he was subsequently brought into violent controversial relations. But the two men personally liked each other, and Bellarmine did not fail in the offices of friendship when, much later on, he warned the Venetian ambassador that plots were being laid against Fra Paolo's life. It is a pleasure, moreover, to record that on the appearance of a scurrilous biography of Sarpi, Bellarmine expressed to the Pope the following opinion: 'Holy Father, this book is a tissue of lies. I know Fra Paolo; I know him for a man of irreproachable habits. If such calumnies are allowed to be published by us, all the dishonour will be ours<sup>1</sup>.'

Indeed Sarpi made for himself a very strong position in Rome. It was even thought that he might reach the purple. Bellarmine, at all events, believed that his services might have been retained for the Curia by the gift of *un fiore secco*—a dried flower, as he called it—by which he meant a see without emoluments. But Sarpi was not ambitious, he took little pains to conciliate,

<sup>1</sup> 'Beatissimo Padre, questo libello è un tessuto di menzogne. Io conosco Fra Paolo, e lo conosco uomo da bene e d'intemerati costumi; e se calunnie così fatte si lasciassero pubblicare da noi, tutto nostro sarebbe il disonore.' Bianchi Giovini, *Biografia*, &c., ii. 174.

and the jealousy of more persistent aspirants easily blocked his path. He was in Rome for the last time in 1597. From this, his fifth journey, he returned to Venice, which he seldom quitted again till his death.

And now that we have our Frate safely in his cell, now that he is on the very threshold of the larger field of European ecclesiastical politics, let us see how much of his daily life, his habit of mind and of body, we can recover from the testimony of his contemporaries. He was a man of medium height, with a large forehead, arched eyebrows, a long nose, a broad nasal bone—remarked by Lavater—a strong, large hand and thick-set body, eyes very black and piercing. He was excessively thin, and his health was seldom good. He had his own peculiar way of doctoring himself; he believed in violent changes of food, of hours, of habits. When out of sorts he would turn day into night, night into day. His medicines were cassia, manna, tamarind—the same that the Venetian *popolo* still consumes. His ailments, which he called his ‘notices to quit,’ he treated lightly, and fought them chiefly by the vigour of his spirits. His high courage was his best medicine. Courage and coolness he possessed in a singular degree, and he had abundant need of both. He was a fidgetty patient, asking his physicians many questions, and frequently declaring that he knew more about his illness than his doctors did—which I dare say was true. The frailness of his body, and the austerity of his habits, preserved to his senses an extraordinary delicacy of perception. He always declared that his enemies would never succeed in poisoning him through his food; and he refused the Government’s proposal to appoint an official taster. His memory had been well trained in

his youth, and was prodigiously retentive. It seems to have been largely what is called a visual memory—he recalled the look of a page, then what was on the page. To Sarpi it seemed a mechanical quality, and he always spoke of it as that ‘excellent weakness.’

He suffered much from cold, and tried to combat it by holding warm iron in his hands; but I suspect that chilblains had the better of him. His friend, Sir Henry Wotton, the English Ambassador, describes him as sitting in his cell ‘fenced with a castle of paper about his chair and over his head when he was either reading or writing alone, for he was of our Lord of St. Albans’ opinion that all air is predatory, and especially hurtful when the spirits are most employed.’ This cell was extremely bare—a table, a box for his books, a bench, a crucifix above a human skull, a picture of Christ in the garden, a little bed, to which he preferred a shake-down on his book-box—that was all. His diet was spare as his lodging—vegetables, hardly any meat, a little white wine, toast—his fine palate appreciating the great varieties of flavour obtained by that excellent method of cooking. His old friend, Frate Giulio, attended to him, saw that he was washed, dressed, brushed, &c. From the convent registers we learn that two pairs of sheets lasted him twenty years—thanks, no doubt, to the shake-down. He was a devourer of books, and he had them bound before he read them. I suppose most of them were like modern German editions. Mathematics were his pastime, and these he kept for the afternoons. Sir Henry Wotton adds some further touches: ‘He was one of the humblest things that could be seen within the bounds of humanity, the very pattern of that precept: *Quanto doctior, tanto*

*submissior*, and is enough alone to demonstrate that knowledge, well digested, *non inflat*. Excellent in positive, excellent in scholastical and polemical divinity; a rare mathematician even in the most abstruse parts thereof, and yet withal, so expert in the history of plants as if he had never perused any book but Nature. Lastly a great canonist, which was the title of his ordinary service with the state, and certainly in the time of the Pope's interdict they had their principal light from him.' Sarpi's manner was excessively ceremonious and urbane. Times were dangerous, and politeness is an excellent weapon of defence. He talked little, but possessed the gift of making others talk. When he did join in the conversation his tone was persuasive, not dogmatic. He cared most, as Fra Fulgentio says, to know the truth—*una gran curiosità d'intendere come realmente le cose fossero passate*. And this gave to his attitude a certain air of aloofness, indifference, disdain, irritating to those who were defending a *parti pris*, and led Sarpi to say that nothing so much as the truth rendered superstitious men obstinate (*Osservo questa esser la proprietà della verità che fa più ostinati gli animi superstiziosi*<sup>1</sup>). It also induced him to lay down a rule for his own guidance: 'I never,' he says, 'tell a lie, but the truth not to everybody (*Non dico mai buggie, ma la verità non a tutti*)<sup>2</sup>,' not because it is not well to tell it always, but, as he remarks, because not everybody can bear it.

The temper of his mind was scientific—mathematics were his favourite study—and the scientific method is apparent throughout all his work. 'I never,' he writes, 'venture to deny anything on the ground of impossi-

<sup>1</sup> *Lett.*, ii. 160.

<sup>2</sup> See *Encyc. Brit.*, s.v. Sarpi.



bility, for I am well aware of the infinite variety in the operations of God and Nature (*Io mai non ardisco negare cosa alcuna riferita sotto titolo d' impossibilità, sapendo molto bene l' infinita varietà delle opere della natura e di Dio*<sup>1</sup>).<sup>2</sup> In respect of this scientific quality Sarpi is a very modern man. He is talking about the merits of the various writers of his day, and whom does he select for praise as the only 'original authors'? Vieta and Gilbert, two men of science<sup>2</sup>—just as we might say that Darwin and the scientific writers were, in a sense, the only original authors of our day.

Linked with this genuine love of discovery for discovery's sake—this curiosity as to how things really were, which is perhaps the essence of the scientific spirit—Sarpi also possessed an exquisite modesty. He never displays one iota of jealousy, and is absolutely without desire for notoriety. Yet Galileo acknowledges assistance in the construction of the telescope from *mio padre e maestro Sarpi*. The famous physician Fabrizio of Acquapendente exclaims, 'Oh! how many things has Father Paul taught me in anatomy.' The valves in the veins were discovered by Sarpi. Gilbert of Colchester ranks him above della Porta as an authority on magnetism. In his treatise on 'L'arte di ben pensare,' the Method of Thinking Correctly, he certainly anticipates the sensationalism of Locke.

Many of his curious inventions, and more of his ideas, were freely placed at the disposal of his friends, and no acknowledgment in public ever sought. Indeed Sarpi, in this respect, lived to the height of his own generous maxim, *Let us imitate God and Nature; they give,*

<sup>1</sup> *Lett.*, i. 229.

<sup>2</sup> See *Quart. Rev.*, No. 352, p. 379.

*they do not lend.* Twice only does he assert his priority. It is important to note the occasion, for it affords some clue as to Sarpi's personal estimate of the relative value of his works. Writing to a friend in France on two different occasions, he exclaims, 'I was the first to affirm that no sovereign had ever freed the clergy from allegiance to himself (*Io prima del Barclay scrissi che sebbene quasi tutti i principi avessero concesso esenzioni ai cherici, mai però non si potrebbe trovare che essi fossero per alcuno liberati*; and again: *Io, pel primo in Italia, fui oso bandire che niuno imperante sciolse i cherici dal suo potere*<sup>1</sup>).' Sarpi is right to guard his reputation here, for it is precisely on the point of ecclesiastical politics, and not in the region of science, however brilliant his accomplishments may there have been, that his real distinction rests.

Thus far I have endeavoured to represent some of the qualities which characterized the mind of Paolo Sarpi. But let us press a little deeper, and discover, if possible, his fundamental views of life, his inner religion, the faith by which he lived. He was a strict observer of outward forms and ceremonies; so strict, indeed, that his enemies were unable to fasten upon him any charge which they could sustain. The cut of his shoes was once impugned by a foolish but troublesome brother; Sarpi, however, triumphantly demonstrated their orthodoxy, and it became a proverb in the Order that even Fra Paolo's slippers were above suspicion.

But beneath the surface of these formalities, I think that Sarpi was essentially sceptical as to all human presentations of the truth, outside the exact sciences.

<sup>1</sup> *Leti.*, i. 313, ii. 414.

And, as so often happens, this scepticism was accompanied by a stoical resignation to fate, and a profound belief in the Divine governance of the universe. It was this scepticism which kept him inside the Church of Rome, in spite of his dislike to its excessive temporal claims and worldly tendencies. He never showed the smallest inclination to change his native creed for any of the various creeds which the chaos of Reformation bestowed upon Europe. The temper of his mind—eminently scientific—prevented him from enjoying that strong externalizing faith which allowed Luther to believe that he had engaged in a personal conflict with the devil. Sarpi was Italian, not German; he was not superstitious, and an Italian who is not superstitious is very frequently sceptical. This scepticism, however, did not leave him without a religion, its corrosive power could not reach further than the human formulas in which men endeavoured to confine the truth. Below all these lay the core of his faith. In his letters no phrases occur more frequently than those which declare his conviction that all is in the hands of God. While in constant danger of his life he refused to adopt the precautions recommended by his friends, being convinced that he would not be killed before the appointed time. When he sees the course of events taking a turn destructive of his hopes, again he affirms his confidence that the issue will be for good. ‘What human folly is this to desire to know the future! To what purpose? To avoid it? Is not that a patent impossibility? If you avoid it, then it was not the future<sup>1</sup>.’

<sup>1</sup> *Lett.*, i. 270: ‘Che miseria è questa umana di voler sapere il futuro! A che fine? per schifarlo? Non è questa la più espressa contraddizione che possi esser al mondo? Se si schiferà non era futuro!’

‘Fate guides the willing,’ he said, ‘but compels the reluctant<sup>1</sup>,’ an aphorism which we may parallel with Dante’s noble line, *In la sua volontade è nostra pace*, or with that simpler and diviner formula of submission, *Thy will be done*.

But there was a further principle in the religion of Fra Paolo, a principle which saved him from the dangers of fatalism. He was perfectly convinced that men were the agents of the Divine will, and that it was man’s first duty to act, to take advantage of the fitting occasion which presented itself almost as a Divine injunction to use it. This doctrine of the *καίρός*, of the fitting opportunity, is repeated again and again throughout the letters<sup>2</sup>. *In all human action, he writes, opportunity is everything. It is well to do God’s service without regard of consequences, but only if all the circumstances are propitious. Without that, such action cannot merit the name of good, and may even be a hindrance to successful action in the future, when the season is ripe. Again: As for myself, being well aware that to use an unpropitious occasion is little pleasing to the Divine Majesty, I never cease to make myself more able and more ready to act when the right moment arrives; and, like the artificer, I gather material when not at work. If the time should never come for me, what I have gathered may be of service to another.*

It is a cold religion, perhaps, but a very strong one; with a deep taproot of faith and an abundant field for the play of human practical judgement, for the develop-

<sup>1</sup> *Lett.*, ii. 126, 429: ‘I fati conducono chi vuole, e chi non vuole strascianano.’

<sup>2</sup> *Lett.*, i. 269.

ment of human action. And this is a proof of its goodness, that in spite of all Fra Paolo suffered—in body, from ill-health and the assassin's dagger; in mind, from calumny, from apparent failure, from isolation—his religion was strong enough to sustain and strengthen his whole life, and a contemporary observer, Diodati, was forced to admit that *Every blow falls paralyzed and blunted on that sweetness and maturity of affections and spirit, which raise him to a height far above all human passions*<sup>1</sup>.

And now, before proceeding to an account of Sarpi's life-work—to a narrative of what he found to do in the field of ecclesiastical politics, it will be as well to see what his views upon this subject were, and what weapons of offence and defence were at his disposal.

We must bear in mind that throughout the controversy upon which Sarpi was about to engage, it is not the Church which he is attacking but the Roman Curia, and the new tendencies which it represented—new, that is, in so far as they gave a new form to the mediaeval claims of the Papacy. Sarpi observes that the Curia would like to give to the Pope not the *primatus* but the *totatus*<sup>2</sup> in the world of ecclesiastical politics. He has a distinct name for the policy which was represented by Spain, the Jesuits and the Inquisition—he calls it the *Dia-catholicon*. For the Jesuits, whom he conceived to be the life and spirit of the *Dia-catholicon*, are reserved his most pungent irony, his most crushing attacks. He hated them because he

<sup>1</sup> Mor. Ritter, *Briefe u. Acten zur Gesch. des Dreissigjährigen Krieges*, ii. 131: 'Tutti i colpi vengono al ammorzarsi e rintuzzarsi in quella sua dolcezza e maturità d'affetto e di spirito che lo tiene quasi fuori di ogni commovimenti.'

<sup>2</sup> Lett., i. 275.

thought they were not only a serious and unwarranted danger to temporal princes, and destructive of good citizenship, but even more, because he was convinced that they were leading the Church upon a false track; confounding the things of earth with the things of heaven, and introducing disorder into a divinely ordered world<sup>1</sup>.

The political situation stood thus: the Curia could always rely on the dread of Spain to enforce its supremacy upon an unwilling Italy; France was the only counterpoise to Spain; England and the Protestant princes of Germany were too far off, and as Sarpi said, they were quite unknown in Venice; and this combination of Spain and the Curia was developed by the Jesuits for the furtherance of their special ends. Sarpi was convinced, as he says, that 'if the Jesuits were defeated, religion would be reformed of itself<sup>2</sup>.' And what his aspirations were in the direction of reform can be gathered from his letters, from such explicit passages as this: *I imagine, he writes, that the State and the Church are two separate empires—composed, however, each of them, by the same human beings. The one is entirely celestial, the other terrestrial; each has its proper limits of jurisdiction, its proper arms, its proper bulwarks. No region is common to both . . . How, then, can those who walk by different roads clash together? Christ has said that He and His disciples were not of this world, and St. Paul has declared that our citizenship is in heaven<sup>3</sup>.* Again

<sup>1</sup> *Lett.*, ii. 6: 'mescolare il cielo colla terra.'      <sup>2</sup> *Lett.*, ii. 217.

<sup>3</sup> *Lett.*, i. 312: 'Io immagino che il regno e la chiesa siano due stati, composti però degli stessi uomini; al tutto celeste uno, e terreno l'altro; aventi propria sovranità, difesi da proprie armi et

Sarpi argues that the Church, being a divine institution, cannot ever be really injured by the State, which is a human institution<sup>1</sup>. He wishes to mark the two as entirely distinct from one another, moving on different planes. If asked, what then is the field of action left to the Church, if she is to interfere in no matters secular and temporal, Sarpi replies that to the Church he leaves the wide field of influence, through precept, through example, through conviction. Religion is the medicine of the mind. As the doctor to the body, so the cleric to the soul<sup>2</sup>. Let the Church make men good, voluntarily, freely, of their own accord, through conviction, and they will not govern wrongly, nor will they ever run counter to their nursing mother. The phrases are such as we might expect in the mouth of a reformer, and yet I think it certain that Sarpi was no Protestant, in spirit or in form. Diodati, the translator of the Bible, who had come to Venice with high hopes of winning Fra Paolo and his followers to an open secession from Rome, reluctantly admits that *Sarpi is rooted in that most dangerous maxim that God cares nothing for externals, provided the mind and the heart are in pure and direct relation with Himself. And so fortified is he in this opinion by reason and examples, ancient and modern, that it is vain to combat with him*<sup>3</sup>. That is the true word about Sarpi. The

fortificazioni; di nulla possessori in commune; impediti di muoversi, comechessia, scambievolmente la guerra. Come s'avrebbero a cozzare se procedono per sì diversa via? Cristo ebbe detto che Esso e i discepoli non erano di questo mondo; e Paolo santo dichiara che il nostro conversare è nei cieli.'

<sup>1</sup> *Lett.*, i. 275.

<sup>2</sup> *Arte di ben pensare*, MS. Marciana, cl. 2, Ital. Cod. 129.

<sup>3</sup> Ritter, *ut sup.*, 131: 'Sarpi è fisso in una pericolosissima

outward forms were so indifferent to him that he would never have abandoned those into which he was born. But that did not prevent him from lending his aid to the party who wished to establish a reformed Church in Venice. It is impossible to deny that he did so after reading Dohna's<sup>1</sup> most explicit reports. Sarpi would gladly have seen perfect freedom for all forms of worship, provided that the worshippers remained good citizens. No wonder that, with these principles at heart, he dreaded every success of the Jesuits; no wonder that the Jesuits hated and pursued him alive and dead. Whether Sarpi can be considered a good churchman or not, depends upon the view we take of what the Church is and what its functions, the answer we give as to the headship of the Church. Certainly he was no churchman at all in the sense intended by the Curia and the Jesuits, certainly not one of those *qui filii sunt legitimi*. And yet Bossuet's assertion that under the frock of a friar he hid the heart of a Calvinist, is quite untenable. And the opinion here expressed is confirmed by a letter to Cardinal Borghese from the Nuncio, Bentivoglio, no friend to Fra Paolo, in which he says that, *though Sarpi displays a great alienation from the Court of Rome, and holds views diametrically opposed to the authority of the Holy See, yet he shows no inclination to embrace the new heresy*<sup>2</sup>. And there we must leave it; he had his own ideal of a Church, and expressed it in the passages just quoted.

massima che Iddio non curi l' esterno, pur che l' animo e 'l cuore habbia quella pura e diritta intenzione e relazione a lui . . . Et in quella è in maniera fortificato per ragioni e per esempi antichi e moderni che poco s'avanza combatterglielo.'

<sup>1</sup> Ritter, *ut sup.*, 75-89.

<sup>2</sup> Balan, *Fra Paolo Sarpi*, 39.



I think that, if he had given himself any name at all, he would have called himself an Old Catholic.

As to the weapon at Sarpi's disposal, his inimitable and individual style, something must be said before we come to the actual struggle with the Curia. We have seen that the bent of Sarpi's mind was pre-eminently scientific, and scientific is the chief quality of his style. His manner was precise, parsimonious, hard, positive, pungent. Never was there a more complete lack of adornment, a more thorough contempt for rhetoric, in a writer of so powerful a pen. And yet the whole is vivified by a living logic, and the reader is caught, and held delighted, by the compulsion of a method which is never explained but always felt. That is why Sarpi may be called the historian's historian; that is why Gibbon, Macaulay, Hallam, Johnson, agree in placing him in the foremost rank. Sarpi is chiefly concerned in saying his say so directly and simply, that the comments, the deductions, the lessons become obvious, are implicit in the very narration. Let me take an example. Fra Manfredi (one of his colleagues in the struggle with the Curia) was enticed to Rome upon a safe conduct, which guaranteed the inviolability of his person and his honour. This notwithstanding, he was tried, forced to an ignominious public recantation, hung and burned. How does Sarpi narrate this event? 'I know not what judgement to make,' he writes; 'the beginning and the end are clear—a *safe conduct and a pyre*<sup>1</sup>.' This is what Sarpi meant by *l'arte del colpire*, the art of striking. The effect is obtained by the simplest juxtaposition of the facts, and no rhetoric

<sup>1</sup> *Letk.*, ii. 102: 'Io non so che giudizio fare; benchè il principio e il fine siano manifesti, cioè un salvo condotto e un incendio.

could have more eloquently expressed the writer's intention.

It is a masculine, athletic style; a style of bronze, polished and spare. Only one decorative variation breaks the rigid outline of its simplicity: Sarpi possessed a dry, ironical humour with which he made great play. Referring to James I's commentary on the Book of Revelation, and laughing at his pretensions as a theological controversialist, Sarpi says: 'I never claimed to understand the Apocalypse, but then—I'm not a king<sup>1</sup>.' When asking for information as to the views of a man he was about to meet, he says: 'I should like to know whether one God in heaven is enough for him, or must he have another on earth<sup>2</sup>, like those *good gentlemen, the Jesuits*?' Again: 'Our adversaries are of such a kidney that they claim to be believed without proof, while they deny to us what is as clear as the sun in heaven, and we have to light a candle at midday to let them see it.' Yet again, 'There is a Scotchman here, who says he understands the Jesuits: he must be a very clever fellow.' And, indeed, this incessant slashing at the Order becomes a little wearisome, and seems exaggerated, perhaps, to us who know the course events have taken, though Sarpi had it firmly in his mind that his great duty to Church and State was to thwart the Order, and defeat its policy.

Such was the man who was called upon to defend what may be considered a test case in the interests of temporal sovereigns against the persistent claims of the Papacy. The question at issue has never really

<sup>1</sup> *Lett.*, ii. 29: 'Io non sono tale che professi pubblicamente d' intendere l' Apocalissi, perchè ne pur son Re.'

<sup>2</sup> *Lett.*, i. 210: 'Ho molto desiderio di sapere . . . se gli basta un Dio in cielo, oppure se lo vuole anche in terra.'

been absent from the field of European ecclesiastical politics. It is a vital question to this day.

Not many weeks ago the walls of Venice were covered with large advertisements 'Evviva Paolo Sarpi,' and Signor Crispi, the Italian prime minister, while commemorating the completion of Italian unity by the capture of Rome, delivered a speech upon the relations of the Church to the State which was inspired throughout by Sarpian sentiments. Baedeker, recording the statue of Paolo Sarpi, remarks with a brevity and dryness worthy of Sarpi himself, that 'this monument was decreed by the Republic of Venice in 1623 and erected in 1892'; and were Austria in possession of Venice, I believe the monument would be wanting still.

Why was a monument decreed to Sarpi? Why has he waited for it so long? Why are his sentiments the inspiring sentiments of a modern European Government?

Doubtless Fra Paolo Sarpi is best known to general fame as an author, as the historian of the Council of Trent—not, I imagine, because that work is often read, but because its writer has received such high commendation from competent judges,—Gibbon, Johnson, Hallam—that his name has become a name which people ought to know. But it certainly is not his fame as an historian which won for the obscure Servite friar the devotion of his contemporaries, of Wotton, of Bedell, of Sanderson among Englishmen, of Philip du Plessis-Mornay, Leschassier, Casaubon, Galileo, in France and Italy; and has made his name a living watchword to the present day.

Sarpi has suffered, I think, from being considered as an isolated phenomenon, as a figure which appears upon the stage of history, acts vigorously, even pictur-

esquely, and disappears again, without any obvious connexions in the past, with no very definite effect upon the future. His biographers tell us who he was and what he did, but they say little to explain his attitude, they make no effort to place him in his true historical perspective. The consequence is that his figure loses some of its significance for us; we are at a loss to understand the weight of his name, the importance of his career.

As a matter of fact Sarpi represents one very definite line in ecclesiastico-political history, in that struggle for national independence out of which modern Europe has been evolved. An analysis of his intellectual parentage, a statement of his political descent, will help us to realize his place in the procession of thought; and the course of this inquiry will explain the devotion of some contemporaries, the animosity of others, the reverence and the hatred with which posterity has surrounded his name.

To understand Sarpi's politico-ecclesiastical position we must go back for a moment to the origin and development of the temporal power in the Church. During the early centuries of the Christian era, the idea of imperial Rome as the unit of society had been growing weaker, while silently, and almost unknown to the temporal rulers of the world, the idea of Christian brotherhood was gaining in strength. The removal of the capital from Rome to Constantinople, the conversion of the imperial family to Christianity, the failure of the Emperors and the success of the Popes in withstanding the barbarian attacks; the separation of the Church from the Empire, brought about by the iconoclasm of Leo the Isaurian—all these events contributed to establish in men's minds the idea of the Church as an earthly power at least concurrent with

the Empire. Then came the union of the Pope and the Franks; the coronation of Pepin as King; the protection he afforded to Pope Stephen; the donation of lands won from the Lombards; the crowning of Charles the Great as Emperor in Rome; and there we have mediæval Europe established with its twofold basis of society, the Pope and the Emperor—a scheme which satisfied the aspirations of mankind by preserving, in an outward and visible form, the ancient grandeur of the Roman name, while including the new factor of Christian brotherhood.

But this beautiful and orderly disposition of the world—a Catholic Church to guide the soul, a Universal Empire to protect the body—was an idea only, an unrealizable dream, practically ineffectual. In the intellectual sphere this double headship of society brought confusion to the mind, and introduced a double allegiance. In actual politics the existence of two coequal sovereigns—both human—at once raised questions as to the exact boundaries of their power, their jurisdictions inevitably overlapped. In a rude society, and with widely scattered territories, the appointment of bishops was an important consideration for the Emperor no less than for the Pope. The bishops were political factors in the government of mankind, as well as spiritual shepherds of human souls;—who was to exercise the right of appointment, the Emperor or the Pope?

But the clash of Pope and Emperor over such a point as this laid bare the inherent defects in the mediæval conception of society. The Emperor was absent, he did not reign in Rome, the Pope possessed no temporal weapons. The Emperor, at war with his spiritual

brother the Pope, ordered his vassals in Italy to attack the ecclesiastical head of society; and the Pope, at war with his material protector the Emperor, was forced to provide material protection for himself by the creation of a personal territory, the States of the Church. The beautiful and orderly ideal is shattered; the material chief has attacked the spiritual, the spiritual chief has made himself a material prince. He is no longer Pope only, he is something more, he is an Italian sovereign besides. Two great Popes, Hildebrand, Gregory VII, and Lothario Conti, Innocent III, achieved and carried to its utmost conclusion this change in the idea of the Papacy. Gregory stated his object and formulated his claims in no uncertain tones. The Church, he said, ought to be absolutely independent of the temporal power; that it might be so in fact, it claimed supremacy over the State. The Pope was infallible; he had authority to depose emperors; princes must do him homage; he was competent to release from their allegiance the subjects of a rebellious sovereign. As we read the words we seem to hear the voices of Bellarmine, Baronius, Mariana or Suarez, and to catch an echo of the Bull 'In coena Domini.'

Innocent carried on the Hildebrandine tradition and realized it in fact. He changed the title 'Vicar of Peter' for 'Vicar of Christ,' and paved the way for that more ambitious style of 'Vice-Dio' which was applied to Pope Paul V. He created the States of the Church; and dreamed of a spiritual empire over Europe, a temporal sovereignty over Italy.

But the consequences of this papal expansion did not correspond to the hopes of these great prelates. The abasement of the Empire led, not to the transference

of European temporal allegiance from the Empire to the Papacy, but to the discovery of strong national tendencies among the various races of the Continent. And, further, inside the Church itself, from this time forward two distinct lines of thought are visible, two opposite tendencies in the spiritual and political region. The one line, continuing the tradition of Hildebrand and Innocent through Thomas Aquinas and the brilliant series of anticonciliar and secularizing Pontiffs; through Bellarmine, the Jesuits, the Inquisition and the Council of Trent. The other, voiceless as yet, but soon to be proclaimed by a phalanx of illustrious writers, Dante, John of Paris, William of Ockam, Marsilio, Barclay, Sarpi. And this double opposition to the Hildebrandine theories, the national opposition outside the Church, the intellectual opposition inside the Church, frequently joined hands and worked together towards the development of modern Europe as a congeries of independent States.

Here, then, I think, we find Sarpi's intellectual pedigree. Thomas Aquinas asserted the supremacy of the Church over the State, and his spiritual offspring are living to this day, in all who hold ultramontane views.

Dante maintained the rights of the Empire as against the Papacy, but his client was moribund, and his *De Monarchia* died *sine prole*.

Egidio Colonna and John of Paris enunciated the doctrine that the Church and the State are absolutely distinct one from another, both divinely constituted, both with independent spheres of action; and from these men, by a direct descent through Ockam and Marsilio of Padua, comes Paolo Sarpi.

Let us look for a moment at Marsilio of Padua—the greatest Italian political thinker of the fourteenth century; perhaps of any century.

Dante had declared that *qua* men, Pope and Emperor were equal, but *qua* Emperor and Pope they were incompatible, irreducible to a common denominator in the world of politics. Of course he is seeking, as the schoolmen always sought, the universal which includes the particulars. He argues accordingly that the resolution of these incompatible factors of the body politic must be sought outside the world, in God. Marsilio of Padua says: Yes, Dante is right. Only I must not introduce into the world of politics a factor which is not there. I must seek the resolution of these incompatibles inside the political sphere. He then announces his doctrine, surprisingly bold, astonishingly modern when we remember that the year is 1324. For him the resolution of the Pope and Emperor, the universal which contains the particular in the world of politics, is the People. The People is the true divine on earth because it is the highest universal, because God made the first revelation of Himself not to the rulers but to the People; because out of the bosom of the People come the various appellations of the body politic—citizens, faithful, lay, cleric. For Marsilio the People presents a double aspect; it is the *universitas civium*, but it is also the *universitas creditium*. From the People, in one or other of these aspects, emerge all the phenomena of the politico-ecclesiastical world.

Marsilio called his book *Defensor Pacis*, Defender of the Peace, but he might with greater truth, as regards its results, have named it *Gladius furens*, the flaming



Brand—for the ecclesiastical party which represented the Hildebrandine tradition never for a moment subscribed to his bold speculations, and such theories must have sounded but little less distasteful to the ears of the Imperialists. And yet Marsilio's doctrines sowed seeds which have lived—are indeed more living now than ever before—and I have dwelt upon them because I think that, in some ways, Sarpi was nearer in politico-ecclesiastical thought to Marsilio than to any other of his predecessors.

When I say that Sarpi was intellectually descended from Marsilio of Padua, I do not mean that their views were identical. There was a wide difference between them, the result partly of their age, partly of their temperament: Marsilio, eminently scholastic, constructive, boldly speculative; Sarpi, on the other hand, coldly scientific, not discursive, occupied in answering definite problems as they are presented to him, not dealing with Utopias. But in spite of all differences, both Marsilio and Sarpi belong to the same order of political thought—to that party which was called into existence by the excessive expansion of papal claims, the party whose task it was to defend the just liberties of the individual and the State.

In order to appreciate the services which Sarpi rendered to his cause, we must first obtain some view of the position which papal pretensions had assumed at the date of his birth.

The temporal claims of the mediaeval Papacy, conveyed by Hildebrand and carried to their extreme conclusion under Innocent III, induced the Hohenstaufen Emperors to an attack, in which their greatest representative—Frederick II—was worsted, it is true,

but the Papacy itself suffered in the conflict, both in moral prestige and temporal power. To support itself against the later Hohenstaufens it called the Angevine Princes to its aid. A crippled Papacy was no match for the growing national tendencies championed by France. The struggle between Boniface VIII and Philip IV ended in the capture and maltreatment of the Pope. The victorious Philip was able to place a creature of his own upon the papal throne, and to remove that throne and its occupant for safety to Avignon.

But if the mediaeval conception of the Papacy had proved a failure, the same fate had likewise befallen the mediaeval Empire. They had destroyed each other in the struggle for supremacy. The capture of Boniface at Anagni and the tragic end of Manfred are parallel events, each of them closing an epoch in the history of the Church and of the Empire.

There was no comparison possible, however, between the vitality of the Empire and the vitality of the Papacy. The waning power of the Empire allowed the growing national instincts to make their way in the formation of modern Europe. The waning prestige of the Pope left no one to take his place. However weak he might temporally be, he was still the spiritual head of Christendom. It is true that a national Church, like the Gallican Church, gained in authority by the abasement of the Papacy; but no one had been audacious enough to carry the idea of a national Church to its logical conclusion by declaring the head of the State to be head of the Church. The spiritual headship of the Papacy remained, however impaired its temporalities might be; and those temporal claims, though abased

for the present, lay dormant only until the Papacy was strong enough to assert them once more, not against the Emperor, it is true, but against the growing nationalities which took the Emperor's place in the field of European politics.

The Papacy had struggled with the Empire, and strangled its opponent. Its next conflict was with the nation, as represented by the conciliar principle—the principle that the Universal Church—*Universitas credentium*—when represented by a General Council is superior to the Popes.

The results of the struggle are notorious. The apparent triumph of the conciliar principle at Constance by the election of Martin V; its real failure, owing to Martin's unexpected independence of action, the moment he became Pope. The patent incapacity of the Council of Basel to command Eugenius IV, and its fiasco with its own nominee Felix V. As far as the power of the Papacy was concerned, it seemed that the conciliar movement had achieved nothing except to make the Popes strong again by sending them back to Rome. The Papacy rejoiced in the return to its native seat.

Three strong Popes, Eugenius, Nicholas, and Pius II, successfully defied the conciliar movement, and gave a new and purely Italian character to the Holy See. The crown was set upon this revival by the famous Bull which, beginning with the word *Execrabilis*, declared all those damned who should venture to appeal from a Pope to a future Council. And the Popes had achieved their new position by the help of the national instinct, that very instinct which had called up the conciliar movement against them. It was the support of Italy which enabled Eugenius to defy Basel. It was

the patronage of Italian art and learning, and the restoration of Italian towns, which made Nicholas popular. In Aeneas Sylvius, a humanist Pope sat on the Chair of St. Peter.

The restored Papacy, thus established once more in Rome, its independence asserted by Eugenius, its splendour by Nicholas, its superiority to Councils based upon *Execrabilis*, began to assume that aspect under which Paolo Sarpi came to know it. Three powerful temporalizing Popes confirmed the worldly tendencies of the Petrine See as an Italian sovereignty. The system of family aggrandizement, begun under Sixtus IV, and continued through Alexander VI and Julius II, laid those pontiffs open to the charge of cynicism. Men were shocked to see spiritual weapons employed for the secular ends of a papal family. And by the beginning of the sixteenth century we find a revival of that line of opposition to the *Curia Romana* which made itself first heard as the result of the Hildebrandine theories. The spirit is the same, the tone is different, no longer scholastic, speculative, theoretical, but rather spiritual, religious, with something in it of the coming Reformation. 'Whoever,' writes Francesco Vettori from Florence in 1527, 'Whoever carefully considers the law of the Gospel, will perceive that the pontiffs, although they bear the name of Christ's Vicar, yet have brought in a new religion, which has nothing Christian in it but the name; for whereas Christ enjoins poverty they desire riches, where He commands humility they flaunt their pride, where He requires obedience they seek universal domination.' This is language very similar to that which is often found in the mouth of Sarpi—a little more rhetorical, less coldly

impersonal than Sarpi's style, but, in that essential phrase, *una nuova religione*, a new religion, containing the whole of what the opposition felt, the break in divine order, the confounding of earth and heaven. Their protest and their spirit are preserved to this day in the term Old Catholics.

The course of events in Europe, no less than in Italy, tended to accentuate the quality of the new Papacy. The rise and spread of the Reformation beyond the Alps led the Roman Curia to furbish its spiritual weapons of excommunication and of interdict. However lightly we may think of such things now, there was a time when papal thunders were no mere *brutum fulmen*. The Venetians had learned that lesson to their cost when, in 1309, the Republic was placed under interdict and excommunication, with the result that her merchants in England, in Italy, in Asia Minor were threatened in their lives, despoiled of their goods, and Venetian commerce was ruined for a time. She had felt the effect later on, when the attack by the league of Cambray opened with an interdict and excommunication from Rome. It is thanks to the action of Venice and to the guidance of Fra Paolo Sarpi that these weapons lost their point, that they have ceased to be used, that Europe can contemplate them now with no greater alarm than we should feel at the threat of a Star Chamber prosecution.

But further, the revolt against authority which was taking place beyond the Alps, served only to emphasize the papal claims in Rome. A noble and genuine effort at reconciliation was made by the yielding Bucer, the gentle Melanchthon, and the winning Cardinal Contarini in the conference of Ratisbon. But behind these

dreamers of peace was Luther, on the one hand, declaring that whatever formulas might be agreed upon at Ratisbon, nothing would induce him to believe that the Catholics could be sound upon justification, and Paul III, vowing that he would accept no concordat whose terms should leave the papal authority open to a moment's doubt.

The conference of Ratisbon was a failure, and merely resulted in more positive assertions of the papal position and more active and even violent measures for the maintenance thereof. And two instruments were ready to hand. The Bull *Licet ab initio*, which founded the new *Inquisition on heretical depravity*, was published in 1542. The Society of Jesus was definitely established in 1543, nine years before the birth of Paolo Sarpi. Nor was it long ere the world perceived that the Inquisition and the Society of Jesus were bent on attacking freedom of thought, liberty of action, national independence, in the interests of papal supremacy. And the Papacy, or at least the *Curia Romana*, came to be identified in many minds—among them Sarpi's—with the action of the Inquisition and the teaching of the Jesuits.

In the face of this aggressive attitude of the Papacy temporal princes began to look to the defence of their rights. Cardinal Baronius challenged the validity of the Spanish claim to Sicily, and even such a Catholic sovereign as Philip III caused the book to be publicly burned. His father declined to accept the Roman Index, and declared that he was competent to make his own. The Catholic rulers of Europe were hostile to the papal claims. But it was reserved for Venice and Sarpi to champion the just rights of secular princes, to

defend single-handed a cause which was common to all sovereigns. This constitutes Sarpi's claim to recognition by posterity. His action in this great cause, his coolness, his courage, give us the reason why he has had to wait 270 years for the erection of the monument decreed to him by the Republic, why his name is venerated by all lovers of national liberty, execrated by those whose policy he helped to crush.

And now let us return to Paolo Sarpi himself, to the man who was called upon to face and largely modify the politico-ecclesiastical conditions of the civilized world. We must remember that it would hardly have been possible for Sarpi to embark on a struggle with the Roman Curia in any State save Venice. In any other Catholic country he would have been surrendered to the Inquisition; had he retired to a Protestant country his arguments would have lost much of their weight, his books would have been prohibited, he himself would have been represented as the servant of a Protestant prince. It is precisely because the defence of secular princes came from a Catholic living in a Catholic State that it made so deep an impression upon Europe.

Sarpi and the Republic were singularly at one in their external attitude towards Rome. The Republic had, from the earliest times, maintained a more independent position than was generally assumed by the other princes of Italy. Yet Venice always remained Catholic. When the Pope alluded to reforming tendencies in the Republic, the Doge Donato, Sarpi's personal friend, broke out, *Who talks of Calvinists? We are as good Christians as the Pope, and Christians we will die, in despite of those who wish it otherwise.*

It was this attitude of Venice, a defence of temporal freedom while admitting a spiritual allegiance, which Sarpi was to proclaim and to defend.

The events which immediately led to the rupture between Venice and Rome had been ripening for many years before the protagonists, Sarpi and Pope Paul, appeared upon the scene; and relations were strained at the moment when Camillo Borghese was raised to the papal throne in 1605, as Paul V. Borghese, member of a Sienese family, born at Rome, had been auditor of the Apostolic Chamber, was a strong churchman, and believed himself a great jurist. He was so amazed at his own elevation to the Papacy, that he considered it to be the special work of heaven, and determined to act accordingly. The Pope 'was scarce warm in his chair,' before he plunged into controversies right and left. Genoa yielded; Lucca yielded; Spain was pliant. But when the Venetian ambassadors, sent to congratulate His Holiness, were admitted to audience, they referred in no doubtful terms to the attitude of the Republic on the questions pending between Venice and the Holy See. The Pope answered by complaining of two laws, lately renewed by the Republic; both of them affecting Church property. In the course of a pacific reply to the Pope, the senate enunciated its fundamental principle: 'We cannot understand how it is possible to pretend that an independent principality like the Republic, should not be free to take such steps as she may consider necessary for the preservation of the State, when those measures do not interfere with, or prejudice other princes.' It seems a reasonable reply, but the difficulty lay in this, that neither party would condescend upon a definition of what was or



what was not to the prejudice of another prince. That depended upon what the other prince claimed. And the Pope was a prince. The need for such a definition led Sarpi to formulate *precisely* what he considered the boundary line between temporal and spiritual rights. *The dominion of the Church, he says, marches along celestial paths; it cannot therefore clash with the dominion of princes, which marches on paths terrestrial.* Could he have obtained subscription to a dichotomy of this nature the quarrel would have been at an end. But the Roman Curia never dreamed of making such a renunciation of its substantial authority.

While the question was still pending, two criminous clerics were arrested in Venetian territory, and imprisoned. The Pope considered this act a violation of ecclesiastical jurisdiction. He sent two briefs to the Nuncio at Venice, one demanding the repeal of the obnoxious laws, the other the persons of the two prisoners, and threatening excommunication in case of disobedience. The briefs reached Venice; but before the Nuncio presented them the Doge died. The Nuncio declared that no election to the dukedom was valid, as the State was under excommunication till it had satisfied the papal demand. This, of course, did not stay the Venetians, who proceeded to elect Leonardo Donato, Sarpi's friend, to the vacant chair. The election was no sooner over than the senate desired the counsels of a doctor in canon law, and Sarpi was invited to express an opinion on the case. He gave it verbally. The cabinet asked for it in writing. Sarpi declined. The senate saw the reasonableness of this refusal, and issued an order by which they took Sarpi into the service of the State and under its protection.

In answer to the question: 'What are the proper remedies against the lightning of Rome?' the newly appointed theologian replied: 'Forbid the publication of the censures, and appeal to a council.' This position was supported in a document of fifteen pages, in which the whole question of appeal to a future council is argued with profound learning and perfect limpidity of thought. The brevity, strength and clearness of this written opinion gave the highest satisfaction, and the reply to the Pope was dictated by Sarpi. It was still pacific in tone; the senate declares that *Princes by divine law have authority to legislate on matters temporal within their own jurisdiction. There was no occasion for the admonitions administered by His Holiness, for the matters in dispute were not spiritual but temporal.* The Pope was furious. He declared to the Venetian cardinals that 'This discourse of yours stinks of heresy'—*spuzza d'eresia*—and dictated a monitorium, in which he allowed the Republic twenty-four days to revoke the objectionable laws and to consign the ecclesiastics to the Nuncio; if obedience were refused, Venice would be placed under an interdict.

The monitorium was published in May, 1606. The senate replied by two manifestoes, one appealing to the cities of the Veneto for support, the other commanding the clergy to ignore the monitorium, to continue divine services, and to affix this protest in a public place. There was a disposition on the part of the clergy to disobey; but an example or two were sufficient to secure compliance. A vicar refused to say mass; the Government raised a gibbet before his door and he was given his choice. At Padua the capitular vicar, when

ordered to surrender dispatches received from Rome, replied that he would act in accordance with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to which the governor replied that the Ten had already received that inspiration to hang all who disobeyed. The rupture with Venice was complete. The Nuncio and the ambassador were recalled from their respective posts.

The question now was whether the Republic would yield as she had done before, as other more powerful states had often been compelled to do. Pope Paul never doubted the issue. But, at Venice, now inspired and guided by Paolo Sarpi, there was an unwonted spirit of resistance to the papal claims, which found expression in the Doge's farewell to the Nuncio. 'Monsignore,' said Donato, 'you must know that we are, every one of us, resolute to the last degree, not merely the Government but the nobility and the population of our State. Your excommunication we hold for naught. Now just consider what this resolution would lead to, if our examples were followed by others'; a warning which the Pope declined to take. Yet this spirit of resistance in defence of temporal rights was accompanied by a remarkable attention to ecclesiastical ceremonies. The churches stood open day and night, and were much frequented. The procession of the Corpus Domini was conducted on a scale of extraordinary magnificence. The Republic desired to make her attitude clear: it was the claims of the Curia, and not the Church, which she was opposing.

Meantime the controversy assumed a literary form; Venice was attacked in books, in pamphlets, in the confessional, from the pulpit. The attention of Europe was soon attracted to the surprising spectacle of a

temporal sovereign successfully defending his temporal rights against the Pope, while still endeavouring to remain inside the pale of the Church. France was friendly; England promised support; Spain alone was openly hostile. The mass of controversial literature grew rapidly, especially in Venice, where all adverse criticism was studied, not burned, as at Rome. The Government appointed a committee to deal with this side of the contest, and Sarpi was its ruling spirit. An attack by Bellarmine drew Sarpi openly into the controversial arena; and instantly he became the mark for the arrows of the Curia. His works were prohibited and burned; he was cited before the Inquisition, and refused to obey on the double ground that he had already been judged illegally, because unheard in defence; and that Bellarmine, one of his adversaries, would also be upon the judicial bench. His phrase was, *I defend a just cause*. The Pope prepared for war; and Venice too armed herself. But the pontiff found that even his ally Spain was not willing to support him in a cause which was so hostile to the temporal interests of princes, and likely to be opposed by all the powers in Europe.

The interdict had now lain upon Venice many months without effect, the ceremonies of the Church were performed as usual, the people were not deprived of the sacraments, they could be baptized, married, buried, as though no interdict had ever been launched. That terrible weapon of the ecclesiastical armoury hung fire. Each day discredited it still further. Venice was demonstrating the truth of Machiavelli's observation that these instruments were powerless unless backed by force; like bank-notes with no metal reserve, current

as long as the credit of the institution lasted, as long as people took them on faith.

At Rome it was becoming evident that the Pope would be compelled to retire. The only question was how to yield with as little loss as possible. Both Spain and France were ready to mediate. France proposed terms of an agreement. But the Venetian Government, after taking Sarpi's opinion, modified these terms beyond all recognition. The Pope might be entreated, but not in the name of Venice; the prisoners would be given to the King, not to the Pope; nothing would be said about withdrawing the Protest, and as for the controversial writings in favour of Venice, the Republic would do with them whatever the Pope did with those in favour of the Curia. The position of Venice was that she had done no wrong: her cause was just. From this firm attitude the Government would not move. The Pope raised objections, hoped for help from Spain, implored the intervention of the Grand Duke of Tuscany, changed his mind a hundred times. But the scandal of the powerless interdict grew daily more serious; the cardinals protested against the injury to the prestige of Rome; and the Pope was forced to yield.

France undertook to mediate, and for that purpose the Cardinal de Joyeuse came to Venice. The various steps in the ceremony of reconciliation were carried out with the utmost punctiliousness on the part of the Republic. The terms of the proclamation withdrawing the protest were framed so as to allow no word to escape which might imply that Venice acknowledged an error.

The surrender of the prisoners was made to the

ambassador of France as a gratification to His Most Christian Majesty, and without abrogating the right to try ecclesiastics. The ambassador handed over the prisoners to the cardinal as a present from the King. The cardinal then proceeded to the cabinet, which was sitting, and announced in the Pope's name that 'all the censures were removed.' Whereupon the Doge presented him the proclamation which recalled the Protest. And so the celebrated episode of the interdict came to an end.

The victory remained with Venice, and Sarpi was the hero of it. It was a great achievement to have resisted the temporal assertions of the Curia without breaking from the Church. And Sarpi himself makes it quite clear that he was aware of the effect of his handiwork. He writes: *The Republic has given a shake to papal claims. For whoever heard till now of a papal interdict, published with all solemnity, ending in smoke? And whereas the Pope once raised a wasps' nest about our ears for wishing to try two criminous clerics, from that day to this a good hundred have been brought to justice. Our differences with the Curia continue just as before, but they have never ventured to use an interdict again: its power is exhausted.* An appreciation confirmed by so cautious an historian as Hallam, who says: 'Nothing was more worthy of remark, especially in literary history, than the appearance of one great man, Fra Paolo Sarpi, the first who, in modern times and in a Catholic country, shook the fabric of papal despotism.'

It was not likely that the Roman Curia would ever forgive such a blow. Sarpi was quite right in saying that it left the Republic alone for the future, but it

pursued the men who had been the Republic's advisers. It was the object of the Curia to induce Sarpi and his colleagues to come to Rome; it could then have represented them as erring children returning to the bosom of the Church, wrung recantations from them, and undone most of the benefits secured by their courage. Sarpi refused to leave Venice, and pleaded an order from his sovereign which forbade him to go. Others, less cautious, yielded to the promises of protection and of honours, and failed to detect what Sarpi called *the poison in the honey*. Their fate was pitiable. Sarpi alone his enemies could not get, though he wrote to a friend: *They are determined to have us all, and me by the dagger*. And he was right. He had received several warnings that his life was in danger. Gaspar Schoppe, on his way from Rome, told him that it was almost impossible for him to escape the vengeance of the Pope. The Government also begged him to take precautions. Sarpi refused to change any of his habits. He continued his daily attendance at the Ducal Palace, passing on foot from his monastery at Santa Fosca through the crowded Merceria to St. Mark's, and back again when his work was done.

On October 5, 1607, he was returning home about five o'clock in the evening. With him was an old gentleman, Alessandro Malipiero, and a lay brother, Fra Marino; the people of the Santa Fosca quarter were mostly at the theatre, and the streets were deserted. As Sarpi was descending the steps of the bridge at Santa Fosca, he was set upon by five assassins. Fra Marino was seized and bound, while the chief assailant dealt repeated blows at Fra Paolo; only three took effect, two in the neck, of small consequence, and

one in the head which was given with such violence that the dagger, entering the right ear, pierced through to the cheek-bone and remained fixed there. Sarpi fell as though dead, and the assassins, believing their work accomplished, and being disturbed by the cries of Malipiero and some women who had witnessed the assault from a window, fired their harquebuses to terrify the people, who were running up, and made off. Sarpi was carried into his monastery, where he lay for long in danger of his life. The Republic insisted upon calling in all the celebrated doctors and surgeons of Venice and Padua—though Sarpi himself desired to be left to the care of Aloise Ragozza, a very young man in whom he had confidence. The multitude of doctors nearly killed their patient. But at length the wound healed, and Sarpi resumed his ordinary course of life.

He had never any doubt as to the quarter whence the blow came; and the flight of the assassins to papal territory, their triumphal procession to Rome, the protection they received there, all point to one conclusion.

The Republic was lavish of its attentions to its famous Councillor. Sarpi was offered a lodging for himself and two others on the Piazza, and the senate voted him a pension of four hundred ducats. Sarpi declined the money and refused to leave his monastery. All that he would accept was the construction of a covered way and a private door, so that he might reach his gondola without passing through the streets. These precautions were by no means unnecessary, for his life was never safe. At least twice again plots were laid against him. The one which was discovered in the monastery was a real pain to him. He writes: 'I have



just escaped a great conspiracy against my life; those of my own chamber had a part in it. It has not pleased God that it should succeed, but I am deeply sorry that the agents are in prison. *Life is no longer grateful to me when I think of the difficulty I have to preserve it.*

That is the first note of weariness which we come across in Sarpi's letters; it is a note which is repeated and deepened during the later years of his life. Those years were passed in constant and active discharge of his duties to the State, in the preparation of opinions upon the various points about which the Government consulted him—on benefices; on Church property; on the Inquisition; on the prohibition of books; on tithes. The epithets applied by distinguished authorities bear witness to their value. Gibbon talks of 'golden volumes,' Grotius calls them 'great.'

The fame of the great Servite grew world-wide. But at Venice his years were closing in some loneliness and depression. To his eyes it seemed that his policy had not achieved all the success he desired. The murder of Henry IV in 1610 was a cruel blow; and he saw France falling once more under the Jesuit sway. Venice too appeared to be lost in a lethargy which offered no resistance. Again and again in his correspondence he complains of Venetian supineness, and declares that the Republic is no freer after, than it was before, the fight. Moreover, his intimate friends and supporters were dying: Alessandro Malipiero in 1609, Leonardo Donato, the Doge, in 1612, Andrea Morosini, the historian, in 1618. The younger generation held different views; were disposed to leave matters alone. Sarpi felt the gradual abandonment. It is said he even thought of going to England or again to the East.

The extent of that abandonment was shown immediately after his death. The senate decreed a monument in his honour. The Nuncio declared that the Pope could not submit to such an affront, and if it was erected, the Holy Office would be obliged to declare Sarpi an impenitent heretic. The Venetian Ambassador counselled compliance, comforting himself with the reflection that he who may not live in stone will live in our annals with less risk from all-corroding time.

But the end of this active life was drawing near. Sarpi had never feared death. When his friend the Doge expired, he wrote<sup>1</sup> that nothing more desirable could happen to an honest man than to say adieu to the earth after a lifetime spent in preparation for departure by the integrity of thought and the discharge of duty. That indeed was Sarpi's own case. He died in harness.

On Easter Eve, 1622, while working in the archives, he was seized with a violent shivering fit. It was the beginning of the end, though he rallied and resisted for another year. Early in 1623 he obeyed a summons to the Palace. He was very ill at the time, and on his return he knew himself stricken for death. On January 14 he took to his bed. Fra Fulgenzio was summoned to the senate to give a report. 'How is he?' they said. 'At the last,' replied Fulgenzio. 'And his intellect?' 'Quite clear.' The Government then proposed three questions on which they desired the dying man's advice. Sarpi dictated his replies, which were read and acted upon.

<sup>1</sup> *Lett.*, ii. 334 : 'Nulla è più desiderabile ad un onesto uomo, che dire addio alla terra dopo un apparecchio di tutta la vita nell' interezza dei sentimenti e nell' adempimento stesso dei propri officj.'

He grew rapidly worse ; still he was able to say with a smile, *Praise be to God : what is His pleasure pleases me, and with His help we will through with this last act becomingly.* Then falling into a delirium, they heard him murmur : *I must go to St. Mark's. It is late. There is much to do.* About one in the morning he turned to his friend Fra Fulgenzio, embraced him, and said, *Do not stay here to see me in this state : it is not fitting. Go you to bed, and I will return to God whence I came. Esto perpetua,*—‘May she endure,’—were the last words on his lips, a prayer which his audience took as on behalf of his country, for whose just rights and liberties he had fought so well.

*November 20, 1895.*



## GUSTAVE FLAUBERT

**J**E ne me doutais guère, la première fois que je vins à Oxford, voici quatorze ans, qu'un jour je me trouverais associé, même pour la plus humble part, à la grande œuvre d'enseignement qui s'accomplit ici depuis des siècles.

Laissez-moi tout d'abord vous en dire ma reconnaissance ; vous avez trouvé le secret d'allier dans votre Université le respect de ce qu'il y eut d'excellent dans le passé au goût et à l'intelligence de ce qu'il y a de plus nouveau dans le présent, comme vous faites monter sur les vénérables murs de vos collèges de jeunes verdures et de jeunes fleurs. C'est ainsi que votre large hospitalité n'a pas craint de convier aujourd'hui parmi vous un romancier français à s'asseoir dans cette place où il a eu comme prédécesseurs tant de littérateurs distingués, et parmi eux un de vos écrivains qu'il a le plus admirés et aimés, le regretté Walter Pater. Vous me permettez, Messieurs, d'apporter ici mon tribut d'hommage à cette précieuse mémoire et de mettre sous les auspices de ce parfait prosateur dont je m'honore d'avoir eu la sympathie, le court et un peu

technique essai que je vais vous lire. Si ce scrupuleux ouvrier de style était encore des vôtres, le savant fellow de *Brasenose*, l'artiste accompli de *Marius l'Épicurien* et de la *Renaissance*, m'approuverait d'avoir choisi pour l'évoquer devant vous la figure du prosateur français le plus scrupuleux aussi et le plus accompli qui ait paru chez nous dans cette seconde moitié du siècle, l'auteur de *Madame Bovary*, de *Salammbô*, de *l'Éducation sentimentale*, de la *Tentation de saint Antoine*, de *Bouvard et Pécuchet* et des *Trois Contes*, Gustave Flaubert. Vous connaissez tous les livres que je viens de vous nommer, et qui sont classiques déjà par leur forme, malgré les hardiesses de certaines de leurs pages. Ils sont en effet d'un art très sévère, mais très libre, où se trouve pratiquée cette esthétique du vrai total qui se retrouve dans Aristophane, dans Plaute, dans Lucrèce, dans les dramatises de la période Élisabethéenne, dans le Gœthe de *Faust*, des *Affinités*, des *Élégies romaines* et de *Wilhelm Meister*. Ce n'est pas ici le lieu de discuter les périls de cette esthétique, si tant est que le souci pieux de l'art puisse aller sans une profonde moralité. Et, pour Flaubert, je me chargerais de démontrer que si ses livres sont audacieux, l'esprit qui s'en dégage n'est pas corrompueur. Mais ce n'est pas une thèse que je viens soutenir devant vous, c'est un homme que j'ai l'intention de vous montrer. Ses idées ont pu être plus ou moins exactes, plus ou moins complètes. Ce qu'il y a de certain, c'est qu'il les a conçues dans toute la sincérité de sa conscience, qu'il y a conformé son effort avec la plus courageuse ardeur et la plus désintéressée, qu'à l'ambition de réaliser ce rêve d'art il a tout sacrifié, plaisir, argent, succès, santé, enfin que ce Maître du

réalisme a donné le plus noble, le plus continu spectacle d'idéalisme pratique. Dans sa correspondance, et à propos d'Alfred de Musset, on rencontre cette phrase significative : 'C'est un malheureux, on ne vit pas sans religion et il n'en a aucune. . . .' Flaubert, lui, a eu la religion des Lettres, poussée jusqu'à la dévotion, jusqu'au fanatisme. Aucun homme n'a représenté à un degré supérieur les hautes vertus du grand artiste littéraire. Toute son existence ne fut qu'une longue lutte avec les circonstances et avec lui-même pour égaler le type d'écrivain qu'il s'était formé dès sa première jeunesse, et, vraiment, à lire sa correspondance, et, à suivre parmi ses quotidiens, ses acharnés efforts vers la perfection du style, à le regarder qui pense et qui travaille depuis ses années d'adolescence jusqu'à la veille de sa mort, on comprend la tragique jeunesse du mot que Balzac prête à un de ses héros dans son roman sur la vie littéraire, les *Illusions perdues* : 'Un grand écrivain est un martyr qui ne mourra pas, voilà tout ! . . .'

Depuis ses années d'adolescence ? . . . C'est depuis ses années d'enfance que j'aurais dû dire. Le premier volume des lettres de Flaubert s'ouvre par un billet, daté de décembre 1830, — il avait neuf ans, — où il s'adresse en ces termes à l'un de ses camarades : 'Si tu veux nous associer pour écrire, moi j'écrirai des comédies et toi tu écriras tes rêves,' et le dernier volume de ces mêmes lettres s'achève en 1880, sur ces lignes griffonnées quelques jours, quelques heures presque avant sa mort : 'Je me flattais d'avoir terminé le premier volume de *Bouvard et Pécuchet* ce mois-ci. Il ne le sera pas avant le mois d'octobre. J'en ai

probablement pour toute l'année. . . . Et ces deux phrases encadrent cinquante années d'une correspondance qui n'est qu'une longue confession du même labeur toujours recommencé. Aucune vocation d'écrivain ne fut plus continûment prolongée, aucune ne fut plus précocement caractérisée. Pour comprendre dans quel sens cette vocation se développa, il faut se représenter tout d'abord avec exactitude le milieu social où l'écrivain se trouva placé par le hasard de la naissance, et le milieu intellectuel où il se trouva placé par le hasard de l'éducation.

Le père de Gustave Flaubert était chirurgien en chef à l'Hôtel-Dieu de Rouen. Tous les témoignages s'accordent à célébrer sa génialité professionnelle, la droiture de son caractère, la sûreté de sa science, la généreuse ampleur de sa nature. Mais quel témoignage vaut le portrait fameux que son fils en a tracé sous le nom du docteur La Rivière et cette page où il le montre, arrivant dans la chambre de Mme Bovary mourante : 'Les mains nues, de fort belles mains et qui n'avaient jamais de gants, comme pour être plus promptes à plonger dans les misères.' Quelle touche de maître et qui fait penser à ces tableaux de Van Dick où toute une race tient dans la minceur ou la vigueur des doigts ! Et il ajoute : 'Son regard, plus tranchant que ses bistouris, vous descendait dans l'âme et désarticulait tout mensonge à travers les allégations et les pudeurs. Et il allait ainsi, plein de cette majesté débonnaire que donnent la conscience d'un grand talent, de la fortune, et quarante ans d'une existence laborieuse et irréprochable. . . .' De ce père qu'il admirait si profondément, Gustave Flaubert avait hérité cette précision dure et comme chirurgicale de son



analyse. Mais cette ressemblance intellectuelle ne devait apparaître que plus tard, et dans l'exécution, dans le tour de main de son œuvre, au lieu que durant les années d'apprentissage, un irréparable divorce d'idées s'établit entre le père et le fils dont celui-ci souffrit cruellement. Voici pourquoi. Pareil à tant de spécialistes dont les facultés se condensent toutes sur un point unique, le père Flaubert était d'une indifférence absolue à l'endroit de la littérature et de l'art. Maxime Du Camp, qui fut l'intime ami de Gustave à cette époque, rapporte dans ses *Souvenirs* quelques-uns des propos que tenait le vieux chirurgien lorsque son fils lui parlait de ses ambitions d'écrivain : ' Le beau métier de se tremper les doigts dans l'encre. Si je n'avais manié qu'une plume, mes enfants n'auraient pas de quoi vivre aujourd'hui. . . .' Et encore : ' Écrire est une distraction qui n'est pas mauvaise en soi. Cela vaut mieux que d'aller au café ou de perdre son argent au jeu. . . . Mais à quoi cela sert-il ? Personne ne l'a jamais su. . . .' De telles boutades, si elles n'entamaient pas la tendresse et l'admiration du jeune homme, paralysaient en lui tout abandon, toute confiance. Il s'habitua à considérer le monde profond de ses émotions esthétiques comme un domaine réservé qu'il fallait constamment défendre contre l'inintelligence de toute sa famille, contre celle de ce père d'abord, contre celle de son frère, héritier du bistouri et des préjugés du chirurgien, contre celle de sa mère qui lui disait : ' Les livres t'ont dévoré le cœur. . . .' Ce père, ce frère, cette mère, — cette mère surtout, — il les chérit d'une grosse et large affection d'homme robuste qui contraste d'autant plus étrangement avec l'évidente réserve de son être intime chaque

fois qu'il s'agit des choses de la littérature ou de l'art. Rien de plus significatif sous ce point de vue, que les lettres écrites à son plus cher confident, Alfred Le Poittevin, durant un voyage en Italie entrepris avec toute cette famille durant sa vingtième année: 'Mon père, dit-il, a hésité à aller jusqu'à Naples. Comprends-tu quelle a été ma peur? En vois-tu le sens? Le voyage que j'ai fait jusqu'ici, excellent sous le rapport matériel, a été trop brute sous le rapport poétique, pour désirer le prolonger plus loin.... *Si tu savais ce qu'involontairement on fait avorter en moi, tout ce qu'on m'arrache et tout ce que je perds...*'

Remarquez bien, Messieurs, la nuance du sentiment exprimé dans ces quelques mots. Il y a là tout autre chose que la mauvaise humeur du jeune homme dont les vingt-deux ans, fougueux parfois jusqu'au désordre, se rebellent contre les cinquante ans d'un père ou d'une mère, assagis jusqu'à la froideur. J'y reconnais la protestation douloureuse d'un talent qui veut durer, grandir, s'épanouir, qui veut vivre enfin, contre un milieu qui l'opprime en le protégeant, comme un vase trop étroit pour l'arbuste en train d'y pousser. J'y reconnais aussi l'origine d'une des idées maîtresses de Gustave Flaubert: la persuasion, pour prendre une de ses formules, que le monde a la 'haine de la littérature.' Il devait, sur le tard de sa vie, exagérer encore cette théorie sur la solitude de l'écrivain et sur l'hostilité que lui portent les autres hommes. Le même Maxime Du Camp raconte qu'après la guerre de 1870, et à propos de chaque événement politique capable de nuire à un roman ou à une pièce de théâtre,

Flaubert s'écriait : ' Ils ne savent qu'imaginer pour nous tourmenter. Ils ne seront heureux que lorsqu'il n'y aura plus ni écrivains, ni dramaturges, ni livres, ni théâtres... ' C'est là une explosion qui fait sourire. Rapprochez-la de ses mécontentements de jeune homme contre les inintelligences de sa famille, de ses fureurs d'homme mûr contre sa ville natale, ce Rouen, où, disait-il, ' j'ai bâillé de tristesse à tous les coins de rue, ' et vous comprendrez comment il est arrivé à ce qui fait le fond même de son esthétique : la contradiction de l'Art et de la Vie.

Vous le comprendrez davantage, si vous considérez qu'à cette première influence d'exil hors de la vie, une autre vient s'ajouter qu'il est nécessaire de caractériser avec quelque détail, car elle circule d'un bout à l'autre de l'œuvre de Flaubert, et en un certain sens elle en fait la matière constante : cette influence est celle du romantisme français de 1830, perçu sur le tard, à travers les livres des Hugo, des Musset, des Balzac, des Dumas, des Sainte-Beuve, des Gautier, par un jeune provincial enthousiaste. Tout a été dit sur les dangers et les contradictions de cet Idéal romantique, conçu au lendemain de la prestigieuse aventure napoléonienne par les enfants oisifs et nostalgiques des héros de la Grande-Armée. Aucune analyse n'en saurait mieux montrer la déraison que la confiance faite par Flaubert lui-même dans sa biographie de Louis Bouilhet : ' J'ignore, dit-il, quels sont les rêves des collégiens, mais les nôtres étaient superbes d'extravagance, expansions dernières du romantisme arrivant jusqu'à nous, et qui, comprimées par le milieu bourgeois, faisaient dans nos cervelles d'étranges bouillonnements. Tandis que les cœurs

enthousiastes auraient voulu des amours dramatiques avec gondoles, masques noirs et grandes dames évanouies dans des chaises de poste au milieu des Calabres, quelques caractères plus sombres ambitionnaient le glaive des conspirateurs. . . . Je me souviens d'un brave garçon toujours affublé d'un bonnet rouge. Un autre se proposait de vivre plus tard en Mohican, un de mes intimes voulait se faire renégat pour aller servir Abd el-Kader. On n'était pas seulement troubadour, insurrectionnel et oriental, on était avant tout artiste. Les pensums finis, la littérature commençait. On se crevait les yeux à lire au dortoir des romans ; on portait un poignard dans sa poche, comme Antony. On faisait plus. Par dégoût de l'existence Bar . . . se cassa la tête d'un coup de pistolet, And . . . se pendit avec sa cravate. Nous méritions peu d'éloges, certainement ! Mais quelle haine de toute platitude ! Quels élans vers la grandeur ! . . . ' Figurez-vous maintenant la rencontre de pareilles sensibilités avec les mœurs paisibles de la France au temps de Louis-Philippe et la nécessité pour tous ces petits Lords Byron en disponibilité de prendre un métier, celui-ci d'avocat, cet autre de professeur, un troisième de négociant, un quatrième de magistrat. Quelle chute du haut de leur chimère ! Quelle impossibilité d'accepter sans révolte l'humble labeur, l'étroussée du sort, le quotidien des jours ! Et voilà, pour Flaubert un second principe de déséquilibre intime. Il était, par naissance, un homme de lettres parmi des savants et des praticiens. Il fut, par éducation, un romantique au milieu des bourgeois et des provinciaux. .

Il fut aussi, et c'est la troisième influence qui

achève d'expliquer sa conception de l'art, un malade au milieu de l'humanité saine et simple, la victime courageuse et désespérée d'une des plus cruelles affections qui puissent atteindre un ouvrier de pensée, car il souffrait d'une de ces infirmités qui touchent au plus vif de l'être conscient, toutes mêlées qu'elles sont de troubles physiques et de troubles moraux. On peut regretter que Maxime Du Camp se soit reconnu, dans ses *Souvenirs*, le droit de révéler les attaques d'épilepsie qui, dès la vingt-deuxième année, terrassèrent Flaubert. La révélation est faite, et il y aurait une puérité à paraître ignorer ce qui fut le drame physique, si l'on peut dire, de l'existence de ce malheureux homme. Quand les premiers accès se furent produits, il eut le courage de prendre dans la bibliothèque de son père les livres qui traitaient du terrible mal. Il y reconnut la description exacte des symptômes dont il avait été victime et il dit à Maxime Du Camp : 'Je suis perdu. . .'. Dès lors, il vécut dans une préoccupation constante de l'attaque toujours possible, et ses habitudes furent toutes subordonnées à cette angoisse, depuis la plus légère jusqu'aux plus essentielles. Il prit en horreur la marche, parce qu'elle l'exposait à être saisi en pleine rue de la crise redoutée. Il ne sortait qu'en voiture, lorsqu'il sortait, et il lui arrivait de rester des mois enfermé, comme s'il n'eût éprouvé de sécurité qu'entre les murs protecteurs de sa chambre. Désireux de cacher une misère dont il avait la pudeur, il se concentra de plus en plus dans le cercle étroit de l'intimité domestique. Il se refusa toute espérance d'établissement personnel, estimant sans doute qu'il n'avait pas le droit de se marier, de fonder une famille, d'avoir des enfants auxquels

il eût risqué de transmettre un mal aussi certainement héréditaire. Tous les liens qui rattachent l'homme à la vie sociale achevèrent de se rompre pour lui sous l'assaut de cette dernière épreuve, et, comme il l'a dit lui-même dans une formule singulière, mais bien profonde: 'tous les accidents du monde lui apparurent comme transposés pour l'emploi d'une illusion à décrire, tellement que toutes les choses, y compris sa propre existence, ne lui semblèrent plus avoir d'autre utilité. . . .' Traduisez cette phrase dans sa signification précise, et vous y trouverez la définition même de l'artiste littéraire, pour qui la vie n'est qu'une occasion de dégager l'œuvre d'art, devenue ainsi, non plus un moyen, mais une fin, non plus une image de la réalité, mais la réalité même et la seule qui vaille la peine de supporter la douleur d'être homme.

L'art littéraire a été souvent défini de la sorte, comme constituant un but par lui-même et aussi comme représentant la consolation et la revanche de la vie. Pour ne citer que deux noms, très disparates, mais moins éloignés l'un de l'autre qu'il ne semble, par leur haine du monde moderne, c'est la thèse que proclamaient Théophile Gautier et ses disciples, et c'est aussi la thèse à laquelle aboutissait le pessimisme de Schopenhauer. L'originalité de Flaubert réside en ceci, qu'il était, comme je l'ai marqué déjà, doué de cette ferveur intime qui fait les convaincus, les fanatiques même, et cette ardeur de sa conviction l'a fait aller jusqu'au bout des conséquences logiques de son principe d'art avec une netteté qu'aucun autre écrivain n'a peut-être égalée. On pourrait extraire

de sa correspondance un code complet des règles que doit suivre l'écrivain qui s'est voué au culte de ce que l'on a quelquefois appelé l'Art pour l'Art, s'il se voue au travail du roman. La première de ces règles, celle qui revient constamment dans cette correspondance, c'est l'impersonnalité, ou, pour prendre le langage des esthéticiens, l'objectivité absolue de l'œuvre. Cela se comprend aisément : le fond de cette théorie de l'art pour l'art, c'est la crainte et le mépris de la vie. La fuite de cette vie redoutée et méprisée doit donc être aussi complète qu'il est possible. L'artiste essaiera avant tout de se fuir soi-même et, pour cela, il s'interdira de mêler jamais sa personne à son œuvre. Flaubert est, sur ce point, d'une intransigeance farouche : 'N'importe qui,' écrivait-il à George Sand qui l'engageait à se confesser, à se raconter, 'n'importe qui est plus intéressant que le sieur Flaubert parce qu'il est plus général.' Et ailleurs : 'Dans l'idéal que j'ai de l'art, je crois qu'on ne doit rien montrer de ses colères et de ses indignations. L'artiste ne doit pas plus apparaître dans son œuvre que Dieu dans la nature.' Et dans son roman de *l'Éducation sentimentale*, parlant d'un travail d'histoire que fait un de ses héros : 'Il se plonge dans la personnalité des autres, ce qui est la seule façon de ne pas souffrir de la sienne. . . .' Poussant cette règle d'impersonnalité jusqu'à ses dernières limites, il interdit à l'artiste de conclure, car conclure, c'est montrer une opinion, c'est se montrer. 'Aucun grand poète, dit-il quelque part, n'a jamais conclu. Que pensait Homère ? Que pensait Shakespeare ? On ne le sait pas. . . .' Il interdit de même au romancier l'emploi du personnage sympathique, parce que préférer un de ses

personnages à un autre, c'est encore se montrer. Sur ce chapitre de l'impassibilité que l'écrivain doit observer, d'après lui, avec une rigueur entière, il a prononcé des paroles d'une saisissante éloquence. Reprenant sa comparaison de Dieu et de la nature, il disait : ' L'auteur dans son œuvre doit être comme Dieu dans l'univers, présent partout et visible nulle part. L'art étant une seconde nature, le créateur de cette nature-là doit agir par des procédés analogues. Que l'on sente dans tous les atomes, à tous les aspects, une impassibilité cachée, infinie. L'effet pour le spectateur doit être une espèce d'ébahissement. Comment tout cela s'est-il fait ? doit-on dire, et que l'on se sente écrasé sans savoir pourquoi... ' Il disait encore : — je cite au hasard, — ' Nul lyrisme, pas de réflexions, la personnalité de l'auteur absente !... La personnalité sentimentale sera ce qui, plus tard, fera passer pour puérule et un peu niaise une bonne partie de la littérature contemporaine... Moins on sent une chose, plus on est apte à l'exprimer comme elle est, comme elle est toujours en elle-même dans sa généralité et dégagée de tous les contingents éphémères... ' Et, dominant tous ces préceptes, il réclame une continuelle surveillance de son propre élan, de la défiance de cette espèce d'échauffement que les niais appellent l'inspiration... ' Il faut écrire froidement, dit-il... Tout doit se faire à froid, posément. Quand Louvel a voulu tuer le duc de Berri, il a pris une carafe d'orgeat, et n'a pas manqué son coup. C'était une comparaison de ce pauvre Pradier qui m'a toujours frappé. Elle est d'un haut enseignement pour qui sait la comprendre... '

Si maintenant, Messieurs, vous passez de la correspondance de Flaubert, où ces idées sont exprimées de



cette façon abstraite et doctrinale quasi à chaque page, aux œuvres sur lesquelles s'est consumé son patient, son acharné labeur, vous constaterez aussitôt que ses livres n'ont été que ces idées mises en pratique. Et d'abord tous les sujets en ont été choisis par l'auteur systématiquement en dehors de son existence et dans une tonalité en pleine antithèse avec ses préférences, ses goûts, son caractère, toute son atmosphère d'esprit. Rien de plus significatif sous ce rapport, que cette *Madame Bovary* qui marqua une date dans l'histoire du roman français, et servit de point de départ à toute l'évolution naturaliste. Quel contraste entre ce roman anatomique et les circonstances de magnanime exaltation où il fut composé ! Flaubert était retiré à la campagne près de Rouen, chez sa mère, dans cette maison blanche de Croiset, ancienne habitation de plaisance d'une confrérie religieuse. Il y vivait de manière à justifier une de ses plaisanteries habituelles : ' Je suis le dernier des pères de l'Église . . . ' Il était jeune, il était riche, il était libre, et son unique souci était de peiner parmi ses livres et sur sa page blanche, passionnément, infatigablement ! Toute la semaine s'écoulait à travailler seize heures sur vingt-quatre, et la récompense du bon prosateur était de recevoir, le dimanche, la visite du poète Louis Bouilhet avec lequel il lisait tout haut Ronsard et Rabelais. D'ordinaire de pareils labeurs sont, chez un homme de cet âge, le signe d'une ambition d'autant plus violente qu'elle a reculé plus loin son terme et ajourné son assouvissement. Dans une page d'autobiographie très frappante, Balzac, parlant de sa jeunesse et du travail auquel il se condamna lui-même, a fait la confession de tous les ambitieux pauvres qui voient dans le triomphe littéraire

un moyen de rentrer dans le monde, illustres, riches et aimés : ‘ J’allais, dit-il, vivre de pain et de lait, comme un solitaire de la Thébaïde, au milieu de ce Paris si tumultueux, sphère de travail et de silence, où, comme les chrysalides, je me bâtissais une tombe pour renaître brillant et glorieux. J’allais risquer de mourir pour vivre . . . ’ Gustave Flaubert, lui, ne poursuit à travers son patient effort aucune chimère de luxe, d’amour ou de gloire. C’est un Idéal tout intellectuel qu’il s’est proposé de réaliser, avec le plus complet dédain du succès extérieur : ‘ Je vise à mieux qu’au succès,’ déclarait-il à un ami, ‘ je vise à me plaire. J’ai en tête une manière d’écrire et une gentillesse de langage auxquelles je veux atteindre, voilà tout . . . ’ Et avec une bonhomie qui est la marque propre du *gars* normand qu’il était resté : ‘ Quand je croirai avoir cueilli l’abricot, je ne refuse pas de le vendre, ni qu’on batte les mains s’il est bon. Mais si, dans ces temps-là, il n’est plus temps et que la soif en soit passée à tout le monde, tant pis . . . ’ Peu lui importe que les compagnons de sa jeunesse arrivent tout autour de lui à la notoriété, tandis qu’il demeure inconnu : ‘ Si mon œuvre est bonne, si elle est vraie, elle aura son écho, sa place, dans six mois, dans six ans, après la mort, qu’importe . . . ’ Et quelle modestie dans cet orgueil : ‘ Je n’irai jamais bien loin,’ gémit-il, ‘ mais la tâche que j’entreprends sera exécutée par un autre. J’aurai mis sur la voie quelqu’un de mieux doué et de plus né . . . Et qui sait ? Le hasard a des bonnes fortunes. Avec un sens droit du métier que l’on fait et de la persévérance, on arrive à l’estimable . . . ’

Ouvrez maintenant *Madame Bovary*, qu’y rencontrez-vous ? Le tableau, scrupuleux jusqu’à la minutie,

des mœurs les plus violemment contraires à cette pure et fière existence d'un jeune Faust emprisonné dans sa cellule. Ce ne sont dans les scènes décrites par cet implacable roman qu'espoirs médiocres, passions mesquines, intelligences avortées, sensibilités basses, une déplorable légion d'âmes grotesques au-dessus desquelles plane le sourire imbécile du pharmacien Homais, de ce bourgeois grandiose à force de sottise ! Cet effet d'ébahissement rêvé par Flaubert est obtenu. Cette prose impeccable, tour à tour colorée comme une peinture flamande, taillée en plein marbre comme une statue grecque, rythmée et souple comme une phrase de musique, s'emploie à représenter des êtres si difformes et si diminués que l'application de cet outil de génie à cette besogne vous étonne, vous déconcerte, vous fait presque mal. Que pense l'auteur des misères qu'il examine d'un si lucide regard, qu'il raconte dans cet incomparable langage ? Vous ne le saurez jamais, et pas davantage son jugement sur les vilénies de ses personnages, sur l'état social dont ils sont le produit, sur les maladies morales dont ils sont les victimes. Le livre est devant vous, réellement, comme une chose de la nature. Il se tient de lui-même, ainsi que le voulait Flaubert 'par la force interne du style, comme la terre, sans être soutenue, se tient dans l'air. . . .' C'est en ces termes qu'il annonçait son projet. Ils pourraient servir d'épigraphes à ce roman de mœurs provinciales, comme à ce roman de mœurs carthaginoises qui s'appelle *Salammbô*, comme à ce roman d'histoire contemporaine qui s'appelle *l'Éducation*, comme à cette épopée mystique qui s'appelle *Saint Antoine*, comme à ce pamphlet contre la bêtise moderne qui s'appelle *Bowvard et Pécuchet*, comme à ce tri-

ptyque prestigieux des *Trois Contes*, qui ramasse sous une même couverture de volume les infortunes d'une servante normande, la légende pieuse de saint Julien l'Hospitalier et la Décollation du Baptiste. Il semble que l'artiste littéraire ait vraiment exécuté tout le programme qu'il formulait dans ses lettres de jeunesse : 'Écrire, c'est ne plus être soi. . . .'

J'ai dit : 'il semble,' car si Gustave Flaubert avait vraiment conformé son activité d'artiste à toute la rigueur de ses théories, et complètement, absolument dépersonnalisé son œuvre, ses livres ne nous arriveraient pas imprégnés de cette saveur de mélancolie, pénétrés de ce pathétique qui nous les rend si chers. C'est ici, Messieurs, l'occasion de constater une fois de plus cette grande loi de toutes les créations d'art. Ce qu'il y a de meilleur, d'essentiel, de plus vivant en elle, ce n'est pas ce que l'artiste a médité et voulu, c'est l'élément inconscient qu'il y a déposé, le plus souvent à son insu, et, quelquefois, malgré lui. J'ajoute qu'il faut saluer dans cette inconscience non pas une humiliation pour l'artiste, mais un ennoblissement de sa tâche et une récompense d'un autre travail : celui qu'il a fait non pas sur son œuvre elle-même, mais sur son propre esprit. Ce don de mettre dans un livre plus de choses qu'on ne le soupçonne soi-même, et de dépasser sa propre ambition par le résultat, n'est accordé qu'aux génies de souffrance et de sincérité qui portent dans le fond de leur être le riche trésor d'une courageuse et haute expérience désintéressée. C'est ainsi que Cervantès a fait *Don Quichotte* et Daniel de Foë *Robinson*, sans se douter qu'ils y insinuaient, l'un, toute l'héroïque ardeur de l'Espagne, l'autre toute l'énergie solitaire de

l'Anglo-Saxon. S'ils n'eussent pratiqué, de longues années durant, ces vertus, le premier de chevaleresque entreprise, le second d'invincible endurance, leurs romans fussent restés ce qu'ils voulaient que ces livres restassent, de simples récits d'aventures. Mais leur âme valait mieux encore que leur art, et elle a passé dans cet art pour lui donner cette puissance de symbole qui est la vitalité agissante des livres. Eh bien ! l'âme de Flaubert aussi, valait mieux que son esthétique, et c'est cette âme qu'il a insufflée, contre sa propre volonté, dans ses pages, qui leur assure cette place à part dans l'histoire du roman français contemporain.

Reprenez en effet cette *Madame Bovary* qu'il a prétendu exécuter de cette manière impeccablement objective, et cherchez à dégager la qualité qui en fait, de l'aveu des juges les plus hostiles, un livre tout à fait supérieur. Ce n'est pas l'exactitude du document. Vous trouveriez dans tel ou tel procès rapporté par la *Gazette des Tribunaux* des renseignements aussi précis sur les mœurs de province. Ce n'est pas la difficulté que l'auteur a dû vaincre pour rédiger dans un style aussi magistral une anecdote aussi platement vulgaire. La saillie toute hollandaise des figures, le relief d'une phrase à vives arêtes qui montre les objets comme à la loupe, la correction d'une syntaxe qui ne se permet jamais une répétition de mots, une assonance, un hiatus,—toutes ces habiletés de métier risqueraient plutôt, à ce degré, de donner une impression de factice, presque de tour de force, et Sainte-Beuve avait, dès le début, mis le trop adroit écrivain en garde contre ce péril de l'excessive tension. Non. Ce qui soulève cette médiocre aventure jusqu'à une hauteur de symbole, ce qui transforme ce récit des erreurs d'une petite

bourgeoise mal mariée en une poignante élogie humaine, c'est que l'auteur n'a pas pu, malgré les gageures de sa doctrine, se renoncer lui-même. Il a eu beau choisir un sujet situé aux antipodes de son monde moral, le raconter tout uniment et sans une seule réflexion, maintenir chacun de ses personnages à un même plan d'indifférente impartialité, ne pas juger, ne pas conclure, sa vision de la vie le révèle tout entier. Le mal dont il a souffert toute sa vie, cet *abus de la pensée* qui l'a mis en disproportion avec son milieu, avec son temps, avec toute action, involontairement, instinctivement, il le donne à ses médiocres héros. C'est la pensée, mal comprise, égarée par un faux Idéal, par une littérature inférieure, mais la pensée tout de même qui précipite Emma Bovary dans ses coupables expériences, et tout le livre apparaît comme une violente et furieuse protestation contre les ravages que la disproportion des rêves imaginatifs et du sort produit dans une créature assurément médiocre, mais encore trop fine, trop délicate pour son milieu. Et ce même thème du danger du rêve et de la pensée court d'un bout à l'autre de cette *Éducation sentimentale* dont Flaubert aurait pu dire plus justement encore que de *Bouvard et Pécuchet* que c'était 'le livre de ses vengeances.' Ce même thème soutient *Salammbô* où l'empoisonnement de la pensée et du rêve est montré, agissant sur des âmes barbares avec la même force destructive que sur des âmes civilisées. Ce même thème circule dans la *Tentation de saint Antoine* où la pensée et le rêve sont de nouveau aux prises, cette fois, avec une âme croyante qui en agonise de douleur, en sorte que cet homme, de raisonnement et de doctrine, qui s'est voulu impassible, impersonnel et glacé,

se trouve avoir donné comme motif profond à tous ses livres le mal dont il a souffert : l'impuissance d'égaliser sa vie à sa pensée et à son rêve. Seulement au lieu que, chez lui, cette pensée et ce rêve étaient à leur maximum, ses doctrines d'art l'ont amené à choisir pour ses romans des existences dans lesquelles cette pensée et ce rêve sont à leur minimum, et cela même ajoute à l'accent de ses livres. Nous sentons, par delà ses ironies continues, sa réserve volontaire, sa surveillance de lui-même, tout un monde d'émotions qu'il ne nous dit pas. C'est Diderot, je crois, qui a jeté au cours d'une de ses divagations esthétiques cette phrase admirable : 'Un artiste est toujours plus grand par ce qu'il laisse que par ce qu'il exprime.' Flaubert se fût révolté là contre, lui, l'expressif par excellence, et pourtant aucune œuvre plus que la sienne ne justifie cette parole de l'esthéticien, tant il est vrai que nous sommes tous, suivant une vieille comparaison, les ouvriers d'une tapisserie dont nous ne voyons que l'envers et dont le dessin nous échappe.

Quand on aperçoit Gustave Flaubert sous cet angle, comme un romantique comprimé par son milieu, rejeté par les circonstances aux plus intransigeantes théories de l'art pour l'art, et cependant conduit par l'instinctive nécessité de son génie intérieur à imprégner ses livres de sa tragique mélancolie intellectuelle, on se rend mieux compte des raisons qui ont fait de lui un chef d'école, à son insu encore et contre sa volonté. Car il était de bien bonne foi, lorsqu'en 1875, et au moment où triomphaient ses disciples Zola et Daudet, il écrivait à George Sand : 'A propos de mes amis, vous ajoutez mon école. Mais je m'abîme le tempéra-

ment à tâcher de n'avoir pas d'école. *A priori*, je les repousse toutes. Ceux que je vois souvent et que vous désignez, recherchent tout ce que je méprise et s'inquiètent médiocrement de ce qui me tourmente. . . .

Ici encore, Flaubert ne mesurait pas la portée complète de son œuvre. Élève attardé des maîtres de 1830, il était arrivé dans la littérature française au moment précis où cette littérature était partagée entre les deux tendances qui résument les deux plus grands noms du milieu du siècle : Victor Hugo et Balzac. Avec Hugo, une rhétorique nouvelle était née, tout en couleurs et en formes, et qui avait poussé jusqu'à la virtuosité le talent de peindre par les mots. Avec Balzac, l'esprit d'enquête scientifique avait fait irruption dans le roman, et presque aussitôt l'une et l'autre école avait manifesté le vice qui était son danger possible : la première, l'insuffisance de la pensée, la seconde, l'insuffisance du style. Ce qui fit de la publication de *Madame Bovary* un événement d'une importance capitale, une date, pour tout dire, dans l'histoire du roman français, ce fut l'accord de ces deux écoles dans un même livre, égal en force plastique aux plus belles pages de Hugo et de Gautier, comparable en lucidité analytique aux maîtres chapitres de Balzac et de Stendhal. Cette rencontre en lui des deux tendances du siècle, du romantisme et de la science, Flaubert ne l'avait pas cherchée. Sa théorie de l'art pour l'art l'y avait conduit par un jeu de logique dont lui-même s'étonna toute sa vie. On sait qu'il a constamment souffert des éloges donnés au réalisme de *Madame Bovary*. C'était sa recherche systématique de l'impersonnalité qui, en le faisant s'effacer devant l'objet, l'avait amené à cette rigueur d'analyse exacte. Ayant,



de parti pris, choisi comme objet de son premier roman une aventure commune et terre à terre, il s'était trouvé composer une étude de mœurs, et la composer dans une prose supérieurement ouvrée, *sa prose*. Ce fut pour ses contemporains une révélation. L'article de Sainte-Beuve dans ses *Lundis*, celui de Baudelaire dans son *Art romantique*, sont des monuments d'une surprise qui tout de suite devint féconde et suscita tour à tour les livres des frères de Goncourt, ceux de M. Émile Zola, ceux de M. Alphonse Daudet, ceux de Guy de Maupassant, pour ne citer dans le roman français contemporain que des artistes incontestés. Un roman dont la matière soit la vérité quotidienne, 'l'humble vérité,' comme disait Maupassant en tête d'*Une vie*,— un roman capable de servir à l'histoire des mœurs, comme un document de police,— et ce roman, écrit dans une prose colorée et plastique, serrée et savante, avec ce que les Goncourt appelaient, barbarement d'ailleurs, une écriture artiste, tel est le programme issu de *Madame Bovary*, qu'ont essayé d'appliquer tour à tour, suivant leur tempérament, les miniaturistes énervés de *Renée Mauperin*, le puissant visionnaire de *l'Assommoir*, le chroniqueur sensitif du *Nabab* et le large conteur de *Pierre et Jean*. Flaubert, ce poète lyrique, né d'un médecin et grandi dans un hôpital, l'avait trouvée toute faite en lui, cette synthèse du romantisme et de la science. Il s'était trouvé aussi tout prêt pour ressentir et pour traduire, lui, l'ardent idéaliste emprisonné dans toutes les misères d'une ville de province, la haine des lettrés contre la médiocrité ambiante, qui est une des formes de la révolte contre la démocratie. Enfin, et c'est par là qu'il demeure si vivant parmi nous, et si présent, malgré les tendances nouvelles des lettres

françaises, il a donné aux écrivains le plus magnifique exemple d'amour passionné, exclusif pour la littérature. Avec ses longues années de patient scrupule et de consciencieuse attente, son admirable dédain de l'argent, des honneurs, des succès faciles, avec son courage à poursuivre jusqu'à leur extrémité son rêve et son œuvre, il nous apparaît comme un héros intellectuel. Je serais bien fier, Messieurs, si le témoignage d'un ordre un peu trop technique, que je lui ai apporté aujourd'hui, pouvait contribuer à répandre et à augmenter dans ce libéral Oxford, malgré les inévitables malentendus que la très libre conception du roman français risque toujours de soulever en terre anglo-saxonne, le respect auquel a droit, parmi tous les lettrés, le plus grand, le plus pur, le plus complet de nos artistes littéraires.

1897.

# GOETHE'S ITALIAN JOURNEY

*I desire to associate this Lecture with the memory of two friends whose labours in the promotion of English Goethe studies will not easily be forgotten: HERMAN HAGER (d. Feb. 1895) and HEINRICH PREISINGER (d. Feb. 1896). Their work (especially as successive secretaries of the Manchester Goethe Society) owed its fruitfulness not less to the brilliant scholarship of the one and the wide literary culture of the other than to rare qualities of heart and character which make the loss of both still poignant to their many friends. Like few others, they stood in close touch with the two elements, English and German (so kindred yet so alien), of the community in which they lived, and drew them together largely by virtue of their own rich endowment in some of the finest characteristics of both.*

THE ideal traveller is a man in whom the single-minded fervour of the pilgrim is mingled with the intellectual ardour of the discoverer and the alert sensibility of the cultivated tourist. There is something in him of Saint Louis, something of Dante's Ulysses, and something of Lawrence Sterne. Such a combination is most naturally attained among those whose goal of travel is Italy. For Italy is a shrine which few approach for the first time without a nascent thrill of the pilgrim's awe; yet the shrine is also a microcosm, a little universe full of problems for the intellect and

of various delight and picturesque charm for the sense. It is probable that no book in the world presents all these aspects of Italian travel so vividly as the *Italienische Reise* of Goethe. In an age when Europe was full of sentimental travellers bent only upon pretexts for smiling the inimitable smile of Sterne, or for dropping a caricature of his exquisite tears, Goethe, with a sensibility far richer and more versatile than Sterne's own, set forth across the Alps resolute to see and to know, to work and to live. His journey was perhaps the most deliberate act of a life controlled throughout by conscious design, like a work of art,—an act in which the whole man moved together, into which he cast his whole capital of hope and faith—nay, hazarded, like that Dantesque Ulysses, the one possession of a love '*lo qual dovea Penelope far lieta.*' The record of a journey so planned, at the crowning moment of his maturity, by a man of Goethe's genius, necessarily interests us even more as biography than as travel; and it is as biography, not as travel, that I propose to deal with it to-day. And not even, chiefly, as a narrative of his outward experiences in Italy; but rather as a document, almost unique in its kind, of the psychical history of a great poet during the central crisis of his life. Let me only add, that the materials available for that purpose have been within the last years notably increased. The work called the *Italienische Reise* was worked up by Goethe, thirty years after the journey itself, from the journals and letters written at the time. A large number of the originals he then destroyed. But the valuable Journal sent to Frau von Stein and a number of the letters to Herder were happily preserved, and have now been issued

by the Goethe-Gesellschaft, admirably edited by Erich Schmidt.

Italy burst upon Goethe like a revelation. To describe his transport during the first weeks, nay, months, of his sojourn, this disciple of Spinoza instinctively borrows the theological phrases of the converted sinner.

‘The scales fall from my eyes. He who is plunged in night takes twilight for dawn, and a grey day for a bright one; but what is that when the sun rises<sup>1</sup>? Certainly, out of Rome one has no conception how one is here put to school. One must, as it were, be born again, and one looks back on one’s former ideal as at shoes one wore as a child<sup>2</sup>. I may be the same man still, but I believe I am changed to my inmost marrow<sup>3</sup>.’

Still more explicitly a week later: ‘The new birth which is transforming me from the core outwards, still proceeds. I expected to learn something here; but that I should so go back to school, that I should have to unlearn, nay, to learn anew, so much I did not expect. Now I am convinced of it, and have completely surrendered, and the more I have to repudiate myself, the more I rejoice.’

And a year later, in language less flushed with the ardour of first impressions: ‘All that I learned, conceived or thought in Germany, is to what I am learning now<sup>4</sup> as the rind of the tree to the kernel of its fruit. I have no words to express the quiet alert joyousness with which I now begin to contemplate works of art<sup>5</sup>.’

<sup>1</sup> *Ital. Reise*, Jan. 4, 1787; *Tagebuch*, Sept. 30, 1786 (ed. E. Schmidt, p. 128).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Dec. 13, 1786.

<sup>3</sup> Dec. 2, 1786.

<sup>4</sup> From the teaching of Heinrich Meyer.

<sup>5</sup> Dec. 25, 1787.

Expressions such as these make it excusable to regard the Italian journey as a still more significant turning-point in Goethe's life than it really was. Legend loves the sudden conversion, pedantry the well-defined epoch, and the large sinuosities of Goethe's career have been apt to acquire a certain angularity under their manipulation. In England, at least, it is not uncommon to hear language which suggests that the Italian journey was the *terminus ad quem* of his relations with naturalistic or realistic art, the *terminus a quo* of his strivings after the antique and the ideal. It would be truer to say that Italy, by bringing the antique in its living reality before his eyes, not only fulfilled the cherished dream of years, but finally delivered him from a haunting phantom of the antique, more antique than antiquity itself, and thus restored him to the company of the great poetic realists, his true kindred, from which that phantom had beckoned him away. Both these distinct if not antagonistic effects, the fulfilment of the dream and the laying of the phantom, are clearly to be read in Goethe's narrative, and have to be borne in mind in studying his mental department as this new world sweeps in upon him.

It was *the fulfilment of a dream*. Sixteen years before he saw the Apollo or the Paestum temple, Goethe had been led by Herder at Strassburg into the glorious thralldom of Greek poetry. At Wetzlar, in 1772, he found a refuge in Homer from hopeless love, installed himself in the palaces of Pindar and Plato, and wrote letters to Herder about them which throb and tingle with an ecstasy poured forth with the unreserve of twenty-three<sup>1</sup>—an ecstasy not yet in the least

<sup>1</sup> To Herder (July, 1772), Hirzel-Bernays, *Der junge Goethe*, i. 307.

incompatible with an equal fervour for the Gothic glories of Strassburg, which his little pamphlet 'Von deutscher Baukunst' glowingly interpreted to the world in the following year: 'O to be Alcibiades for a day and a night and then die<sup>1</sup>!' he cries, yearning to have met Socrates face to face. Even now, however, he is full of zest to turn his Greek knowledge into action, to master art as well as facts, and weld matter into new shape as well as luxuriate in sensation. 'An artist is nothing so long as his hands do not work and shape<sup>2</sup>.' At Weimar this bent found expression, not only in the repeated workings and shapings of his own poetry, but in a peculiar attraction to Greek plastic art. Winckelmann had traced the evolution of Greek sculpture, so far as this was possible without visiting Greece, and given a penetrating analysis of its aesthetic qualities. Goethe was, on the observant and intellectual side of his nature, deeply akin to Winckelmann, a kinship which gives a fraternal intimacy of appreciation to the life he subsequently wrote of him<sup>3</sup>; and the ideas of Winckelmann determined, during the whole of his first eleven years at Weimar, his relation to the antique. Phidias and Scopas and the unknown hewer of the Laocoon and the Apollo Belvedere appealed to his delight in plastic expression, but they appealed as through a glass, darkly, in woodcut and plaster-cast. Face to face their creations could be studied, out of their native land, only in Rome. The deep-seated veracity of Goethe's nature chafed at this blurred half-knowledge of the beauty he divined, and towards Rome,

<sup>1</sup> *Der junge Goethe* (end of 1771), i. 303.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, i. 308.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. e.g. his naïve reproof of Winckelmann's hatred of philosophers. *Winckelmann: Philosophie* (Hempel ed., xxviii. 219).

for the greater part of these eleven years, with growing tenacity and maturing resolve, his heart and his eyes were set. Desire is an inadequate word for the gravitation which impels a man of this stamp to get out of the region of notions into the region of direct experience,—of intuition,—of *Anschauung*. To gratify that impulse is not, for such a man, to indulge in a luxury, but to overcome a disease; and Goethe's state during the last years before his journey was full of morbid symptoms. He could not endure to open a Latin author or to look on an Italian landscape; Herder rallied him with getting all his Latin from Spinoza, because he shrank from the sight of any other. 'Had I not carried out the resolve to make this journey,' he wrote to Frau von Stein from Venice, 'I should have gone mad.' 'In every great parting there lies a germ of madness,' he wrote later, on the eve of his return home; and the words were true now, for his love to the unknown land had the poignancy of remembered loss. And Italy brought him instant relief. It brought him the full sensible experience of what he had imperfectly divined; and in those rapturous descriptions of his new birth we have a measure of the gulf which, for him, separated the imagination fed upon things taught and the imagination fed upon things seen. 'I have had no wholly new thought, found nothing wholly strange, but the old has become so definite, so living, so consecutive, that it has the effect of novelty. It was as when Pygmalion's statue, already endowed with all the being art can give, at length came to him and said, "It is I!"' And he goes on to breathe the profound content which fills him,—the content of one who suddenly finds him-

<sup>1</sup> Nov. 1, 1786.



self in the world for which he was made, and with which all his instincts and activities harmonize. Here at length that fidelity to sense-impressions which disqualified him for all that is fantastic or speculative in art, found its reward. 'I live here now,' he writes, 'with a clearness and calm which I had for long not known. My habit of seeing and interpreting all things as they are, my trust in the light of the eye, my entire exemption from prejudice, serve me once again right well, and make me at least supremely happy. Every day a new and notable object, daily fresh, grandiose wonderful images, and an entirety long conceived and dreamed but never grasped with the imagination<sup>1</sup>.'

But a *phantom was laid* as well as a dream fulfilled. In other words, Italy not merely defined and vitalized his conceptions of the antique but modified and transformed them. Winckelmann had taught Goethe and his contemporaries to regard the beauty of sculpture as resting upon the repose and generalization of the forms, and thus as in its nature opposed to movement and to character. Expression he explicitly represents as hostile to beauty; and the highest beauty was to be won by promiscuously assembling the loveliest lines of a host of faces, a process which necessarily disintegrates and shatters expression. Winckelmann, no doubt, implicitly qualified this position in his dealing with concrete examples<sup>2</sup>; but, as usually happens, his scholars ignored the involuntary inconsistencies of the master's finer insight, and gave a more unlimited scope to his dominant teaching. No one can read Goethe's

<sup>1</sup> Nov. 10, 1786.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. the admirable treatment of Winckelmann in Mr. Bosanquet's *History of Æsthetic*, p. 239 f.

*Iphigenie* without feeling that the ideals of sculpture have there obtruded themselves, in spite of Lessing, upon those of drama. The grace of Sophocles is upon the supple yet finely chiselled verse; but in the conception and shaping of the dramatic matter the repose and ideal abstraction of form which we still call statuesque seems to have been a more controlling inspiration than the life-like pity and terror of Sophoclean tragedy. *Iphigenie* is a noble and pathetic figure, but the pathos is expressed with a reserve borrowed rather from the methods of the Greek chisel, as Goethe understood them, than from those of the Greek pen. She has been aptly called a Greek Madonna, and Goethe himself, standing before the picture of St. Agatha at Bologna, recognized his heroine in that ideal form, and resolved to permit her no language which he could not attribute to the Saint. As is well known, another saint, but a breathing and human one, was already faintly recognizable, to Weimar society, in *Iphigenie*; and we can hardly doubt that the sway exercised over him by a woman of high-bred distinction and intellectuality, calm without coldness, tender without passion, increased the hold upon him of all in the Greek genius that was self-controlled, ideal and reposeful, and withdrew him from the spell of the lyric cry which *Antigone* can utter no less than the heroes of Homer. Thus the passion for the antique which drove him across the Alps contained an element of illusion, and the joy of satisfied desire was far transcended, in his immensely strenuous intellect, by the loftier joy of discovery.

Let us now proceed to watch the steps in this process. The Italian journey may be regarded as a drama in three acts, with a prelude. On September 3, 1786, Goethe

stole away in the dead of night from Carlsbad, hurried over the Brenner, by Verona, Vicenza, Padua, to Venice; thence after three weeks' stay, without a pause by Bologna, Florence, Perugia, to Rome (October 29). There he spent the following four months, from October to February—the first act. Towards the end of February he went south to Naples and Sicily, thence back to Naples, and again to Rome in June, 1787. The records of the second Roman sojourn, from June, 1787, to April, 1788, are of the utmost interest in Goethe's development, though wanting in the picturesqueness and charm which place the descriptions of Naples and Sicily among the most delightful literature of travel in the world. Throughout these various phases of his journey Goethe is before all things an observer. He had come to Italy to get his eyes upon the things he had dreamed of; and it was by getting his eyes upon them that he discovered all the other things he did not dream of. Imagination was, in Goethe, we may almost say, a function of the eye; and almost all his poetic history is implicitly written in his ways of using the eye. It is therefore of primary importance to notice what he sees and what he does not see. Certainly the limitations of Goethe's observing power and its comprehensiveness are equally striking. Its limitations: for Goethe serenely ignores entire provinces of the world of Italy which the hardiest modern philistine would not dare be known to have passed by. Republican and Christian Rome, mediaeval and Christian Italy, he heeds not: at Assisi he turns with loathing from the colossal memorials of St. Francis to feast his eyes on the temple of Minerva. Byzantine and Gothic architecture are anathema to him; the man whose wonderful prose

hymn, thirteen years before, to Strassburg Minster had anticipated Ruskin's equally wonderful chapter on the Nature of Gothic Architecture, now compares the dreamlike wonder of St. Mark's to a crab on its back, and dismisses Gothic at large from his attention. 'The rows of miserable statues of saints on stone brackets,' he says in a passage added in 1816, but doubtless true enough to his mind in 1786, 'the pillars like bundles of tobacco-pipes, the pointed pinnacles and petal-points;—with these, thank heaven, I have done for ever<sup>1</sup>!' His interest in painting begins with the Renaissance. Giotto's frescoes in the Arena at Padua concern him as little as Fra Angelico's in St. Marco at Florence. Of Mr. Ruskin's 'three most precious buildings in the world,' two, St. Mark's at Venice and the Arena, he thus ignores, or worse. To the third alone, the Sistine Chapel, he does full justice. *History*, again, added attraction for him to no monument or site; at most, the spectacle of the Via Sacra, where the roads from the uttermost points of the world had their meeting-point, beguiles him for a moment to fancy himself following the legions to the Weser or the Euphrates, or standing in the crowd which thronged the Forum on their return. A generation after Goethe's visit, these defects were visited on him by the reproaches of two very different classes of his countrymen at Rome—the Romantics, who were the first to vindicate the early art of Italy, and the historical students of the early Republic, who gathered round Niebuhr.

All these notable things which Goethe passed by failed, in one way or other, to appeal to his sense of form. Gothic offended his Hellenist's eye by the

<sup>1</sup> *Ital. Reise*, Nov. 9, 1786.

want of repose inherent in its soaring lines; the pre-Raphaelite painting by its stiffness and crudity: and history lay out of the region of *Anschaung* altogether. On the other hand, the great painters of the Renaissance, as well as the sculptors of Greece, and the architects of Rome, discovered to him for the first time the possibilities and significance of *form* in art. He had long known the Belvedere Apollo in plaster-casts, but when he stands before the marble contours of the original he passes into one of those accesses of rapt intuition in which, as Wordsworth says, of another kind of rapture, 'the sense goes out.' 'The Apollo,' he cries, 'has plucked me out of the actual<sup>1</sup>.' Even the dull imitative symmetries of Palladio become to him a revelation of 'all art and all life<sup>2</sup>.' He had hitherto regarded art as 'a faint reflexion of Nature'; now, he writes to Karl August shortly before his return, it has become a new language to him<sup>3</sup>. No wonder that he looks back on the transalpine Egypt as the formless North. Nothing contributed so powerfully to develop this sense of form as his persistent use of the pencil. Goethe's talent for art lay entirely in his eye, not in his hand, but so powerful was the impulse derived from the eye to recreate form that the hand was forced into an activity uncongenial to it. During the whole of his journey, but especially in the two Roman sojourns, Goethe drew. In the first, under the guidance, first of Tischbein, then of Meyer and Hackert, he sketched from Nature; during the second winter he spent the best part of his time in

<sup>1</sup> *Tagebuch*, Oct. 4 (ed. E. Schmidt, p. 139).

<sup>2</sup> *Ital. Reise*, Oct. 8, 1786.

<sup>3</sup> Jan. 25, 1788; ed. Düntzer (*Hempel*, xxiv. 915).

drawing, and later in modelling, the human figure. His sketches, a selection of which has been published by the German Goethe-Gesellschaft, have at first sight a purely pathological interest. In reality, however, they were simply the rude auxiliary scaffolding on an educative process which was going on unseen behind. The painter and the modeller failed to model or to paint, but combined to train the poet. As M. Cart expresses it, 'he learnt to draw, not with the pencil, but, thanks to the pencil, with the pen<sup>1</sup>.' In a formula of Goethe's own, he learnt to see with a feeling eye, and feel with a seeing hand<sup>2</sup>.

Plasticity was no doubt the first and greatest gift of Italy to Goethe. Yet the plastic quality of his later work is not adequately expressed by the analogies of sculpture or painting. The figures in *Hermann und Dorothea* are at least as delicately chiselled as those of the *Iphigenie*; but the chisel is felt to be a less appropriate image in their case, and we seek involuntarily for analogies to their breathing and supple delicacy in a totally different region—that in which the rosebud unfolds into the rose, and the child's face is silently moulded into the woman's. I do not mean merely, what is obvious, that these figures are nearer to ordinary life than the others, but that the analogies of organic nature have in the meanwhile taken hold of the poet's imagination, and shared with those of art in controlling his eye and determining the quality of his touch. And this process, like the former, though it had begun long before, was consummated in Italy.

Very early in his Weimar time Goethe had become

<sup>1</sup> Theophile Cart, *Goethe en Italie*, p. 179.

<sup>2</sup> *Römische Elegien*, v.

a keen student of natural history. The paternal administration of a little German State, watchfully bent on exploiting the economic resources of the land, provided many openings for the study. His official supervision of the forests led him to botany, of the mines to mineralogy<sup>1</sup>. Werther's somewhat abstract worship of Nature became defined and articulated into a passionate effort to understand in detail how the flower grows, and how this goodly frame, the earth, fitted itself to be the cradle and the home of man. Weimar smiled at these eccentric pursuits of its poet, and Schiller, not yet quite ripe for his friendship, wrote with serious indignation to Körner of his 'zur Affectation getriebene Attachement an die Natur,'—the infantine simplicity of understanding which permitted him to abandon himself to his five senses and dabble in herbs and mineralogy<sup>2</sup>. To such dabbling Italy offered a host of new seductions; and the eagerness of the pilgrim to gaze on the shrine of ancient art did not in the smallest degree check his alert observation wherever he went of plants and soils. Lists of minerals diversify the praises of Palladio and the passionate words of love in the vivacious Journal which the 'Great Child' sent home to Charlotte von Stein. At Palermo he goes out for a quiet morning's work at his Odyssean tragedy of *Nausikaa*, but the marvels of strange plant life in the public garden put to flight his vision of the garden of Alcinous. And on his return to Rome even the tapestries from

<sup>1</sup> This and much more is set forth in a luminous page of Scherer, *Gesch. d. d. Lit.*, p. 546.

<sup>2</sup> Aug. 12, 1787 (cit. Koberstein, *Grundriss d. Gesch. d. deutschen Nat.-Litteratur*, iv. 274 n.)

Raphael's cartoons hardly persuade him to forget the lava-streams of Naples from which he had with difficulty torn himself away.

To the purely literary student of Goethe these activities are apt to appear more or less idle divagations from his proper work, just as scientific specialists have often disdained them as incompetent intrusions upon their own. Yet it may be questioned whether the profoundest instincts of Goethe's mind are not more transparently legible in his study of nature than in his study of art. In that study the bias of prejudice, the bias of system, which disturb his serene appreciation when confronted with Gothic or pre-Raphaelite beauty, had far less place; there, above all, he exercised that gift which the maturer Schiller beautifully described in the analysis of Goethe's mind which opened their correspondence and sealed their friendship: 'Your observant gaze, *der so still und rein auf den Dingen ruht*, never exposes you to the danger of those vagaries in which both speculation and the imagination which follows its own lead alone so easily go astray. In your veracious intuition all that analysis toils to discover, lies entire<sup>1</sup>.' To Goethe himself his acquisitions in natural science seemed to fall into their places in his mind, like new individual utterances of an intellect whose scope and cast he thoroughly understood. 'However much I find that is new,' he had written to Frau von Stein<sup>2</sup>, 'I yet find nothing unexpected; everything fits in and joins itself on, because I have no system.' We know from countless

<sup>1</sup> *Briefwechsel*, i. 6, Aug. 23, 1794.

<sup>2</sup> An Frau v. Stein, ii. 231. Cf. the same phrase used of his art studies, *Ital. Reise* (Hempel ed., xxiv. 393).



utterances what *system* meant to Goethe—the ‘theory’ which is always ‘grey’ while ‘life’ is always ‘green’; or as one of his bitterest epigrams has it, the wooden cross whose only function is to crucify a living thing<sup>1</sup>. Goethe had no system, no rigid classification against the barriers of which new experiences might jostle, to the system’s detriment or, too probably, their own; but he had what Bacon called an anticipation of Nature, a way of thinking about Nature which over a wide field of phenomena corresponded with the way in which Nature herself thinks. Throughout Nature he anticipates organic unity; complete isolation, ultimate discrepancy, exist only as figments for his mind. No doubt Goethe at times pursued this anticipation where it did not hold, as in his vain onslaught on Newton’s *Pfäffischer Einfall* of dividing the primal unity of light into seven<sup>2</sup>; no doubt it led him at other times only to such a half-truth as the theory of the metamorphosis of plants. Yet his half-truths were but rash formulations of conceptions which the whole course of nineteenth-century discovery has elaborated and defined, and his recognition of the skull as an expanded vertebra was itself a discovery of the first rank. He delights to trace organic affinities in the inorganic world. The weather polarizes itself into recurring antithesis of wet days and fine, his own poetic faculty has five or seven day cycles of alternate production and repose<sup>3</sup>. ‘I must

<sup>1</sup> *Epigramme*, 80.

<sup>2</sup> *Xenien* (Hempel, iii. 252).

<sup>3</sup> ‘Sonst hatte ich einen gewissen Cyklus von fünf oder sieben Tagen, worin ich die Beschäftigungen vertheilte; da konnte ich ungläublich viel leisten,’ 1827. *Gespr.* vi. 164 (quoted by R. M. Meyer in a fine and suggestive article, ‘Goethe’s Art zu arbeiten,’ *G. J.*, xiv. 179).

watch more closely,' he writes in the Diary of 1780, 'the circle which revolves in me of good and bad days. Invention, execution, arrangement, all revolve in a regular cycle—gaiety, gloom, strength, elasticity, weakness, desire, likewise. As I live very regularly the course is not interrupted, and I must get clear in what periods and order I revolve round myself<sup>1</sup>.' And as he interprets the material and the intellectual worlds on the same analogies, so he recognizes no final division between them; with his master Herder he begins the history of man with that of the planet<sup>2</sup>. Few travellers, and fewer poets, in his day apprehended with so keen a zest the influences of physical environment; of soil upon plant life, of site upon the conformation of towns. It must be allowed that he betrayed the weak side of this particular zest in the famous letter in which he gravely took Charlotte von Stein to task, in the depths of her anger and grief at his union with Christiane Vulpius, for over-exciting her passions with coffee<sup>3</sup>.

The central conception upon which all Goethe's interrogations of organic nature converge is what he calls the *type*. Penetrated with the instinct of evolution, he feels out in each individual specimen the elements which attach it to the life of all other living things<sup>4</sup>. The crowning moment of his botanic studies is not the discovery of some rare species, but the day when he can report to Frau von Stein that he is on

<sup>1</sup> *Tagebuch*, i. 112; quoted by Meyer, *u. s.*

<sup>2</sup> Herder's *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1787), which Goethe read in Italy.

<sup>3</sup> Letters to Frau v. Stein, ed. Schöll, ii. 364.

<sup>4</sup> *Ital. Reise*, May 17, 1787.

the point of finding the grand type of all plants—the *Urpflanze*, ‘a marvel which Nature herself might envy me.’ But the type is not, in Goethe’s hands, isolated from the multiplicity of single plants. It is rather a sort of intellectual nucleus, about which the impressions of the individual plant-world in all their concrete richness spontaneously arrange themselves in his mind, so that his intuition of the concrete individual has no sooner liberated the typical elements than these are caught and converted back into intuition, the concrete living thing appearing to him clothed as it were in its affinities, closely inwoven with the images of its kindred forms, and of the gradual phases of its growth. It was the intensity of this process in Goethe which made it impossible for him to believe that anything was ultimately isolated. This is what a scientific critic, in Goethe’s last years (1822), celebrated as his *Gegenständliches Denken*, a phrase which the old poet seized upon with undisguised pleasure, explaining it to mean that his thought did not detach itself from the concrete objects, their impressions being absorbed into and penetrated by it, so that his intuition was itself thought, his thinking intuition<sup>1</sup>. It went along with this ‘objectivity of mind,’ that his way of getting to the typical elements was not a despotic construction of them out of the data at hand, but a watching for the fruitful instances, for what, in an admirable phrase, he called the *pregnant points* of experience<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Hence his characteristic difference with Schiller, who took the *Urpflanze* to be an ‘*Idee*,’ while Goethe insisted that it was an ‘*Erfahrung*.’

<sup>2</sup> *Besondere Förderung durch ein einziges geistreiches Wort*, 1822. Hempel ed., xxvii. 351 f.

‘I never rest until I find *den prägnanten Punkt*, from which many conclusions can be derived, or rather, which spontaneously begets and lays before me conclusions which I with careful fidelity gather up.’ So, with benign Olympian egoism, Goethe expounds himself. This process of gathering up the typical elements at the point where they are most richly stored is not to be confounded with that which simply abstracts from a number of individuals what they have in common, arriving at a series of generic qualities. That is a process valuable in logic, but not very instructive in the study of living organisms. A man who tried to arrive at the typical Englishman by eliminating, one by one, all the qualities in which Englishmen differ, would find in the crucible at the end of the process no John Bull, but an impalpable phantom of a man without probably so much as a taste for roast-beef to define him. Probably enough, too, it would turn out that no complete light would be thrown on the English type by the most exhaustive analysis of the commonplace Englishman; that originality, far from being an out-of-the-way nook occupied by mere vagaries and eccentricities, was often the haunt in which the inmost secrets of national life were written large, and could be read plain; the pregnant place, in Goethe’s phrase, which spontaneously begets and brings forth large conclusions; so that we should understand the common Englishman himself better by fathoming Shakespeare than by fathoming John Smith. To reach the type in this way demands not merely an analytic comparison of specimens, but, above all, the brooding penetrative interpretation of, it may be, just those specimens which seem to have individual stuff in them, and are apt to be cast aside as

anomalies. And this was Goethe's procedure; this was the inveterate habit of his mind. The famous instance of the intermaxillary bone need only be mentioned: he himself compares with this *Gegenständliches Denken* his equally *Gegenständliche Dichtung*. His finest lyrics were occasional poems, not merely suggested by a particular occurrence, but retaining the very individual stuff, so to speak, of the occurrence intact, merely lifted to the highest level of expressive speech, and thereby necessarily brought into relation with universal experience, since this is what supreme expression means. He himself notices how it was said of his lyrics that each contained something individual—*etwas Eigenes*. An old traditional story took possession of him; he bore it about with him at times for forty or fifty years, not as an inert mental deposit, but alive and quick in the imagination, continuously transformed, but without suffering change, ripening towards a purer form and more decisive expression<sup>1</sup>. So it was with the great ballads of '97—*Die Braut von Korinth* and *Der Gott und die Bajadere*. This imaginative interpretation of particulars differs from a mere generalization of them, as the flower in the crannied wall seen in the light of what it is, 'root and all, and all in all,' differs from an abstract exposition of pantheism; or, as Millet's wonderful creation The Sower—'gaunt, cadaverous, and thin under his livery of misery, yet holding life in his large hand,—he who has nothing scattering broadcast on the earth the bread of the future'—differs from the blurred abstraction which Mr. Galton might obtain from the combined photographs of all the sowers that ever lived.

<sup>1</sup> *Besondre Förderung, &c., u. s., p. 352.*

It was probably in his dealings with natural science that Goethe first became vividly conscious of his own method. But it reacted in Rome upon his interpretation of *art*, and thence upon his ideals of *style*. The Italian journals show us the former process as it goes on, the Roman Elegies exhibit the latter complete. He had arrived in Rome, as we saw, imbued with the conception which Winckelmann had made general, that the essence of antique art was a calm and abstract beauty, to which expression and movement were, as such, hostile. So prepared, it was not unnatural that his wholly untrained eye, ardent to discover that harmonious calm, had at first gazed with ecstasy on the insipid, and held him spellbound for a week in the Palladian desert of Vicenza. At Rome, too, he found Winckelmann's teaching still dominant among his scholars, with its least profitable elements exaggerated and its undeveloped germs of truth suppressed. During his first sojourn he was entirely a pupil in the hands of these accomplished artists, and too much their inferior in artistic sensibility to criticize their artistic methods. But he was already unconsciously gathering, by long days of delighted study in the Sistine Chapel, material for a different judgement; and when in the summer of 1787 he returned to Rome, and plunged with boundless zest into his art studies, his attitude was far more critical. Bungler as he remained in all the executive processes of art, he was now something more than an amateur in the training of the eye, and his close and familiar intercourse with the organic life of nature, his sympathetic understanding of leaf and flower, and of the structure of the human body, opened to him a way of approaching art to which none of his artist friends had

in any degree access. Goethe's complete absence of pretension gave these merits their full weight in the society of Rome, from which he now affected a less severe seclusion than at first. Younger men gathered about him, fell under his spell, underwent his benign moulding and formative power, became incipient disciples. Already in August we find him hitting out what he calls a new principle of art interpretation, and contrasting it with that of 'the *artists*.' He has begun to model the human figure; or, as his ardour phrases it: 'Now, at last the  $A$  and  $\Omega$  of all known things, the human figure, has got hold of me, and I of it, and I say: "Lord, I will not leave go of thee, except thou bless me, though I should wrestle myself lame." I have come upon a thought which simplifies many things for me. It comes to this, that my indomitable study of Nature, my anxious toil in comparative anatomy, enable me now to see much as a whole in Nature and in the antique, which the artists with difficulty discover piecemeal, and what they do discover, they cannot communicate to others<sup>1</sup>.' On September 3 he wrote: 'My art studies make great progress, my principle fits everywhere and interprets everything.' Finally, on September 6, more explicitly: 'So much is certain: the old artists had as complete a knowledge of Nature, and as definite an idea of what can be represented and how it must be represented, as Homer had. These great works of art were at the same time supreme works of Nature, produced by men according to just and natural laws. All that is arbitrary or fantastic falls away; here is necessity, here is God.' The ideas which he here conveys in allusion and epitome are probably those which he after-

<sup>1</sup> *Ital. Reise*, August 23, 1787.

wards unfolded in the introduction to the *Propyläen*, the short-lived effort of the prophets of art in Weimar to preach their gospel to a deaf nation<sup>1</sup>. There he contrasts two methods of artistic production. 'An artist may, by instinct and taste, practice and experiment, succeed in eliciting the beautiful aspect of things, select what is best from the good he finds, and produce at least a pleasing effect; or he may (which is far rarer in modern times) penetrate into the depth of Nature and into the depths of his own heart, so as not only to produce what is superficially effective, but, vying with Nature, to create an intellectual organism, and give the work of art a content and a form by which it seems natural and supernatural at once<sup>2</sup>.' Clearly, the former procedure of arbitrarily selecting and contriving beautiful forms is that piecemeal study which he branded in the *Journal*, and which we know to have been taught by Raphael Mengs. It was the procedure inevitably suggested by a theory which would throw over the higher as well as the lower truthfulness of art in a blind pursuit of beautiful form. For a mere compilation of beautiful forms cannot, save by accident, have expression, any more than a volume of elegant extracts, however ingeniously pieced together, can make a poem. Goethe never to the end completely overcame Winckelmann's antithesis between beauty and expression; but a man who had for years been reading in the single organism the signs of the type, and had lately achieved as he thought a momentous discovery in the process,

<sup>1</sup> This suggestion is made by O. Harnack: 'Goethe's Kunstanschauung in ihrer Bedeutung für die Gegenwart,' *G. J.*, xv. 194.

<sup>2</sup> Einleitung in die *Propyläen*, Hempel ed., xxviii. 13. Cf. Harnack, *u. s.*, p. 187 f.



was not likely to wholly ignore the aesthetic value of expression. And now came his eager studies of the human figure. From two totally different directions, through osteology and antique sculpture, he had converged upon this study; now it became the meeting-point at which his presuppositions in classic art and in organic science met and flashed through both regions of his thought with an electric illumination. The creation of a statue became for him now akin to that searching interpretation of the particular organism by the aid of the fullest knowledge and the subtlest insight, which makes every fibre in it significant and expressive. The statue was for him analogous to those *pregnant points* of organic nature in which the type reveals itself without being extorted—an organism expressive in every contour of the permanent and persistent qualities and relationships of man.

It was inevitable that when his new principle had thus unlocked for him, as he thought, the secrets of sculpture, he should look with other eyes upon his own art of poetry. The poet, like the sculptor, had not to pursue an abstract ideal of beauty, and assemble beautiful forms from all sources, but to reveal the *typical* in Nature. In this revelation Goethe now found the essence of *style*. In the profound and luminous little essay, written soon after his return, *Einfache Nachahmung der Natur, Manier, Stil*<sup>1</sup>, he distinguished under these names three phases in the artistic rendering of form. By the 'simple imitation of Nature' he understood the accurate copying of forms by one without insight into their origin and structure. As soon, however, as the detail becomes complex and minute, as in

<sup>1</sup> Hempel ed, xxiv. 525 f.

drawing a tree or a pebbly brook, accurate imitation tends to give way to some kind of convention, in the choice of which the artist betrays his own idiosyncrasy ; in Goethe's words, he 'devises a language of his own to render what he has seen, a language in which the mind of the speaker is directly expressed and defined. And just as the opinions entertained on moral questions group and shape themselves differently in every thinking spirit, so every artist of this class will see, apprehend and imitate the world in a different way.' Thus arises what Goethe calls *Mannerism*. 'But if the artist, by imitating Nature, by striving to find a universal expression for it, by exact and profound study of the objects themselves, finally attains to an exact and ever exacter knowledge of the qualities of things and the mode of their existence, so that he surveys the whole series of forms, and can range together and imitate the various characteristic shapes, then what he achieves, if he achieves his utmost, and what, if achieved, sets his work on a level with the highest efforts of man, is *Style*.' In this interesting passage Goethe distinguishes what we might otherwise call a conventional treatment of things (*Mannerism*) from two modes, a lower and a higher, of realism. Simple imitation, he says, works, as it were, in the vestibule of *Style*. The more faithfully it goes to work, the more calmly it perceives, the more quietly it imitates, the more it accustoms itself to think about what it sees—viz. to compare what is similar to separate and what is unlike, and range single objects under universal points of view—the more worthy it will become to cross the threshold of the sanctuary of style.

It is easy from this passage to understand why

Goethe in Italy wrestled so passionately with the fate which, otherwise so bountiful, had denied him the artist's forming hand. To shape the marble or the clay would alone have completely solved the problem of the artist as he now, under the spell of plastic art, understood it. Again and again, in the *Journal and Letters*, he scornfully turns aside from the futility of words, abstract sounds which only by an indirect and uncertain process bring the thing to the eye.

'But of a single craft Master I am, or wellnigh:  
Writing German. And thus I, hapless poet, for ever  
Shaping unshapeable stuff, squander my life and my art!'

In words, however, and German words, fate compelled him to work. Words were a *pis-aller*, and he strove to make them do, as far as they might, the work of plastic form. The Roman Elegies are reliefs carved in ivory and glowing in mellow sunlight. With the dull skies of the North he has left behind its featureless forms; we are in a world teeming with light and colour, and where the light is caught and flashed back from the clear-cut profiles of gods and men. The Rome in which we find ourselves is not the Rome of the antiquarian or the tourist; not a church, not a picture meets the eye, not one familiar outline of the historic monuments shapes itself under the poet's pen; the stones of Rome are silent in spite of his appeal; but from the ruined or vanished temples the gods of the ancient world have come forth, their immortal youth fresh upon them as in the days of Phidias and Praxiteles, unconscious of the eighteen centuries of Christendom, unconscious of

<sup>1</sup> *Epigramme* 29; cf. 77. The reasons adduced for understanding 'den schlechtesten Stoff' merely of the subject of his epigrams are not to me convincing.

the faded figments which pseudo-classicism had put in their place, receive the poet's homage, mingle in his story and serve as symbols for his thought. Goethe's neo-paganism is equally distinct from that of Shelley and of Pope. The deities of Twickenham are the expiring pulsations of Greek myth, under the stress of the extruding pressure which all ethereal things undergo in the grip of the Latin tongue, where Ceres meant corn and Bacchus wine. The gods of Shelley, on the other hand, still glow and tremble with the vital energies of which myth is born; they are of the kindred of the sun and dawn, divine presences detected through the shimmering woof of Nature, but not yet completely defined with human form. Goethe's deep-seated instinct for harmonious completeness and sensuous definiteness, drew him to the intervening epoch in which the mythic tradition, detached from all mystic suggestion but not yet dissipated into phrase and fable, found expression under the chisel of the great sculptors in ideal human forms. For him, as for them, the human body is (in the words of Otilie) the nearest likeness of the divine; and of the antique representations of it he had written from Rome in words already quoted, '*there is necessity, there is God.*' Human enough these gods of Goethe certainly are; but their humanity clothes itself in unfailling grace. Olympus is not far above the earth, and it does not surprise us to find the gods the poet's guests in his Roman studio. He looks round the room with its treasured trophies of Roman art-shops, and it becomes a Pantheon before his eyes:—

'Jupiter's godlike brow is bent, and Juno's is lifted,  
 Phoebus Apollo steps forth, shaking his crownet of curls;  
 Downward cast and austere is the gaze of Pallas, and sprightly  
 Mercury shoots side-looks sparkling with malice and charm.

But Cytherea uplifts to Bacchus the dreaming, the tender,  
Eyes that with blissful desire still in the marble are moist!<sup>1</sup>

Or, instead of their being his guest, he involuntarily finds himself theirs. Surely neo-pagan rapture never found more intense expression than in the close of the seventh *Elegy*, where he dreams himself strayed into Olympus:—

‘May a mortal partake such bliss? Am I dreaming? or is it  
Thine Olympus indeed, O father Zeus, that I tread?  
Ah me! here I lie, in supplication uplifting  
Unto thy knees my hands; Jupiter Xenius, hear!  
How I entered I know not; but Hebe my steps as I wander’d  
Turn’d aside, and led, clasping my hand, to thy halls.  
Hadst thou sent her to bring some hero, haply, before thee?  
Was the fair one at fault? Pardon! Her fault be my gain!  
Art thou the god of the guest and of them that welcome him?  
O then  
Thrust not thine own guest-friend back from Olympus to earth!  
Bear with me, Zeus! And at last may Hermes, tranquilly  
leading,  
Guide me, by Cestius’ tomb, down to the homes of the dead!’

Byron’s ‘O Rome, my country! city of my soul!’ expresses a passion as ardent as Goethe’s; but in him the passion breaks forth as a thrilling lyrical cry; Goethe’s masterful art constrains it into living human or godlike shapes. The human form has become for him, we may almost say, not only the supreme but wellnigh the only adequate language of art; whatever he has to say he strives to render in the idioms of this tongue. Not only the Roman *Elegies*, but the few poems actually composed in Italy, illustrate this. That love opens the eyes to the splendour and beauty and colour of the natural world is a common enough poetic idea: notice how Goethe expresses it in the brilliant

<sup>1</sup> *Röm. Elegien*, xi.

little apologue *Amor als Landschaftsmaler*. The poet was sitting at dawn upon a crag, gazing fixedly on the morning mist, which spread like a grey canvas over the landscape. A boy came and stood at his side. "Why do you gaze thus idly on the empty canvas?" I will show you how to paint. And he stretched out his finger, that was ruddy as a rose, and began to draw on the broad sheet. Aloft he drew a beautiful sun, which glittered dazzling in my eyes; then he made the clouds a golden edge, and sunbeams breaking through the clouds; then the delicate crests of luxuriant trees, the hills rising boldly one behind another; then, below, water that seemed to glitter in the sun, seemed to babble under the steep brink. Ah, and there stood flowers by the brook, and there were hues on the meadow, gold and pearl and purple and green, all like emerald and carbuncle! Overhead in clear and pure enamel the sky, and the blue hills far and further; so that utterly ravished and new-born I gazed, now at the painter, now at his work. But the hardest remains. Then he drew again with pointed finger a little wood, and right at the end, where the sunlight blazed on the ground, a bewitching maiden, featly formed and daintily clad, fresh cheeks under brown locks, and the cheeks were of like colour with the finger that drew them. "O you boy!" I cried, "what master has taken you to school?" While I yet spoke, lo, a breath of wind wakes and stirs the tree-tops, ruffles all the wavelets of the brook, fills the perfect maiden's veil, and what made me more marvel as I marvelled, the maiden begins to move her foot, steps forth, and approaches the spot where I am sitting with my wilful master. And when all was moving, trees and brook and flowers and veil, and the dainty foot of the

fairest one, do you imagine that I upon my rock, like a rock, sat still?'

Some three years before the date of this poem, and two before he went to Italy, Goethe had written the yet more famous *Zueignung*, now prefixed to the entire series of his poems. It is interesting to contrast them. Here too an abstract thought about art is conveyed through an allegory. The German language contains no verses of more finished loveliness than these, but how different is the method! Instead of the brief statement of the situation at the outset—the poet at dawn on his rock, the mist, the boy—we have three stanzas of description:—the poet wakened from sleep, climbing the hillside to his upland hut, his joy in the flowers by the way, then the river and the mists and the sun breaking through; then at length amid the dazzling vapours, the godlike form of poetic Truth. A dialogue ensues;—confession, worship on the one side, counsel, playful irony on the other: finally, near the close she lays in his hands a veil and tells him in two stanzas more how to use it. Evidently here Goethe has not yet learnt to suspect the futility of words which he was to declare so peremptorily in Italy. Had this been written shortly after his journey instead of shortly before it, how differently that throwing of the veil—the one fragment of action which the poem contains—would have been related to the scale of the whole! We should not have been told how the veil would turn the world into poetry for the poet; we should have seen it flung and watched that transformation going on before our eyes, as we watch the landscape growing under the hand of Amor.

But this is not the only interesting point of com-

parison. Italy has given Goethe a totally new apprehension of colour, of definiteness in form. The *Amor als Landschaftsmaler* was written in the intervals of a sketching tour amid the autumnal splendour of the woods of Frascati. A letter of nearly the same date as the poem (November 24, 1787) brings this vividly home to us. 'There is a brilliance and at the same time a harmony, a graduation in the colouring of the whole, of which in the North we have no conception. With you everything is either hard or dull, gay or monotonous.' Brilliant and harmonious too is his own landscape in the *Amor*; it has the clear bright colouring of Raphael's frescoes in the Farnesina, with their deep blue background, like blue hills and pellucid enamelled sky. The *Zueignung* landscape has the quite different charm of the North; the clear outlines grow delicately uncertain; mists lie low along the river and wander in fantastic drifts and eddies along the mountain side, or make a dazzling veil of sheen for the sun: it is not the brilliance of the blossoms which strikes him, but their dewy freshness. And most significantly of all, the delight in a nebulous and tremulous beauty thus communicated to the landscape is embodied also in the image which figures the relation of poetry to truth; it is not the wonder-working rosy finger of Amor, glorifying the blank canvas with colour, but a veil,—not a veil like the maiden's to float gracefully in the breeze, but one 'of morning vapour woven and radiant sunlight,' that softens and modulates the harshness of actuality, allays the throb of passion, and makes day lovely and night fair.

It is not, however, in the *Amor* or the Roman Elegies, brilliantly plastic as they are, that we find the most enduring artistic fruit of his Italian journey. The



sensuous splendour of the Italian world, culminating in the glory of the human form revealed in antique sculpture, for a time hurried him along paths which were not absolutely his own. He returned home after twenty months' absence, full of the deep content of one who has stilled the intellectual hunger of years, to find a chilly welcome in the little German court from which he had fled. Weimar had not quite forgiven his disappearance : it retailed scandalous stories of his habits, and grudged him his well-salaried leisure ; he on his part chafed at the constraints of German *Sitte*, and remembered the free Bohemian *camaraderie* of the studios of Rome. His literary prestige itself was threatened. When the MSS. of *Iphigenie* and of *Egmont*, laboriously rewritten, reached Weimar from Rome, his friends admitted their merit but regretted the author of *Werther* ; and now all the youthful impetuosity of genius which the author of *Werther* had flung from him in its pages was renewed in the young poet of the *Robbers*, who had come to Weimar in Goethe's absence, and had moreover emphatically disapproved of the *Egmont*. Not without pique at this want of response, Goethe gave his Roman humour full bent ; sacrificed with hardly a pang the friendship of Charlotte von Stein by an informal union with a burgher's daughter, and wrote of his love as Propertius and Tibullus had written of theirs, in the aggressively pagan Roman Elegies. Aggressively pagan Goethe clearly was in these first years after his return. The German north was slow to emerge for him from its mantle of Cimmerian darkness, slow to recover its power of appeal to an eye steeped in the glow of Raphael and of Sicily. And Christianity was not lightly or soon forgiven its ascetic chastisement of the senses, its

flagellations of the form that Phidias had carved, its monastic sequestrations of beauty, its trappings upon passion. Thirty years later Goethe, though still completely untouched by Christian theology, was to find a noble expression for Christian religion as that which teaches the reverence for what is below us<sup>1</sup>. But in 1797 it was rather his humour to tell with incomparable *élan* the legend of the betrothed maiden of Corinth who dies under the ascetic constraints of her Christian parents, but wins back through the unconquerable power of love from the grave itself to the embraces of her unseen and unknown lover<sup>2</sup>!

But Goethe was too great and too deeply rooted in the mind of his time to be absolutely and completely the 'old pagan' he pleasantly called himself. Antiquity was once for all gone, and to be literally ancient was to fail to be truly antique. The moral consciousness of the world had been definitely enriched, its horizon enlarged. To feel and think like Propertius—or even like Plato—in the nineteenth century, is to be something less than Propertius and something less than Plato; for 'the ancient civilization,' as the Master of Balliol has said in an admirable essay, 'was not impoverished, as such a revival of it must be, by ignoring problems which had not yet been opened up.' Goethe of all men could not ignore the problems of the modern world; he was penetrated by them. His deep-rooted instinct for the organic, which had thrown a new light for him upon the expressiveness of antique art, tended yet more inevitably to dissolve the barriers which, for him, severed the antique, like a sacred precinct, from

<sup>1</sup> *Wilhelm Meister's Wanderjahre*, Book ii.

<sup>2</sup> *Die Braut von Korinth*.

the profane modern world. The passionate student of natural history could not persist in disdaining all flowers but the rose. And the student of the natural history of man could not persistently refrain from applying the new-won wealth of his art to the living organism which alone he intimately and profoundly knew, the German burgherdom about him. Many other influences, with which we are not here concerned, contributed to the production of *Hermann und Dorothea*; the stimulus of Schiller's friendship, the habituation to epic narrative gained (under whatever different conditions) in *Reineke Fuchs* and *Wilhelm Meister*; the example of Voss; and the exorcism by which F. A. Wolf had banished (1795), as he and Goethe thought, the great constraining shade of Homer, and made it possible to step out and walk in the large Homeric way without adventuring to do battle with a god. We are rather concerned to see how those two lines of Goethe's development which we have been following out—his discipline in Greek Art and in organic nature, after meeting in his theory of criticism and in his theory of style—now, at length, came together harmoniously blended in his poetry. Goethe himself, recognizing perhaps most clearly what he had reached with most toil, declared that all the merits of his epic were those of sculpture. How much it owes to sculpture is obvious:—the plastic beauty of the forms, the absence of those critical or reflective divagations which escape the pen so much more easily than the scalpel, the subordination of effects of colour to those of contour and mass. And the entire drawing is guided by an exquisite instinct for the typical, in that kind which we have seen to characterize Goethe. *Hermann and Dorothea* are perfectly individual, yet they are at the

same time *pregnant points* in which the life-history of an endless vista of German manhood and womanhood may be read. A typical German community, with its habitual activities and routine, yet everywhere disclosing the secret of its own persistence, the stuff of heart and character in which, generation after generation, it stands rooted, is unfolded before us with the simplest yet profoundest art, steeped in that implicit poetry which for Goethe habitually invested the enduring relations of things. And the subtlest feeling for environment inspires the drawing of the human figures of this community,

*'Wo sich nah der Natur menschlich der Mensch noch erzieht.'*

In the simple story of the innkeeper's son, we read the whole economy of a community firmly planted in the soil; we see its orchards and gardens and vineyards, we see the burgher's thrift and the watchful eye of the housewife. And across this thriving community is thrown, with the finest effect, the wreckage of one abruptly uprooted and dispersed, while again out of that wreckage detaches itself the noble figure of Dorothea, homeless and exiled, but a perpetual well-spring of all the qualities which give cohesion to society and build up the home. In drawing of detail too, the sculpturesque intuition is persistently blended with organic feeling: there is a suppleness in the clear forms, a tenderness in the unhesitating profiles. This large flexible speech impresses on all that enters its embrace a delicate precision of form, but also elicits everywhere subtle suggestions of growth. When Hermann and Dorothea walk homeward through the cornfields towards the stormy sunset, they are gladdened by the tall waving corn, which almost reaches their tall figures;

the gladness of harvest, and the comeliness of goodly stature, stealing upon our imagination from the same two lines. The stamping horses whose thunder we hear under the gateway, or which we watch speeding homeward eager for the stall, while the dust-cloud springs up under their mighty hoofs, are drawn by a man who has looked on the glorious fraternal four of bronze that champ and curvet over the portal of S. Mark's. Yet, on the other hand, what depths of patriarchal sentiment, of the feeling that gathers about the home lands where for unremembered generations men have sown and reaped and garnered, taking their life from the earth, and at last laid to rest in it, —lies in a single utterly simple line: *These fields are ours; they grow ripe for the morrow's harvest.* Here those two springs of poetry well up apart; more often they blend too intimately for the finest analysis. At other times their currents meet and mingle without indistinguishably blending, like the grey Danube and the green Inn at Passau. Hermann and Dorothea descend in the gloaming through the vineyard to his father's house. On the rough unhewn steps her foot slips and twists; she is near falling. 'Swiftly he spread his arms and supported her; gently she sank on his shoulder, breast drooped upon breast, and cheek upon cheek. So he stood, rigid as a marble image, controlled by resolute will, did not clasp her closer, but stayed himself against her weight. And so his senses were filled with his glorious burden, the warmth at her heart and the balm of her breath exhaled upon his lips, and he felt the man in him as he bore her womanhood's heroic stature.' One easily feels the hand of the sculptor in that fine description; in the precision with which

not only profile, but pose, the strain or relaxation of muscle, are realized, the fearless insistence on weight and stature, heedless of the Romantic canon which forbids a heroine to be heavy. Yet, on the other hand, what breathing vitality, what warmth and fragrance, in every line!

Let me, finally, in a few sentences, give a somewhat wider horizon to this study of Goethe's style at the moment of its maturest perfection. In his later poetry the exquisite balance between plastic and organic feeling is somewhat disturbed; under the influence of Schelling, the mysterious and impalpable aspects of organic nature grow more and more dominant in his mind, and it becomes the office of poetic expression not to strive to body forth the impalpable, but to suggest it by likeness and symbol. *Alles Vergängliche ist nur ein Gleichniss*—all the vesture of man's thought and speech becomes but a parable of the eternal infinity of Nature. Goethe lived in a time when, alike through poetry and science, the universe of sense and thought was at countless points acquiring a new potency of appeal to man. All things, as Wordsworth said, *were speaking*; and the multitudinous chorus found nowhere so complete an interpretation as on Goethe's clear harp of divers tones. Wordsworth and Shelley render certain aspects of external Nature, the loneliness of the mountains, the tameless energy of wind, with an intensity which makes all other Nature poetry pale. But they looked with cold or uninspired eyes on the whole world of art, on the mystery of the Gothic vault, the glory of Attic marble. Except under certain broad and simple aspects—the patriot, the peasant, the child—they were strange to the world of man. Their 'Nature' was not

yet the *unendliche Natur*, at whose breasts all things in heaven and earth drink of the springs of life. Wordsworth's aspiration to tell of man barricaded evermore within the walls of cities remained an unfulfilled item in the programme of a recluse; and Shelley's champion of oppressed humanity hung far aloof from men among the caverns and precipices of Caucasus. Physical Nature they spiritualize rather than interpret. Wordsworth has, like Goethe, the 'quiet eye,' and sees and renders with a precision as delicate as his the forms of things—the daisy's star-shaped shadow on the stone; he feels with equal or perhaps greater intensity the *being* of the flower, but he does not, like Goethe, feel its *becoming*. Nature for him has something of the rigidity of his own character. With Shelley, on the contrary, the vitality of Nature streams and pulses through its whole fabric with an intensity which dissolves all form and structure into light and air, and anticipates the slow aeons of organic change with momentous crises of convulsion. Goethe alone is the poet of the Nature that evolves. In this direction, no doubt, we must also recognize the sources of his limitations. He was so penetrated with the instinct of harmonious evolution that he pursued it by too short and simple paths, arrived too easily at the goal. The mathematician, who lays the concrete totality on the rack of a disintegrating analysis, was as abhorrent to him as the caricaturist who mutilates the beauty of truth with burlesque. From the tragic side of life he turned with an aversion not wholly born of pity. And tragedy itself insensibly missed, in his hands, the supremest heights of pity and terror. Faust is not wrung with the remorse of Othello, and his reconciliation attains

a harmony more complete, perhaps, but of a lower kind than that which we enter through the purifying pity which the merciless poignancy of Othello's tragedy inspires. Yet harmony is the last word of art as of life, the final postulate of religion and philosophy; and if Goethe rarely, like Shakespeare, evoked poetry from the supreme agonies and anarchies of men and states, if he knew neither the divine anger of Dante nor his diviner love, and had seen neither the depths of hell nor the heights of heaven, he yet toiled for two generations towards the mastery of a world, of which their horizon encircled but narrow portions, the image of the indwelling reason of the universe slowly growing articulate through the ages in the intellect and imagination, the ordered knowledge and ideal art of Man.

*November 18, 1897.*



# THE SPANISH ROGUE-STORY

(NOVELA DE PÍCAROS)

THE interest shown in rogues and their ways needs no explanation; it is part of the curiosity of one half of the world to know how the other half lives. The Gods and Heroes of the Epic, and the Arcadian Shepherds of the Idyll, are so far removed from the ordinary experience of mankind that their magnificent artificiality palls at last, and the imagination cries out for some simpler and more natural food. There is a part of our nature that loves to see and hear men like ourselves, it may be a little better or a little worse, acting and speaking as we might act and speak amid infinitely varied surroundings. The crafty fox, or jackal, is the most interesting character in the beast fable; we cannot respect him, but his versatility excites our admiration more than the boldness of the lion, the man of one virtue. Reynard is perhaps the oldest and most universal rogue or *pícaro*. When he appears upon the scene our interest revives; we are not sorry, indeed, that his mischief sometimes brings him into awkward positions, but we take comfort the while in the thought that he is immortal, for we hold him dearer than the

more virtuous beasts who are by turns his victims and his tools. But for this he must not be too wicked, his tricks must be humorous as well as profitable, for wickedness unadorned is repulsive and inartistic.

When literature has taken for its province *Quicquid agunt homines*, it finds itself face to face with a problem; for there are many things that all men do, and these are generally uninteresting. It is only a later age that takes delight in reading about itself in its more commonplace moods, and studies mankind through books. We, perhaps, can dispense with plot, incident, and adventure, and, like Dutch painters, revel in the exact portraiture of the things of everyday life, but our remote ancestors had not yet reached this period of development. An ancient Assyrian *Kailyard Book* or a Byzantine *Pride and Prejudice* would probably have excited but little interest among contemporaries. The tale of the clever thief, a shadowy rogue-character struggling to emerge from his neolithic state, hovers in the dawn of literature. In Petronius he appears fully developed for the first time; we find him again naked and unashamed in Apuleius; in the middle ages he becomes supernatural and figures largely in demonologies, and so he comes through Rabelais and Dickens right down to our own time. The very profession of a rogue brings him into contact with all classes of society, he is always running away from somebody or after somebody; his discontent with the humdrum existence around him shows a certain originality of mind. Most lives contain some incidents worth telling, but the *pícaro's* life is interesting—nay, thrilling—throughout. Not only

is he ever active and busy, but he sets other characters in motion and gives rise to new if unpleasant experiences and situations. With the tremulous delight of conscious naughtiness we follow him through scenes which our respectability would never allow us to visit alone, and only half-ashamed find ourselves deeply engaged in some plot against our neighbour's donkey or his purse. Experience is widened without after-taste of guilt, the imagination is stimulated and the purpose of art, not indeed in its highest form, but in a form which all alike can share, is fulfilled.

Though the rogue is found in every age and climate, some situations are more favourable to his growth than others, and he is not everywhere made the subject of books. Moral standards change so much that he now figures chiefly in criminal statistics, for the distinction between *pícaro* and criminal, though very real, is disregarded by the law. The *pícaro* is guilty of almost every crime, yet he is not black-hearted; above all, he is no hypocrite. He is the irresponsible product of a state of society, he is primitive man in an artificial environment.

‘ . . . the good old rule  
Sufficeth him, the simple plan  
That they should take who have the power  
And they should keep who can.’

In order to enjoy his story he must be looked upon as extra-moral, just as ambassadors and their belongings are by a fiction extra-territorial. This was understood by the earlier Spanish recorders of his exploits. The later ones ceased to understand him aright, they were afraid of their own creation, and are never tired of repeating that their object is a moral

one and their hero the incarnation of all that should be shunned. The *pícaro* reformed and grown old—a contradiction in terms, for the *pícaro* is ever young, and is devoid of conscience—is introduced bewailing the misdeeds of his youth. The happy sense of irresponsibility is gone; instead of the rogue we have the vulgar criminal, and excuses are lavished on the inexcusable. The *pícaro*, then, is a by-product of society, and his story is a peculiar form of the novel of manners and adventures. It is generally autobiographical, and its chief merit, over and above its literary and artistic worth, lies in the inimitable picture it presents of the inner life of an age—of a tenth that is submerged but finds no discomfort in submersion.

In Spain down to the middle of the fifteenth century literature was an exotic cultivated only at court, in the cloister, and in the schools. Artificial, mythological, and obscure, it was addressed to a small class taking no heed of the people, who sang their ballads of the Cid and the Moorish wars despised of literary folk. The reaction towards nature and reality is marked by the appearance of the *Celestina* or *Tragi-comedy of Calixto and Melibea* about the year 1480. This strange book is neither a novel nor yet a play. Though written from end to end in dialogue, and divided into twenty-one parts called ‘acts,’ its length and diffuseness quite unfit it for acting. But it is hardly too much to say that it contains the germ of all that is original in the Spanish drama and the Spanish novels of manners and adventures. The first act—by far the largest—is said to be the work of Rodrigo Cota of Toledo. The plot involves a host of minor characters, but the argument is simple. Calixto in pursuit of a truant hawk

comes suddenly on Melibea in her garden. He at once falls in love, and, with the outspokenness of a Spanish gallant, declares his passion. Harshly rejected, he returns home and falls into a state bordering upon despair. He takes into his confidence his servant, Sempronio, and is persuaded to entrust his case to Celestina, matchmaker, go-between, quack doctor, and witch. Sempronio goes to summon her, and we are introduced to her home and associates, a graphic and unedifying scene in low life. To Calixto Celestina stakes her reputation on securing his success in his suit. Here the original author is said to have left his work; but so well had he indicated his plot, and so good a model had he furnished of brisk and natural dialogue, never till that time attempted in Spanish, that Fernando de Rojas, who completed the book, was able to make the remaining twenty acts undistinguishable in style from the first. Through these twenty acts we will not follow him, partly because of the indelicate nature of the story, and partly because of its length and complication due to the vivacious tangle of underplot. Celestina, disguised as a pedlar, makes her way into Melibea's house, wins her confidence, hoodwinks her, and fulfils her pledge to Calixto. But the witch falls a victim to poetic justice, murdered in a quarrel among her gang over their ill-gotten gains. Calixto, surprised in Melibea's garden, perishes by a fall from the wall, whereupon the disconsolate lady mounts a tower, and after bewailing her frailty from its top, dashes herself to pieces at her father's feet. A long soliloquy by Pleberio, the father, on the danger of evil associations, forms the last act.

The success of the *Celestina* was rapid and great.

It was translated into every literary language—including Latin—and has left its mark everywhere. Its hero and heroine are the very types which we afterwards meet in the Spanish sword and cloak plays, and in the novels of Cervantes and Lope de Vega. Romeo and Juliet are their direct descendants. It is at the same time one of the first books, after the middle ages, to take low life as its main theme. Sempronio, Parmeno, Carlo, Felicia, and the rest, are *pícaros*. *Celestina* herself we shall meet over and over again in the rogue-stories. The material for the long series we are about to examine was dug by its author or authors, the form was fixed by *Lazarillo de Tormes*.

About the middle of the sixteenth century there appeared in Spain a little black-letter volume of about a hundred widely printed pages, entitled *The Life of Lazarillo de Tormes and of his Misfortunes and Adversities*. So eagerly was it sought after, first by the public and afterwards by the Inquisition, that of the earliest known edition—that of Burgos, 1554—only one copy has survived, and the rough little chap-book, with its coarse woodcuts and many misprints, is one of the treasures of the Chatsworth Library. Within the next two years it was thrice reprinted, once at Alcalá, and twice at Antwerp for the benefit of the Spaniards in the Low Countries. But these editions are only less rare than the earlier one, for everybody read it, and the copies were worn away in the pockets of Spanish soldiers abroad, or thumbed out of existence as they passed from hand to hand in Spain. Its success, indeed, equalled that of the *Celestina*, and sprang from the same cause. The learned and polite literature of the period had abandoned the earth and

moved in an imaginary world. Latin, French, Italian and even Arabic models had been studied and imitated. If anywhere an original path had been struck out it was in the Romances of Chivalry which began to be fashionable during the first half of the sixteenth century. But, after *Tirant lo Blanch* and *Amadis of Gaul*, these knightly stories became ever more vapid and wordy, their heroes ceased to be human, and each new writer outdid his predecessors only in the size of the giants and the wild incredibility of the enchantments which Florisel or Primaleón so easily overcome. The age of chivalry was passing away, the ponderous folios were costly and cumbersome, and the story of Palmerín was almost as much out of place in a cottage as the hero himself would have been. The drama was in its infancy; the *villancicos*, or carols sung with rough impersonation by shepherds at Christmas, a few mysteries acted in churches, and certain stiff dialogues intended for court revels, and rough farces for country fairs, formed its whole stock as late as the middle of the sixteenth century. A vast amount of verse was written, but any of the early *cancioneros*, or song-books, into which it was collected will serve to show how metaphysical and mythological, stilted and formal it had become. With the exception of ballads of uncertain date, and the rollicking satire of the Arch-priest of Hita, it is hard to find, between the *Poema del Cid* (twelfth century) and the famous *Coplas de Manrique*, which belong to the later sixteenth century, a Spanish poem of more than merely historical and linguistic interest. The citizen, the farmer, the soldier, and the muleteer had their old-world legends and ballads orally handed down, and cared nothing for the

fine poetry that found favour at court. People who lived in the workday world refused utterly to believe in the lovesick, lackadaisical and euphemistic shepherds of the pastoral romance lately introduced through Portugal from Italy. A generation that had heard its fathers tell of the conquest of Granada, a generation to which the marvels of the New World were daily being revealed, and which had itself witnessed the heroic deeds of arms that spread the Spanish power in Italy, the Netherlands, and Africa, had no need to seek the stirring and wonderful amid the enchanted castles of an imaginary chivalry. It was a new pleasure for the people to find themselves the subject of a book, and to recognize in story the familiar types of everyday life. The portrait they found in *Lazarillo* was not perhaps a flattering one, but they acknowledged its truth and delighted in it as their own.

The structure of the story—if story it can be called—is so simple as to be almost childish. Yet it is uneven and defective. The book hardly admits of analysis, for its merit lies in its terse abruptness, its marvellously true touch of nature, its good-natured but biting satire, its unstudied vigorous language, and its sublime disregard of proprieties, literary and other. In jotting down a few keen observations on men as he found them, its author has left a picture of the society of his day, such as volumes of history as then written could not supply. A rough outline, however, will give some idea of the loose construction and vast capabilities of the Spanish rogue-story, of which *Lazarillo* is the first and best example.

*Lazarillo*—little Lazarus—takes his high-sounding territorial name from the river that runs by Salamanca.



In his childhood his father, a miller on the stream, was publicly flogged and exiled for 'certain unskilful blood-lettings,' practised on the sacks entrusted to him. 'Suffering,' as his son writes, 'for justice sake,' he died in an expedition against the Barbary coast. Left to her own resources his wife took in washing, kept open house for students of the university, and replaced her husband by a thieving mulatto groom. But again the police broke up the household, and Lazarillo became guide to a blind beggar. He has left his name in the profession, for wherever Spanish is spoken a blind man's guide is still called a *Lazarillo*. 'Since God made the world,' he writes of his master, 'never did he fashion so cunning and astute a rogue. At his business he was past-master. He had by heart more than a hundred prayers. His voice was deep, resonant, and very musical, and echoed through the church where he prayed. His look was humble and devout, and he was at his best when praying, for he never waved his arms, nor made grimaces with his mouth and eyes, as others do. Besides this he had a thousand ways of getting money . . . but never did I see so greedy and niggardly a man.' One of the longest chapters in the book tells of Lazarillo's wanderings with his blind master, the tricks he played on him in order to get his share of the doles of the charitable, and the beggar's cunning in outwitting, detecting, and punishing him. But in the end Lazarillo outdid him. One rainy night they were making their way through a village, down the street of which poured a dirty torrent. The blind man, anxious to avoid wetting his feet, bade his guide lead him to a place where he could jump across. "Put me with my face towards the water," he said; "you jump first

and I will follow." I led him to a stone pillar and set him straight in front of it; then I gave a spring and crouched behind the pillar as though a wild bull were upon me. "Now," said I, "jump your hardest so as to land on this side of the water." Scarcely were the words uttered when he gave a bound like a wild goat, stepping backwards to gain speed, and springing forward with all his might. His head dashed against the pillar and echoed like a great pumpkin. . . . I never heard what became of him, nor did I seek to learn.'

The next day the boy was found wandering, and taken into service by a parish priest. His change of masters brought no improvement in his fortunes. 'All griefs with bread are less,' says the Spanish proverb, and Lazarillo had exchanged ill treatment for starvation. Nowadays we see nothing laughable about hunger, but its pangs and the ingenious means of remedying them are a favourite theme of the rogue-story. To such straits is Lazarillo reduced on a crust a day and two onions a week, that when parishioners fall ill he prays for their death in order that he may eat his fill at the burial-feasts. Many are the tricks he plays in order to elude the vigilance with which the niggardly priest guards his slender stock of coarse food, and great is its owner's perplexity over its disappearance; but the secret is out at last, and Lazarillo is again a wanderer. In his next master, whom he meets at Toledo, we are introduced to the most carefully drawn and interesting figure in the book, the proud but beggarly *escudero*, or serving-gentleman, a hidalgo of long pedigree, who has quitted his phantom estate in the noble north because of a quarrel with a richer neighbour to whom he refused to take off his hat first. Full of

braggart point of honour, he holds work of any kind degrading, yet would be content to accept the meanest post as hanger-on to the great, and to flatter and lie for a living. But for the present nobody requires his services, so he dwells alone in an unfurnished house until the landlord claims rent and he is forced to hurry elsewhere. All day, gnawed by hunger, he parades the streets in his shabby but well-brushed cloak, 'now throwing its fold over his shoulder and now beneath his arm, his back straight, but with graceful inclinations and movements of his arm, his hand from time to time resting upon his thigh.' He wears sword by side as a gentleman should, and carries a huge rosary. In his mouth is a toothpick to make believe he has dined, yet the only food he gets are the crusts that Lazarillo, his servant, collects by his old profession of begging. 'Merciful heavens,' exclaims Lazarillo, 'how many such have you scattered up and down the earth, who for the beggarly thing they call honour suffer more than would win them Paradise.' Honour, it is to be noted, in this peculiar sense is quite external. 'An ounce of public affront,' says Cervantes, 'is heavier than a ton of secret shame.' It is this sentiment that compels Calderón's hero to murder the wife of whose innocence he is certain, merely because she is compromised in the sight of the world. *El Médico de su Honra* is applauded still in Spain. With all his faults the *escudero* is not a bad fellow, an example and victim merely of a general prejudice, and Lazarillo is becoming really fond of him when their gloomy partnership is broken up by a visit of the rent-collector.

The next chapter reads like an argument or summary merely. 'I had to seek a fourth master, and he was

a Mercenarian friar, to whom I was sent by the sempstresses I have mentioned, and whom they called their kinsman. A notable hater of the choir and of convent fare, much given to roaming, secular business, and visits, so that I fancy he wore out more shoes than the rest of the convent together. He gave me the first pair I wore in my life, but they did not last me a week, nor could I put up any longer with his perpetual trot. For this, and for certain other little matters that I do not mention, I quitted him.'

It was the fifth chapter, or 'treatise,' as the author prefers to call it, that brought the book into the Index Expurgatorius, for it contains the famous story of the *buldero*, or pardoner, who now became Lazarillo's master. During their Moorish wars the Spanish kings received from the popes a bull of crusade allowing them in aid of their struggle against the infidel to profit by the sale of certain indulgences. After the fall of Granada the bull was extended to provide money for the religious needs of the New World. This source of income was farmed out, and the proceedings of the pardoners were so oppressive that among the petitions of Parliament are repeated protests against their violence. They would collect the whole population of a village in the church on a week-day, and keep them locked up under pretence of hearing sermons until a certain number of the indulgences were sold. Or they would stop passers-by in the streets and suddenly call upon them to recite the creed, pater-noster, or other prayers. The slightest hesitation or mistake obliged the victim to buy the bull under threat of delation to the religious courts. When these means failed they sometimes, we must suppose, practised tricks such as

the one so brilliantly described in our story. It is too long to be told here in full, and too good to suffer curtailment. Those who do not read Spanish may find it in the good old English version by Thomas Rowland of Anglesea, entitled *The Spanish Rogue*.

After four months' service Lazarillo tired of the pardoner, but again took service with a clergyman, this time a chaplain who gave him a donkey, four pitchers, and a whip, and sent him off to gain his living as a water-carrier, charging him thirty *maravedís* a day as hire for the tools of his trade. Even so he managed to put by a little money. 'As soon as I found myself decently clad,' he says, 'I told my master to take his donkey, for I would no longer follow that business.' His next venture was not more successful; a shower of stones and a heavy drubbing at the hands of some malefactors who had sought asylum in a church, cured him of his fancy for bailiff's work. At last he found a post to suit him and gratify his ambition. As town-crier of Toledo his duties were to announce public wine-sales, to act as auctioneer, cry lost property, and accompany such as were publicly flogged or hanged, 'proclaiming aloud their misdeeds in good romance.' His luck does not end with his 'crown appointment,' as he proudly calls it. He marries a lady of doubtful antecedents and hasty temper, the ex-housekeeper of the Archpriest of San Salvador, and is delighted to find that her former master takes a kindly interest in his affairs. 'At this time,' he writes, 'I was in my prosperity and at the pitch of all good fortune.' Here the book breaks suddenly off, as though in the middle of a chapter. The author cast it down when he got tired of it, without troubling even

to add his name, but Lazarillo became father of a family hardly less famous and numerous than that of Amadis himself.

In 1555 appeared at Antwerp a Second Part, anonymous like the First, but the work of another and far inferior hand. So little did its author understand the book, that he turned it into a kind of fairy-story. Lazarillo suffers shipwreck on the way to Algiers, is changed into a tunny-fish, and becomes a great person among the dwellers of the sea. The silly fragment is not worth attention. Sixty years later, when the rogue-stories were very popular, Juan de Luna, a teacher of Spanish, published in Paris a further continuation. He succeeded somewhat better than his predecessor, but he was so thorough a pedant that he actually undertook to weed the original *Lazarillo* of 'ill-chosen words, false concords and faulty constructions.' His book is by no means dull, but its author's notions of decency are even more slack than those of most writers in the style. His pages are full of fierce and vindictive satire against the clergy, and though they contain amusing passages, we are scarcely sorry that Jean de la Lune, as he calls himself, never fulfilled his promise of writing the Third Part which was to be the best of all.

Five years after its appearance *Lazarillo* was placed upon the Index, but copies continued to pour into Spain from abroad, and seeing that it was impossible to suppress, it was thought well to emend it. The expurgated edition appeared in 1572, and *Lazarillo* was not again printed in full in Spain till well on in the present century.

For fifty years nobody thought of asking who was the author of this famous book, and nobody ventured to

claim it. Then on insufficient evidence it was attributed first to Juan de Ortega, General of the Jeronymite Order, and, later, to Diego Hurtado de Mendoza, author of a famous book on the Wars of Granada, and soldier, statesman, and ambassador under Charles V.

Dr. Lockyer, Dean of Peterborough, told Joseph Spence that *Lazarillo* was written by a company of Spanish bishops on the way to the Council of Trent. He cites no evidence, however, and Mendoza's name was placed upon the title-page, where it continued until Mr. Morel-Fatio showed how faulty was the evidence in support of his claim. The same critic would seek the real author among the band of liberal scholars grouped round Juan de Valdes the reformer. But *Lazarillo* shows no trace of being the work of an educated hand. It may have been written in a camp, a pot-house, a lax student's garret, or even a prison. It was meant for the people, and probably sprang from them. Its author's name was perhaps an obscure one, and he did not look to a stroke of genius that cost him scarce an effort to give it fame. Its reckless fun and disregard for propriety point rather to one who had little to lose and hoped no gain when he drew with bold unerring hand the three great types of Spanish society in the sixteenth century, the priest, the hidalgo, and the beggar.

A successful book generally produced in Spain a host of imitators who did not stick at forgery. It is therefore surprising that, with the exception of the author of the spurious Antwerp Second Part of *Lazarillo*, nobody turned his attention to the *pícaro* for forty-five years. The next to carry on the tradition was Mateo Alemán of Seville. The First Part of his *Life and Acts of the*

*Pícaro Guzmán de Alfarache*, watchman of human Life, was published in 1599. Of the author his friend Luis de Valdés wrote: 'There never was a poorer soldier, or a more overflowing heart, nor a more restless and eventful life than his.' But this is practically all we know of him. *Guzmán de Alfarache* is not his only book, but it is the only one deserving attention. *Lazarillo* represents the transition of Spanish society from the frugal severity of Ferdinand and Isabel's old-fashioned reign to the freer and looser manners of the stirring times of Charles V. Under Philip II a kind of artificial reaction set in. The king's gloomy austerity spread to the rest of the nation, and made hypocrites where it failed to make converts. Philip died in 1598, so *Guzmán* appeared amid the wild outbreak of almost hysterical frivolity that followed years of repression. The reading public had vastly increased, and the welcome given to the *pícaro* is proved by the fact that six years saw twenty-six editions of the book, and more than fifty thousand copies were sold. It was early translated into French, Italian, German, Portuguese, Dutch and Latin. The English version by Diego Puede-Ser, *alias* James Mabbe, Fellow of Magdalen, contains laudatory verses from the pen of Ben Jonson:

'The Spanish Proteus, which though writ  
In but one tongue, was formed with the world's wit,  
And hath the noblest mark of a good booke  
That an ill man doth not securely looke  
Upon it; but will loathe or let it pass  
As a deformed face doth a true glass.'

*Guzmán de Alfarache* in its general plan closely follows *Lazarillo de Tormes*, but is distinguished from its model by its vastly greater length, the more studied



development of its principal character, its more finished style, the introduction of episodal stories like the pretty Moorish romance of Osmin and Daraxa, and by the long and wearisome moral commentary that follows each new escapade and misfortune of its hero. The writer professes a lofty object, to chastise vice and combine pleasure with profit. It is to be noticed also that he entirely drops the fierce satire against the clergy. But a great and lamentable change has come over the *pícaro*; he has seen the error of his ways, and is on the high-road to respectability. At times he even goes the length of painting himself as an honest man driven by misfortune to evil courses. This spoils the book from an artistic point of view, and Guzmán is at times little better than a weakling and a sneak. Only here and there does the author slacken his moral rein and give himself up to the genuine fun of his subject. As usual, the book is in the form of an autobiography. The ruin of his father, a Genoese usurer, drives the hero from his home when only twelve years old. He picks up his knowledge of the world in inns along the road, and arrives at Madrid a fledged *pícaro*. A time of service with a cook teaches him still further villainies. He is dismissed, and makes up his mind to enlist and go abroad. Refused on account of his tender age, he becomes servant to an officer, and steals and cheats for his master's benefit until they reach Italy. But the captain has grown afraid of him, and ungratefully dismisses him as soon as he can do without him. After visiting at Genoa his father's relatives, who play a very dirty trick upon their shabby kinsman, he drifts to Rome, becomes a beggar, and gives an elaborate account of the craft as there organized. Rescued from his

supposed piteous plight by a cardinal, he exhausts the patience of his good master by his incorrigible thieving, but finds another in the French Ambassador at Rome.

Here ends the First Part, breaking off suddenly like *Lazarillo*, and, like it, offering a bait readily taken by the forger. The title-page of the spurious Second Part bears the name of Mateo Luján de Sayavedra, concealing the personality of Juan Marti, a Valencian lawyer. Parts of it are by no means worse than the original; in fact Alemán hints that it is partly his own and stolen from his notes. But, on the whole, it is wearisome reading, and at times the story, which supports the long moral and mythological discourses, shrinks to a mere thread. The *pícaro* goes the usual round, major-domo and scullion in Italy, student at Alcalá, lackey, actor and galley-slave. It is the most digressive of picaresque books. 'It will not do for me,' says the author, 'to jump from the coals of my kitchen to the education of kings.' Yet this he is always doing, and often, as he admits, 'like the mare of Xerxes' he oversteps the limits of nature and probability. A legal discussion on the nobility of the Basques is dragged in and occupies several chapters.

When Alemán shortly afterwards brought out his own Second Part, he was not content, like Cervantes, with overwhelming the forger with mockery. He introduced into his book, by name, a brother of Marti, and after holding him up to contempt as a sorry villain even among *pícaros*, slew him by making him jump overboard in a fit of frenzy, imagining himself to be really Guzmán de Alfarache. We pick up the true Guzmán again at the point where we left him devoting his talent for intrigue to the love affairs of the French

Ambassador. With an inconsistency which is found again in the character of Sancho Panza, and which, perhaps, is not unnatural, the rogue is at times cunning in the extreme, and at others an utter booby and simpleton. Thus it is that he falls victim to a trick played upon him by a lady whom his master persecutes with unwelcome attentions, and so wide is the fame of his discomfiture that he is forced to quit Rome. On leaving for Florence he is cheated and robbed by his associates, but he speedily remedies his fortunes by his unholy skill at cards, a never-failing resource of his tribe. He now enters upon a more ambitious course of roguery, and sets up as a gentleman. The Spaniards in Italy were hated and feared for their pride and unscrupulousness. Guzmán himself tells us that when they travel they leave their consciences at home as articles too delicate to stand a sea voyage. Even the meanest of them gave himself such airs that the Italians often slyly inquired, 'If you are all gentlemen, who tends the pigs in Spain?' Still he managed to bluster along comfortably enough, and by a series of clever tricks ruthlessly plundered the relatives of his father who had treated him so ill when, on his first arrival at Genoa, he presented himself before them poor and friendless. On his way back to Spain his jackal Sayavedra, or Marti, is drowned. But it is wearisome to follow his fortunes further, and we are tempted to rejoice when his career of rascality is cut short, and he is condemned to the galleys. His description of the convicts' life is one of the most interesting parts of the book. He is too clever to 'flog sardines,' as they called it, for long. As officers' servant he seizes a chance of betraying a plot of mutiny among his former com-

panions of the oar-bench. It is while still on board awaiting his pardon and, as he assures us, fully repentant, that he finds time to write his exhaustive and exhausting story. Its digressions are numerous and incongruous. Among them is found a tirade against the meanness and jealousy of the lower orders, a description of Florence, the *Arancel de los Necios*, or *Tariff of Fools*, a laboured piece of witticism in the style perfected later by Quevedo, and more than one excursus upon political economy.

The next writer in the style attempted the risky subject of the lady Picaroon, and without profit to his own reputation or his readers. Nothing can show the character of his book better than its title-page: ‘*The roguish Highland-girl called Justina; in which, under witty discourses, are hidden profitable morals. At the end of each chapter you will find an explanation shewing how you may profit by the book to flee from the deceits which are common in our days. It is also an Art of Poetry containing fifty-one kinds of verse never till now set forth; their names and numbers are on the following page. Dedicated to Don Rodrigo Calderón Sandelín of the bedchambre of his Majesty, lord of the towns of Oliva and Placenzuela. Composed by the Licenciado Francisco Lopez de Úbeda, native of Toledo.*’ The prologue declares ‘that there is no entanglement in *Celestina*, no joke in *Momus*, roguery in *Lazarillo*, elegance in *Guevara*, wit in *Eufrosina*, cross-purposes in *el Patrañuelo*, or story in the *Golden Ass*, and speaking broadly, there is no good thing in ballad, play, or Spanish poet, but that its cream and quintessence is herein contained.’ Those who venture beyond this pedantic and pretentious preamble will find

the book very hard reading. The scene is laid in the town and neighbourhood of Leon. So many are the local details that the author must have been familiar with the district; his real name, Pérez de León, perhaps denotes a native. The incident is confined to a few unsavoury tricks played by Justina at local merry-makings. For digression, laboured wit, and indecency the *Pícara Justina* may be compared with *Tristram Shandy*, but it is *Tristram Shandy* without trace of the charming scenes and characters that illuminate and redeem that monument of perversity. It has moreover the unenviable distinction of being cited by the learned Gregorio Mayans y Siscar as the first example of the corrupt Spanish prose of the seventeenth century. Its pages are crowded with strained conceits and witless plays upon words, making it quite untranslatable, were anybody found rash enough to undertake the thankless task. The 'Moral' or *Aprovechamiento* appended to each chapter is invariably a platitude of the most impertinent kind. After a revolting disquisition on the knaveries of innkeepers, we read: 'There are innkeepers so corrupt and dissolute that you will find their houses to harbour more vices than persons. Here covetousness, sensuality, idleness, scandal, and deceit find lodging, and, above all, evil communications and over-freedom, which is a cause of great perdition in the Christian state.' This author would have made a famous preacher in the style of Fray Gerundio, and a worthy associate of the scholar in *Gil Blas* who wrote the learned note, 'In Athens children cried when beaten.' Oddly enough the book was often reprinted, though its success was not great enough to induce the

author to carry out his intention of writing a Second Part, in which Justina marries Guzmán de Alfarache.

The next author of rogue-story in chronological order is Cervantes. In 1613 he published his *Novelas Ejemplares*, romantic stories for the most part, of a kind that had been made popular by Italian writers. After *Don Quixote* nothing could add to Cervantes' fame as a writer, but we see him here in his best light as a man. It is wonderful how, after so much buffeting about the world, he preserved freshness of mind to create the famous character of the gipsy girl who keeps her native purity unstained amid the foulest surroundings, and to evolve the grave and kindly philosophy of the *Dialogue of the Dogs*. But while Cervantes was able at will to withdraw into the charmed world of his imagination, his eyes took in keenly the scenes around him, and looked not unkindly upon the sordid but picturesque figures which he met in his wanderings. Thus among his stories we find *Rinconete and Cortadillo*, a chapter from the lowest life in Seville. An inn in Sierra Morena is the chance meeting-place of two ragamuffins bound southward to better their fortunes. 'The younger was about fourteen or fifteen, and the elder not more than seventeen, both sprightly youths, but very ragged, shabby, and out-at-the-elbows. As for cloaks they had none, their breeches were of coarse linen, and their stockings bare flesh. For this, it is true, they made up by their shoes; for one was wearing a pair of trodden-down and cast-off sandals, while his companion's boots were in ribbons, had lost their soles, and looked more like hobbles than shoes. One wore a green hunting-bonnet, the other a low-crowned broad-brimmed hat without a band. On his back and slung about his chest one carried

a shirt of dingy hue rolled up and thrust into one of its sleeves. The other had no bundle or saddle-bags to trouble him, but the front of his dress showed a great swelling caused, as afterwards appeared, by a ruff or walloon collar stiffened with grease instead of starch, and so worn and frayed that it looked like a bundle of lint. Wrapped up and treasured away along with it was a pack of cards, of oval form, for by constant use their corners had been worn away and they had been cut down to that shape. Both were sunburnt, their nails untrimmed, and their hands not over-clean. One carried a half-sword and the other a yellow-handled huntsman's knife.' No better portrait of the *pícaro* can be found. The greetings of these two worthies are exchanged with stately courtesy, but they speedily make friends, and throwing off the mask confess to one another the peccadillos which obliged them to quit their homes. They get money for their journey by combining to cheat a muleteer with the oddly shaped cards. At Seville they set up as *muchachos de esportilla*, or basket-boys, hiring themselves, like their fellows in the *Arabian Nights*, to accompany householders to market and carry home their purchases. This, of course, is only a cloak for picking pockets. But they soon find out that the tricks they have learned in the country are as nothing to those practised in the metropolis of *pícaros*, where the whole body of malefactors, from petty thieves who steal linen hung out to dry, to first-class cut-throats, are organized into a regular guild. An acquaintance picked up in the street, a full-blown *pícaro* who, when asked, 'Is your worship perchance a thief?' answers, 'Yes, for the service of God and of all good folk,' introduces the

new-comers to Monipodio, the head of the association—prototype of Fagin and many others. The motley throng of bullies and low women over whom he holds sway is sketched with matchless skill. The organization of the gang is revealed, the book of engagements read out, and its various items of wounds, beatings, insults, and frights, retailed by the company at fixed prices, are assigned for execution to suitable members. The description of the lovers' quarrel in low life is unsurpassed in vigour even by the most brilliant passages of *Don Quixote*. Its realism is startling, but it is saved from being merely repulsive by its author's inimitable gift of humour. Cervantes saw these people leading the lowest and most criminal lives, but he recognized that they were not utterly bad. No shadow of hypocrisy lies about their carefully tended common altar, or even about the piety of the old woman, who, having vowed to burn a candle before a shrine as a thank-offering for the successful theft of a bundle of washing, borrows the necessary sum, without any intention of repaying it, under pretence of having left her purse at home. The absurd good faith of the whole proceedings is what strikes us most. The patter of the *germanía* or thieves'-latin is gay and artless, comic touches everywhere relieve the savagery of the background, and over the whole the author has shed that indefinable quality of distinction that marks all his work. Even those who do not care to read about people whom they would not wish to know will not utterly reject the two ragamuffins. We take leave of them amidst the most unpromising surroundings, but we do not despair of their future. Cervantes has been called a one-book author, but we have here a proof



that he could have written another as good as the special form will admit of. He never falls into the besetting sins of the kind, its low buffoonery, its over-trying into the dark and loathsome corners of society, and its tedious moralizing over actions too obviously bad to need comment.

Five years after the *Novelas Ejemplares* the same printer, the famous Juan de la Cuesta, brought out at Madrid the *Life of the Squire Marcos of Obregón*, by *Master Vicente Espinel*. Its author was already an old man. Espinel came of a family of *conquistadores*, or original Christian settlers, at Ronda, and there he studied 'Latin, music, and the art of holding his tongue' till the age of twenty, when his father sent him off to Salamanca with a huge, old-fashioned sword, a good frieze cloak, a little valise, and a blessing, to make his way in the world. Hindered in his studies by his natural restlessness and his poverty, he for two years made a miserable living by giving lessons in music. In 1572 the university was dispersed on account of riots that had broken out owing to the prosecution of the saintly Fray Luis de León by the Inquisition, and Espinel set out for home 'in apostolic guise.' It was thought no shame for the poor student on the road to ask an alms, and, when nothing better could be had, the pittance of the poor could be shared at the convent gate. So Espinel, though penniless, prolonged his journey, visiting famous places by the way. A few months later he was again in Salamanca and had found a rich patron. His talent for music and poetry had gained him friends, but his books were still neglected, and his name is not to be found upon the matriculation roll of the university. Yet he was supposed to be

studying for the Church with a view to being presented to a chaplaincy founded by his relatives for his benefit. In 1574 he suddenly quitted Salamanca, and obtained the post of *alferez* or standard-bearer to the vice-admiral of the fleet of 300 sail that was fitting out at Santander for the invasion of England. But plague fell upon the camp, and those who escaped dispersed. Among them Espinel, who wandered westward along the coast, through the leafy Basque provinces and Navarre to Saragossa, making himself welcome everywhere by his music. For some years he served the Count of Lemos as *escudero* or gentleman-attendant at Valladolid, and afterwards accompanied his patron to Seville, intending to join the body of Spanish troops sent by Philip II to take part in Don Sebastian's disastrous expedition to Africa. They arrived too late to share in the campaign, and Espinel stayed on in the charming city leading the loose and disorderly life reflected in the portion of his verses written at this time. His quarrels and duels at last forced him to seek asylum in a church, but even the influence of his powerful patrons could no longer protect him, so he was shipped off to Italy in the retinue of the Duke of Medina Sidonia, Governor of Milan.

With regard to this journey a question has arisen which will probably never be satisfactorily answered. Alluding to it in his *Marcos de Obregón*, Espinel says that he was carried off by African pirates and lived for a time as a slave at Algiers. The incident of a time of captivity in Africa is so often found in Spanish novels that we are inclined at first to suppose that Espinel introduced it haphazard into the story of Marcos' life. The adventures that befell

Marcos at Algiers are indeed wildly romantic and improbable, but his release is told with such detail of names of well-known witnesses that we can hardly refuse to believe that some such misfortune really befell the author, who, as we shall see, is Marcos himself. At any rate his captivity was not a long one; he landed at Genoa and passed on to join the Spanish army besieging Maestricht. Again he found patrons, and one of these he followed back to Milan, where he was chosen to write the Latin and Spanish verses to adorn the catafalque of Anne of Austria at the requiem held in the cathedral. Three years he lingered in Italy, and all this time his health was bad, owing, as he says, to the heaviness of the water of Italy as compared with that of Spain. In spite of this he wrote some of his prettiest verse, and associating with the best musicians of the time, greatly improved in the art.

At thirty-four Espinel grew weary of the life he had been leading as poet, soldier, musician, and adventurer, and his thoughts turned to the modest chaplaincy at Ronda. An old friend of his had become Bishop of Malaga, and through him he obtained ordination. His sonnets at this time are full of promise of amendment, but his disorderly life was too recent to be forgotten, and his fellow townsmen refused to believe in his reformation. Persecution drew from him a fine *epistola*, in which he admits the truth of all and more than all that had been raked up against him, and then turns on his detractors and crushingly exposes their base motives. He was admitted to his benefice, and four years later obtained promotion. But the scandals continued; life in a country town, too, was

irksome to his restless spirit ; he felt that his talents were buried ; and he compared himself in verse to a lizard, numbed by cold under its stone on the bleak heights of Ronda. He appointed a deputy to do the work of his benefice, and remained in Madrid among his friends until a royal order compelled him to return. It seems that the evil reports about him did not lack foundation, for he was deprived of one of his benefices, and two years later the magistrates of Ronda addressed to the king a memorial declaring ‘ that this chaplain is a man of such habits, conversation, and manner of life as is set forth in the annexed report upon his vices, crimes, excesses, negligence, and avarice. The service of God and your Majesty demands that another be appointed in his place, for we cannot believe that rebuke or punishment can work a change in evils rooted in the nature of the man and confirmed by habit.’ Had Philip II lived, this report would have ruined Espinel, but he died the same year, and the poet gleefully returned to Madrid, where he joined in the gay reaction against the gloomy asceticism of the old king. His inventions in music and poetry, a new lyric metre that still bears his name, and the addition of a fifth string to the guitar, had made him famous. He was welcomed in the literary world, took his degree at Alcalá, and received an appointment as master of the school of music attached to the chapel of the Bishop of Plasencia. He enjoyed the friendship of Cervantes and Lope de Vega ; a Latin epigram from his pen is prefixed to *Guzmán de Alfarache*, and he was chosen to examine for the *imprimatur* books as famous as Lope’s comedies. The scandals against him were forgotten, or remembered only at Ronda, whither he never

returned, and he died in peace during the hard winter of 1623-4.

If I have detained you so long over these biographical notes, it has been with the object of showing the close connexion that often exists between the writers and the heroes of the rogue-stories. Imagination played but a small part in their composition, memory supplied incident and character in abundance, while rough experience, often untouched with sympathy, gave the coarse and realistic setting. This is specially the case in the book before us, for Marcos de Obregón and Vicente Espinel are practically one and the same person. The criminous clerk merely set down his own life previous to his ordination, added a few incidents which, if they had not happened to himself, had come within his experience, and mixed in an inordinate amount of commonplace moralizing. In his preface he declares that he believes this story of his life to be an improving one. 'There is not a page in my *Escudero* but contains some special moral over and above the obvious one.' He still dwells with pleasure on the follies of his youth. Sometimes, however, he feels he has gone too far; he then hastily divests himself of the swashbuckler's buffcoat, resumes his sober gown, and betakes himself again to his moralizing. Or, again, he is cynical, and tells against himself horrible stories. I do not remember in the whole series of these books a more heartless story than the one contained in Part II, chapters 1 and 2. Marcos has cajoled his gaoler into the belief that he can make gold, and ruthlessly blinded him by casting corrosive acid into his eyes. 'He fell back fainting and speechless, while I rejoiced heartily to find myself

free, even at the cost of the poor turnkey, for the desire for liberty justifies everything. The wretched gaoler, thinking to get a house full of gold, was left without even eyes to see it. May God look upon the covetous, and bring to their souls such salutary chastisement as preserves life and soothes the conscience.?

Although its hero nowhere wins our sympathy, *Marcos de Obregón* has always been considered one of the best books of its class. Ticknor sums up his opinion by declaring that while inferior to *Guzmán de Alfarache* and *Lazarillo* in diction and style, it is superior to them in action and movement; events follow one another with greater rapidity, and the conclusion is more logical and complete. With part of this criticism it is impossible to agree. *Lazarillo* in a tenth of the bulk contains a greater number of finished pictures that cling to the mind, and is surpassed only by *Celestina* in vivacity. But *Marcos de Obregón* is much more carefully and elegantly written. Occupying a halfway position between the rogue-story, pure and simple, and the ordinary novel of adventures, it contains some admirably drawn characters, such as Dr. Sagredo and his haughty wife, and the moustached bully of the gaol. If the book is read with any real pleasure, however, it is not because of any literary or artistic excellence, but because it takes us back to a great epoch of one of the most picturesque societies that have ever existed. Rags and finery jostle one another, villainy and heroism go hand in hand. We pass from the dim garret of the starving student at Salamanca to an assembly of *virtuosos* in an Italian saloon, from a thieves' kitchen in Seville to a palace in Algiers. And the whole story is told by a shabby old serving-gentleman to his friend the hermit

while sheltering from a downpour of rain on the outskirts of Madrid.

A sentence of Voltaire's has made Marcos more famous than any of his fellows. In his *Siècle de Louis XIV*, speaking of *Gil Blas*, he says, 'It is entirely taken from the Spanish novel entitled *La Vida del Escudero Don Marcos d'Obrego*.' The fact that the title thus quoted contains almost as many mistakes as words goes far to show that Voltaire had no very close acquaintance with the book or the language in which it was written. But over this sentence a mighty literary battle was waged at the beginning of this century, in which many famous men, Sir Walter Scott among them, took part. Its fury was quite unnecessary; a cursory examination of the two books will show that Le Sage borrowed from Espinel some of his best scenes and characters. The introductory story of the two students and the buried pearl, the barber's boy, Diego de la Fuente, the haughty Doña Margelina, and many others are all old friends, but old friends stripped of their awkward moral appendices and renovated and informed by Le Sage's brilliant genius. So little did he trouble to conceal his debt to Spain that he actually introduced Guzmán de Alfarache by name into his book. He gathered materials far and wide throughout the broad fields of Spanish novel and comedy, and from Espinel he took more than from any one author, but to say that *Gil Blas* is 'entirely taken' from *Marcos de Obregón* is to say that Shakespeare's plays are 'entirely taken' from the formless chronicles and tales of which he made use.

*The talkative Lay-brother, or Alonso, Servant of many Masters*, is the work of Dr. Geronimo Yañez y Ribera,

the author of other graver books such as *Truths for a Christian Life*. The First Part was printed at Madrid in 1624, the Second two years later at Valladolid. Though agreeably written and more readable than some, it is not a good specimen of its class, departing as it does in two essential particulars from the primitive type. The whole of it is in dialogue. Alonso tells his stories to a vicar of his convent during the hours of recreation. He is at best only a half-hearted *pícaro*, at times he is even a virtuous person brought by misfortunes into evil company. On the whole we dislike him more than the thorough-going rogue, for besides being a coward and sneak he is a prig, deservedly hated everywhere for his intolerable habit of giving good advice. Many of the miscellaneous stories here loosely strung together are good, but some are pointless and a few slightly risky. In the latter case the lay-brother apologizes for troubling 'his paternity' with such profane matters. At the beginning of the Second Part we find without sorrow or surprise that Alonso's chatter and meddling have brought about his expulsion from the convent. He is now a hermit, but has been through a new set of adventures, and finds a hearer for them in the curate of his parish. To him he retails a clever confidence trick with which Guzmán had already made us familiar, the famous story of the Dominican and Franciscan at the ford, Alonso's life among the gipsies and his captivity in Algiers—all this without showing one spark of originality or producing the impression that a real person is speaking.

The next of the series, the last with which I need occupy you, is a book of a very different kind. It brings us right back to the fountain-head of picaresque



inspiration, and putting into shade the more colourless pages of intermediate authors, outdoes even *Lazarillo* itself in boldness. In English it is known as *Pablo de Segovia*, and has lately been republished with exquisite illustrations from the fairy pencil of Daniel Vierge. In Spanish it is generally called *El gran Tacaño* (The Great Skinflint), but its full title is *History of the Life of the Sharper (Buscón) called Don Pablos, Archetype of Vagabonds and Mirror of Rascals*. Its author was the fantastic genius, the Spanish Swift, Francisco de Quevedo, a man who mirrors in his life and writings the whole of the varied and brilliant manners of his time. At one moment a courtier, at another a recluse, associating with swashbucklers while keeping up a Latin correspondence on learned subjects with Justus Lipsius, he is all the time pouring from his pen a series of occasional sketches in verse and prose, unequalled in Spanish for biting wit, scurrility, fierce satire and brazen indecency. Later we find him charged with important secret missions in Italy, or, again, defending the claims of Santiago, patron of Spain, against those who wished to substitute for him the lately canonized Santa Teresa. He became private secretary to Philip IV, and wrote his *Marcus Brutus* and *God's Policy*, grave and heavy works on statesmanship. In his collected works poems on the Resurrection and treatises on Divine Providence elbow picaresque books and loose farces. In the end the same bold spirit which had led him to avenge an insult offered to an unknown lady in the street by killing her aggressor, and, though a cripple, to challenge the most famous fencing-master of the time to a duel to the death, brought on him the enmity of the all-powerful favourite,

the Count-Duke of Olivares, and he was imprisoned in the stately convent of San Marcos at León. At Olivares' fall he was set free, but his health was quite broken, and he died two years later, welcoming death in touching verses, and edifying the bystanders by his calmness and piety.

It was in his youth that he wrote in the picaresque vein. His first attempt was a satire, not a story. It bears the whimsical title, *Capitulations of Life in the Capital and diverting Entertainments therein*, and is a descriptive catalogue of the inhabitants of lower Bohemia. With a pitiless realism that causes a thrill of disgust and horror, he brings before our eyes in rapid succession, first the ragged beggar tribe, the maimed, the halt, and the blind, the monstrous deformities shown in booths at fairs, and the loathsome garrets where sores are touched up and 'beautified'—the word is his own—overnight in order to excite pity on the morrow. Next the dandies of low life, struggling to keep up appearances, and bragging amid their misery of imaginary ladies, horses, and hounds. The thieving lying pages, and the cowardly bullies with trailing cloak and hat thrust down over brow, 'who straddle their legs and stare at you out of the corners of their eyes,' are passed in review. These gentlemen it is who make a profession of coming to the aid of damsels in distress. A cry is heard in the ill-lit street; up rushes our friend to find a lady struggling with some ill-looking ruffian. A few sword-thrusts are exchanged and the assailant makes his escape, apparently badly wounded. The gallant rescuer becomes uneasy, the man will probably die. Asylum must be sought in some church. The poor girl hands over her

purse and jewellery, and continues to send supplies to her rescuer during the time of his supposed 'retreat,' little dreaming that he and her aggressor are in league. Then we have the card-sharppers and the receivers of stolen goods, and so the ugly list goes on through all those who make a living out of the follies and vices of a great city. From the materials thus carefully collected and studied Quevedo made his *Don Pablos*. Though not published till 1626, it probably passed from hand to hand some years earlier. The date is important because of the resemblance between some of its passages and Cervantes' *Rinconete and Cortadillo*. But *a priori* we may conclude that Quevedo was the borrower. The publication of his story was later by thirteen years. Had Cervantes laid hand upon Quevedo's work, Quevedo was not the man to let him pass unchallenged. The Great Skinflint is the most finished and perfect example of his kind. Alemán served up the limbs of a *pícaro* piecemeal between the pages of a sermon. Espinel did the same, and wandered off into the ordinary novel of adventure. *Rinconete and Cortadillo*, like *Lazarillo* itself, is merely a fragment. Quevedo stripped the rogue of the grave gown that sits so ill upon him, took from his lips his long-winded platitudes, and sent him out into the world a shameless but consistent character. He never falters and never wastes time as he hurries us through infinitely varied scenes of low life. He is nowhere confused, and unity is maintained by the personality of the *buscón*, always the centre of the action whenever he appears. The book is so well known that it is useless to follow its hero from Segovia, his home, to Alcalá, from Alcalá back to the hideous den of his uncle the hangman, as suitor to a lady,

beggar, actor, and bravo at Seville. It is full of incident ; its author's violent and *outré* genius often gives us a caricature instead of a portrait, but it is marvellously graphic. It cannot be read with any pleasure ; it is one of the most painful and saddest of books. Its description of squalid and criminal scenes produces the same impression as an actual visit to them. Quevedo never distinguishes between vice and folly, but uses the same merciless lash of mockery for both. He revels in repulsive detail, and may certainly be excused of any attempt to make vice attractive. If the proper study of mankind were man in his lowest and most degraded form, the *Gran Tacaño* would be a great book. As it is we turn shuddering away as Quevedo throws the cold clear light of his genius into the whitewashed sepulchre of his nation's greatness, and standing at our side calls our attention to its loathsome details. His feeling for his fellow men was a mixture of fierce contempt and hatred.

To continue the list would be wearisome and profitless. The *Weasel of Seville and Hook of Purses*, the *Autobiography of Estebanillo Gonzalez*, the *good-humoured Man*, the works of Santos and many others carried on the tradition but added nothing new. The subject is as wide and varied as one side of human nature, and, as such, incapable of exhaustion. The *pícaro* had taken root in Spanish literature, and throve throughout the seventeenth century. Lope de Vega saw his dramatic possibilities, and brought him on the stage as a stock character of Spanish comedy. For the *gracioso*, the servant and foil of the hero, whose buffoonery, rascality, and cowardice are obtruded on us even amid the most grave and stately scenes of

Calderón and Tirso de Molina, is nothing but the *pícaro* slightly changed and under a new name.

My subject has been the rogue in Spain during the period of his most abundant growth, amid a society peculiarly suited to him. For this purpose I have passed in rapid review all important books of the class from the *Celestina*, 1480, down to Quevedo's story, 1626. Those who care to examine the part played by the rogue in the literature of the world may be referred to a learned and graceful study by Mr. James Fitzmaurice-Kelly, published in the *New Review*, July, 1895, and entitled *The Picaresque Novel*.

1898.



## BOCCACCIO

TO many readers it has appeared as if the friendship of Petrarch and Boccaccio made the first comfortable resting-place in the history of literature, on this side of the Dark Ages. On the other side, further back, there are no doubt many marvellous and admirable things, the enchantments and sublimities of 'Gothic' art; but there is little rest there for those who are unaccustomed to the manners of the earlier literature. There are interesting things, there are beautiful things in the literature of the Middle Ages; poems and stories that have character and worth of their own, and cannot be displaced or annulled by anything the Renaissance or the march of intellect may have produced in later times. But there is one defect in the Middle Ages: they are not comfortable. There is no leisurely rational conversation. Many civilized and educated persons feel on being asked to consider mediaeval literature, to pay attention to the poets of Provence or to the Minnesingers, the same sort of reluctance, the same need for courage, that Dr. Johnson may have felt in setting out for the Isle of Skye. Even to speak of Dante is not always

safe with the less adventurous sort of pilgrims; it is like recommending a good mountain to a traveller who is anxious about his inn. Boccaccio and Petrarch come much nearer to their readers and take them into their confidence; they make friends for themselves as only modern authors can, or authors who belong to an age like that of Cicero or Horace, in which there is conversation and correspondence and a vivid interest in the problems of literature. The reader who is acquainted with the Epistles of Horace may be pleased to think that in the society of Petrarch and Boccaccio he has escaped from the Goths; he has arrived at the familiar world where there is an intelligent exchange of literary opinions. Petrarch and Boccaccio have made this sort of reputation for themselves. It may be fallacious in some respects; the explorer who goes to the Letters of Petrarch will do well for his happiness if he forgets to compare them with the letters of Cicero or of Swift. But the impression is not altogether wrong; Petrarch and Boccaccio, in their conversation, are more like the age of Lewis XIV or of Queen Anne than any authors in the thousand years before their day.

Those two Italian poets have the advantage, an unfair advantage possibly, over older writers that they do not depend for their fame altogether on the present value of their writings. They have imposed their story on the world, their hopes, interests, ambitions, and good intentions. Like Erasmus and Rousseau, they are known to the world, and esteemed by the world, without very much direct and immediate knowledge of their writings. There is a traditional legend of their quest for the sources of learning, and for perfection in literature. Also there is, apart from their individual works,



the historical and dramatic interest of their contrasted characters. The merest fragments of knowledge about the two Italian poets, the traditional story of Laura, the garden of the *Decameron*, may set one's fancy to work on a story of two scholarly friends who were brought together by their genius and their ambition, and eternally kept from understanding one another through a difference of humour in their natures. It is a situation such as is familiar in comedy. There are two men who are friends and associates; one of them, Petrarch, is an enthusiast, full of sensibility, full of anxiety, troubled about his soul, troubled about his fame, vexed with distracting interests, and with a mind never safe from the keenness of its own thoughts—an unhappy man from the hour of his birth. The other, Boccaccio, is equable and sanguine, takes the world lightly, is not inclined to make grievances for himself nor to remember them; at the same time a hard worker, yet not distressing himself about his work; possessed of those happy virtues of which Bacon speaks, for which it is difficult to find an appropriate name. 'The Spanish name *disemboltura* partly expresseth them, when there be not stonds nor restiveness in a man's nature, but that the wheels of his mind keep way with the wheels of his fortune.' He acknowledged himself the pupil and follower of Petrarch. He was more even-tempered and happier than his master, but far inferior to him in scholarship and insight. Boccaccio recognized this, and did his best to profit by Petrarch's example and instruction. His Latin prose and verse must have seemed doubtful to Petrarch; one can only guess what pain the better scholar suffered and dissembled in reading the essays of Boccaccio.

That is part of the comedy; the best part of it is that both the personages retain their separate characters unspoil and uncompromised in what might seem to have been a remarkably hazardous exchange of sentiments and opinions. To the end the relations are maintained between them; Petrarch is always the master, and never entirely at liberty, never contented; Boccaccio always acknowledges that he is a pupil, and is always unconstrained.

Two of the differences between them, which might seem promising occasions for a downright quarrel, but really turn out quite otherwise, are to be found in Boccaccio's expostulation with Petrarch on his residence at Milan with the Visconti, which he regarded very naturally as a surrender to a tyranny, and in his letter accompanying a copy of Dante's poem. To explain to your friend and master that he is selling his soul, to remind Petrarch of the genius of Dante, these ventures might be thought to be dangerous; it is difficult to see any good answer to a friend who tells you ever so considerately that you are turning against your principles.

As to the shamefulness of Petrarch's yielding to the attractions of Milan, he had no good answer ready; what defence he tried to make must be reckoned among the least admirable things in his history. He had not to meet Boccaccio only, but a host of other critics. Boccaccio (in 1353) had put the case as gently as he could, in the form of an allegory, but his touch was not light. Italy, neglected and betrayed, is represented as Amayllis, and the Archbishop of Milan, Petrarch's friend, as Aegon priest of Pan, who has abandoned his rural worship and made himself into a captain

of thieves. It is with this renegade that Silvanus (Petrarch's own name for himself in the eclogue to his brother) has allowed himself to betray the Muses and the Peneian Daphne (that is, Laura), and what is he doing there? It is not indeed to be thought that, along with Aegon, he is glad to hear of murder and rapine, the shame and desolation of his native land; yet what is the friend of solitude, of virtuous freedom, and of poverty, what is Silvanus doing in that tyrannical house?

The allegory does not do much to soften the accusation. What Petrarch said to Boccaccio in answer is not known, but the lines of his defence are found in letters to other correspondents. They are not good. The power of the great to command obedience, the vanity of human wishes, these are made his excuse. There may have been insincerity on both sides; it is probable that Boccaccio did not feel the shame of submission as vehemently as he was able to express it. Yet, however it is taken, the situation is characteristic of both parties, and so is the result. Boccaccio is on the side of the obvious and superficial truth; the man who has praised solitude, independence, and poverty, and who has wished, in immortal verse, that he could awaken Italy from her lethargy of servitude, is not the man to accept any patronage from the Visconti. Petrarch, on the other hand, finds himself driven from this plain ground into sophistical apologies. He has to make himself believe what he wishes, and in the fluctuations of his life he supports himself on the commonplaces of the moralists. There is no quarrel, but the men are different.

The difference comes out much more distinctly, and we may say the danger of a breach between them is

very much greater in the case of the letter about Dante. A matter of personal conduct was never very serious to Boccaccio, where it did not touch his own interests, and not always then; but on some questions of taste he would venture a good deal. It is unlikely that he would have stood a long examination on the rack; but one of the last things he would have renounced was his admiration for the *Divine Comedy*. The words put in his mouth by Landor, in the imaginary conversation with Petrarch about Dante (*Pentameron*, First Day), are perfect as a summary of his ways of thinking. Petrarch says to him: 'You are the only author who would not rather demolish another's work than his own, especially if he thought it better—a thought which seldom goes beyond suspicion.' And Boccaccio answers, in terms that really represent his character: 'I am not jealous of any one; I think admiration pleasanter.'

He sent a copy of Dante's poem to Petrarch in 1359, with some Latin verses, the purport of them being to inquire why Petrarch was unjust to Dante. He does not say as much as this explicitly, but the meaning is plain enough. It is a common incident. Imagine a zealous admirer of Mr. Browning's poetry sending a copy of *The Ring and the Book* to a severe and critical friend. 'You must read this: "Because, you spend your life in praising, to praise you search the wide world over"; how have you been able to go on for years without saying a word about this glorious poem?' And the recipient of these benefits, when he has time to spare, goes calmly and writes a letter more or less like Petrarch's answer to Boccaccio, and is the cause of grief and surprise in the mind of the enthusiast. 'You are mistaken in supposing that I ever undervalued your

poet; on the contrary, I have always consistently pitied him, on account of the wrong done to him by his foolish admirers. It is true that I never read much of him, for at the usual age for such things I was on other lines, and had to be careful about desultory reading. Now, of course, I shall take your advice and look into him again, I hope with good results. I need not say'—and so forth.

It is much in that way that Petrarch thanks Boccaccio for his present; and still they were friends. Some historians have found that Petrarch is cleared by his letter from the suspicion of envy, but it is not easy to find any very sincere good will to Dante or his poem. It was impossible for Petrarch to share Boccaccio's honest, unreserved delight; he had prejudices and preoccupations; he was obliged to criticize. Boccaccio has no hesitations, doubts, or scruples; his fortunate disposition makes him a thorough-going partisan of what he feels to be good. He does not criticize; he thinks admiration pleasanter.

These two authors, so unlike in most things, were brought together by friendship and common interests, and have their place together in history; they are among the first of the moderns in every account of the revival of learning, and they are revered as among the first explorers and discoverers by most writers who have to describe the emancipation of humanity from the superstitions of the Middle Ages.

It may be suggested that possibly the historians of the Renaissance have been a little too much inclined to interpret the fourteenth century by their knowledge of the sixteenth, to read Petrarch by the light of Montaigne. Montaigne is what it all ends in, no

doubt; in Montaigne, or in Shakespeare. There at last, in the prose author and in the poet, is the explanation and solution of those difficulties in which the life of Petrarch is involved; and Petrarch takes the first stages in a progress that is to lead from superstition (that is to say, the traditional and conventional moralities of the Dark Ages) to the free and unembarrassed study of human nature. It is impossible to understand Petrarch without the sixteenth century. But Petrarch did not travel the whole course; though all his life is an effort to get freedom, he never fully escapes from the ancient ways. It is a mistake in history to represent him as conscious of the full meaning and import of his reforms in learning and in poetry. Many things he saw clearly, but he was never free from the mediaeval hindrances, and he feels them more than those who have no glimmering of any other world outside their mediaeval cave. In Boccaccio there are like contradictions, but here the difference of temper in the two men comes and helps the more sanguine of the two. Boccaccio does not feel the contradictions in the same degree as Petrarch, and does not fret about them.

Where the weight of mediaeval convention is most obvious in the writings of Petrarch and Boccaccio, is perhaps in their theories of poetry. The work of Petrarch in Italian verse is often described, and justly, as if it were a victory of form and poetic style, of pure art not distracted from its own proper aims. But there is no hint of this sort of view in Petrarch's own descriptions of the poetical office. On this subject he speaks out quite distinctly; he has no hesitation at all, nothing but unqualified and uncompromising adherence to the doctrine that all poetry is allegory (*Fam.* x. 41;

to his brother)—the doctrine that filled the Middle Ages with their most tedious fictions and conventionalities, the doctrine that provokes more scorn and invective than any other from the leaders of the new schools, equally in religion and in learning. Tindale the reformer speaks of it in terms not very different from those of Rabelais.

Boccaccio holds this mediaeval doctrine also, but he holds it in his own characteristic way. He is fond of it, and especially fond of a quotation from St. Gregory the Great, the chief authority on the allegoric method. St. Gregory, in the preface to his *Moralia*, explains that the Holy Scripture is not for one order of mind only, that it may be read by simple people in the obvious sense as well as by great clerks in the allegorical. Boccaccio adopts St. Gregory's illustration, and speaks of poetry, and incidentally of his own Commentary on Dante, as giving both the easy and the difficult meaning. 'It is like a river in which there are both easy fords and deep pools, in which both the lamb may wade and the elephant may swim'—*un fiume piano e profondo, nel quale l'agnello puote andare, e il leofante notare.*

But while Petrarch holds to this doctrine painfully, and expounds the *Aeneid* as an allegory of man's soul, and his own eclogue to his brother Gerard the Carthusian, minutely, point for point, as an allegory of his studies, it never is allowed to trouble Boccaccio. His apology for poetry in the *De Genealogia Deorum*, though it keeps to this mediaeval commonplace about the allegorical mystery of poetry, is full of life and spirit. One of the best pieces of satire since Lucian discussed the professional philosophers is Boccaccio's account of the way the schoolmen on the one hand and

the friars on the other go depreciating poetry and crying up their own wares instead. Who are the men who revile the Muses? There is a race, he says, who think themselves philosophers, or at any rate would be glad to be thought so, who say that poetry is all very well for children in their grammar schools; they are men grave in language and ponderous in their manners, who trade in words that they have gathered from glances at books, words that do not touch reality; who trouble learned men with their problems, and when they are answered, shake their heads and smile at the rest of the company, as if it were nothing but respect for the years of their instructor that prevented them from crushing him; then they will go and make use of what they have heard and give it out as their own, if they can get any one to listen to them, musing and sighing as if they were in deep contemplation, or as if they were drawing true oracles direct from their most divine and mysterious sources. The allegorical theory of poetry does not look so formidable when Boccaccio is explaining it. His defence of poetry is much the same as Sir Philip Sidney's, and seems to have been called out by the same kind of puritan depreciation as Sidney had to refute. Once in his life, it is true, Boccaccio was seriously frightened and made to doubt whether a lover of poetry could be saved; through a warning from the deathbed of a certain religious man, who had a vision of Petrarch and Boccaccio, and sent them notice of their probable fate if they persisted in carnal learning and poetry. Petrarch had to encourage him, and advised him not to be seriously troubled. Doubtless in this distress the allegorical theory was a comfort to Boccaccio. But practically it has very little effect on



his work ; and many poets of a much later day, like Tasso, allow it a much more important place in their poetical designs.

It is hardly possible to make too much of the influence of Petrarch and Boccaccio on the literature of Europe. Both of them depended upon the older mediæval poets for much of their own writing ; Petrarch on the earlier schools of courtly verse, Provençal and Italian, Boccaccio on French romances, on the *Divine Comedy*, and on the popular narrative poetry of his own country ; but while both were largely in debt, both made such use of what they borrowed that they gave their own character to the mediæval forms ; and so everywhere in later ages the form of courtly lyric is mainly Petrarchian, not in Italy only, but in all the Latin nations and in England, with Ronsard, with Camoens, with the Elizabethans ; while the most successful forms of narrative poetry are those which Boiardo, Ariosto, and Tasso derived from the work of Boccaccio, and handed on to Spenser. Petrarch and Boccaccio determined the course of the principal streams of poetry in all the languages of Europe for more than two centuries after their lifetime, and, in some important respects, even to the present day.

As a successful inventor of definite literary forms, as the founder of literary schools, Boccaccio may claim respect for all his works, and not for his one great book, the *Decameron*, only. Even if the *Decameron* had never been written, there would still remain a great variety of things in prose and verse, each with some original value of its own, and all, even the least successful of them, productive and stimulating in the schools of poetry.

The *Decameron* has perhaps had less influence in this way, as a pattern of literary design and execution, than some of the other works of Boccaccio—the *Teseide* for instance. The *Decameron* has provided matter for a great number of authors—Dryden in the *Fables*, Keats's *Isabella*, and later still; but the form and the expression of the *Decameron*, which are its great excellence, have not been copied to the same extent, or at any rate in the same obvious and acknowledged manner. It doubtless made the first great and decisive change from the naïve and unstudied fashions of mediæval composition to the elaborate harmonies of prose; and again, wherever in later comedy the vernacular or vulgar speech is liberally used, there may be found something to recall the rich idioms of Bruno and Buffalmacco, and the other Florentine ruffians of the *Decameron*. Yet the *Decameron* is not followed in the same way as some of the less famous works of Boccaccio. The *Filocolo*, the *Filostrato*, the *Teseide*, the *Fiammetta*, the *Ameto*, are each a new kind of fiction, showing later writers some of the promising ways in which their ideas might be arranged and developed.

The *Filocolo* and the *Fiammetta*, works which have their faults, are among the most ingenious and dexterous examples of literary tact. They are types of prose romance which were wanted in modern literature. Boccaccio discovered these new and promising varieties of story, apparently without any trouble or labour. The *Fiammetta* is the first of the prose romances in which the heroine is made the narrator, and in which vicissitudes of sentiment are the matter of the story. He had certain models to work upon; chiefly, no doubt, as one of his biographers explains, the *Heroides* of Ovid;

he may also have known the Epistles of Heloisa, and sentiment of the kind he deals with is common and familiar stuff for all the mediaeval varieties of courtly poetry. But this does not greatly detract from Boccaccio's originality as an inventor of one of the principal types of the modern novel. The *Filocolo*, his earliest work, is even more remarkable. Boccaccio takes an old French story, one of the best known and one of the most attractive, the story of the true lovers, Floris and Blanchefloure. This he writes out in prose, in his own way, with all the rhetoric, all the classical ornament he can find room for: the result is exactly like one of those Greek rhetorical romances which Boccaccio had never seen, and which were to have such enormous influence two centuries later. The Greek romance of *Theagenes and Chariclea* had, in the sixteenth and the seventeenth century, a value like that of the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid*: Sir Philip Sidney, Tasso, and Cervantes are among the followers of Heliodorus, and speak of him as one of the most honourable names in literature. Boccaccio knew nothing about Heliodorus; so he invented him. His *Filocolo* is a literary form in which most of the things provided by Heliodorus were anticipated, generations before the Greek romances came to be a power in the West.

The *Ameto* is the first pastoral romance in prose, with poems interspersed; a form not now much in request, but which was long regarded as an admirable kind of fiction. The catalogue of these romances is a long one; and though the readers are not many, it is no ignoble company that includes the *Diana* of Montemayor, the *Galatea* of Cervantes, the *Astrée*.

The *Teseide* has a higher eminence in the history of

poetry. It is the first attempt, in a modern language, to reproduce the classical epic poem. Boccaccio is the first adventurer in that long line of poets, in all the nations, who have tried for the prize of the epic, 'not without dust and heat,' and with so many failures, with such vast heaps of wreckage, piles of similes, broken 'machines,' battered and dingy masks of the gods and goddesses of Olympus; yet it is not all waste, for *Paradise Lost* is one of the successors of Boccaccio's *Teseide*. *Paradise Lost* was written with the same kind of ambition, to show that the epic forms of the ancients could be reproduced, and filled afresh, by a modern imagination using a modern tongue. *Renaissance* has some meaning as applied to the works of Boccaccio. The contents of the ancient poems had of course never been ignored, and were of as much importance in the twelfth century as in the fourteenth or the sixteenth. But Boccaccio is one of the first of modern writers to try for the form and spirit of classical literature.

He is not absolutely the first, for Dante was before him. Dante was the first to realize the value and the possibilities of the ancient devices in modern poetry; and some part, not a small part, of Boccaccio's work is to popularize the methods of Dante; for instance in that use of the epic simile which was introduced in English poetry by Chaucer, and which Chaucer learned from Dante and Boccaccio.

The talent of Boccaccio for finding out new kinds of literature, and making the most of them, is like the instinct of a man of business for profitable openings. The works of Boccaccio, other than the *Decameron*, are full of all kinds of faults, from pompous rhetoric to the opposite extreme of mere flatness and negligence; but

nothing impairs his skill in discovering the lines on which he is going to proceed, the ease and security with which he takes up his point of view, decides on his method, and sets to work. The execution may be scamped, may be trivial in one place and emphatic in another, without good reason, but it seldom does much to spoil the good effect of the first design. This intuition of the right lines of a story was what Chaucer learned from Boccaccio. There is nothing more exhilarating in literary history than the way in which Chaucer caught the secret of Boccaccio's work, and used it for his own purposes.

There is more of instinct than of study in Boccaccio's power of designing. He did not sit down, like some later poets, to think about the poetical forms of Greek and Latin poetry, and try to reproduce them. He copied the epic model, it is true, but it does not need much reading to find out that an epic should have a descriptive catalogue of armies, and, if possible, one book of funeral games. The problems of the unities are different from this, and there does not seem to have been anything the least like the theory of the unities in Boccaccio's narrative art, though the narrative unities are there in his compositions. He might say like M. Jourdain: 'Cependant je n'ai point étudié, et j'ai fait cela tout du premier coup.' He took no pains about the study of classical forms; his classical researches were of another kind. He liked the matter of ancient learning; his learned works are encyclopaedias; the *Genealogies of the Gods*, a kind of dictionary of mythology intended for the use of poets, to keep them right in their noble ornamental passages; *De Casibus Virorum Illustrium* (*The Falls of Princes*, as it is called

in the English version, Lydgate's 'Bochas'); *De Claris Mulieribus*; and an appendix to the classical dictionary of the gods providing additional useful information for the poets 'concerning Mountains, Woods, Wells, Lakes, Rivers, Pools and Marshes, and concerning the Names of the Sea.'

He was not troubled about rhetorical principles, and says nothing much about his art, beyond his explanation of the allegorical theory. His account of Virgil is characteristic. Boccaccio was a professor in his old age; when he came to Virgil in his Dante lectures he had nothing to tell his audience about Virgil's diction nor about the idea of an Heroic Poem; he told them that Virgil was an astrologer who lived at Naples, and who made a brazen fly and a bronze horse and the two heads, one weeping and the other laughing, set up at the two sides of the Porta Nolana. But while he neglected the theory of poetical composition he was making discoveries and inventions in literary form, and establishing literary principles in a practical way. He has no criticism in him, but he does more than the work of criticism by the examples he sets. Chaucer, equally without any explicit reflexion on the principles of construction, shows how he had made out for himself what Boccaccio was driving at. Chaucer had all the mediaeval tastes, the taste for exorbitant digressions and irrelevances, the love of useful information, the want of proportion and design. But he read Boccaccio and discovered his secret without any lectures on criticism and without saying much about his discovery. He wrote, in imitation of Boccaccio, the stories of the *Filostrato* and the *Teseide*. He changed them both; he added substance to Boccaccio's light and graceful

form of *Troilus and Cressida*; he threw away the epic decorations of *Palamon and Arcita*. In both he retained, from his original, the narrative unity and coherence. How much he learned from Boccaccio, and how little it was in agreement with his own natural proclivities, may be seen in his *House of Fame*. He has just finished his *Troilus and Cressida*, his greatest work, and one of the greatest imaginative works in English poetry, a poem which for sheer strength and firmness of design, not to speak of its other qualities, may stand comparison with anything in the great Elizabethan age, even with Milton himself. When he has finished this piece of work, Chaucer thinks he has earned a holiday, and writes the *House of Fame*—a rambling, unfinished, roundabout paper, with every good old mediaeval vanity in it—long descriptions, popular scientific lectures, allegories, moralizings, everything that he knew to be wrong, everything that was most familiar and delightful to him from his school-days, and most repugnant to a correct and educated taste. Wherever Chaucer sets himself to do strong work, there is the influence of Boccaccio; he unbends his mind afterwards, in a plunge among the mediaeval incongruities; sometimes with libertine recklessness, as when he imposed the tale of Melibeus on the Canterbury pilgrims; Melibeus the ineffable, the unlimited, the hopeless embodiment of everything in the Middle Ages most alien to life. The reaction shown in Melibeus may prove how strong the contrary influence was, the lesson of restraint and coherence which Chaucer acquired from Boccaccio.

In his relation to English literature, as the master of Chaucer, Boccaccio may seem to have the character

of an academic and scholarly person prescribing rules. This is illusion. Boccaccio had a natural gift for story-telling, and for coherence in story-telling. His talent for composition, design, arrangement, gives him his rank among literary reformers. But this talent remains always natural, and half unconscious. There are pedantries in Boccaccio, but not the academic and formal pedantry of the sixteenth-century literary men. He does not lecture on the principles of composition. He has not Dante's affection for philology; he would not have had much sympathy for Tasso's painful defences and explanations about the plan and details of his epic.

Boccaccio has his strength from the land of Italy, like Virgil, Horace, and Ovid. He has the old pieties of the country people. The best things in his great classical dictionary are the references to the undying popular beliefs and rituals. Though he did not get on well with his father, he remembers with affection the old religion of the New Year's Eve when his father used to repeat the old country observance, and pour a libation on the burning log for the gods of the household. In the same temper as Sidney's praise of the ballads, he finds the spirit of poetry in the old wives' fairy tales at the fireside in the winter nights. One of his greatest achievements in poetry, the confirmation of the octave stanza as the Italian heroic measure, is due to his trust in Italian manners and traditions. The *ottava rima* is a popular, not a learned, form of verse. It is not a rude or barbarous measure; it is ultimately derived no doubt from the courtly schools; but still it is popular, because the common people of Italy, and more especially of Tuscany, have chosen to make it so.



The stanzas of the early popular romances of Tuscany show distinctly their relation to the lyrical form of the *rispetti*, which are to this day, it would seem, the favourite form among the Tuscan villagers. Thus the following example, from the *Cantare di Fiorio e Biancifiore*, shows the same device of repetition (*ripresa*) which is obligatory in the lyrical *rispetti* :—

Alora dise Fiorio: E io vi vo' andare,  
 e metere mi voglio per la via,  
 e cercaragio la terra e lo mare,  
 con tutta quanta la Saracinia;  
 e giamai non credo in quà tornare  
 s' io non ritruovo la speranza mia;  
 giamai a voi io non ritorneraggio,  
 s' io non riveggio 'l suo chiaro visaggio.

The mode of the *rispetti* is this :—

Non ti maravigliar se tu sei bella,  
 Perchè sei nata accanto alla marina;  
 L' acqua dol mar ti mantien fresca e bella  
 Come la rosa in sulla verde spina:  
 Se delle rose ce n' è nel rosaio,  
 Nel tuo viso ci sono di gennaio;  
 Se delle rose nel rosaio ne fosse,  
 Nel tuo viso ci sono bianche e rosse<sup>1</sup>.

Boccaccio, in adopting this popular stanza for his romantic and epic verse, was acknowledging his reliance on the genius of the popular poetry. This, together with his command of the vulgar idiom in his prose, gives him his authority in Italian literature at the beginning of the new age. It is the good fortune of Italian poetry that at a time when there was so much danger of pedantry and formalism, of mere classical imitation, Boccaccio was there to set the force of his

<sup>1</sup> Tigri, *Canti Popolari Toscani* (1856), p. 15.

example and influence against the encroachments of fanatic precisians. He had too much learning, too strong a faculty for design, too great variety and liveliness of elocution, to be ignored by any scholar. He could not be dismissed as a barbarian; and he was too ingenuous, too fond of the Tuscan earth, the Tuscan air, to admit the sterile blight of the false classicism. In his own way and degree he did what Catullus and Lucretius, Virgil and Ovid, had done before him—by taking all he could get from the universal sources of learning, while he kept his loyalty to the native genius of Italy. Thus he appears at the beginning of the Renaissance well protected against some of its most insidious vanities; just as the great Latin poets were saved by the same Italian genius from the dangers of a too absolute subservience to Greece.

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