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Title: Philosophic Nights in Paris

Author: Remy de Gourmont

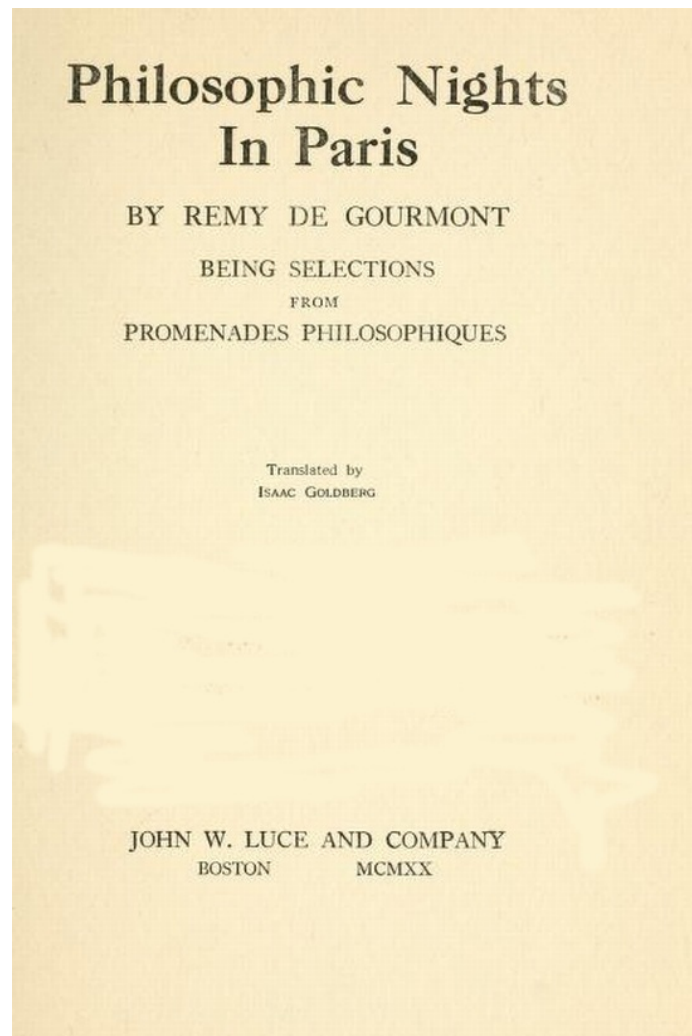
Translator: Isaac Goldberg

Release date: September 3, 2014 [EBook #46759]

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Marc D'Hooghe at <http://www.freeliterature.org>

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Philosophic Nights

In Paris

BY REMY DE GOURMONT

BEING SELECTIONS

FROM

PROMENADES PHILOSOPHIQUES

Translated by

ISAAC GOLDBERG

JOHN W. LUCE AND COMPANY

BOSTON MCMXX

Introduction

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INTRODUCTION

The importance of Remy de Gourmont to the universal world of thought is now beginning to be recognized among thinkers of every continent. During his own life he was a figure apart and aloof even from his confrères; his reputation was a matter more of intensity than of extensive acclaim, although subtly it made its way, as did that of the Symbolist school in general, to many nations. Now, however, he is beginning to receive that wider recognition which during his life he actually shunned. He belongs with the notable few who have devised and lived a philosophy of continuous adaptation to the new knowledge that the new day brings forth; he is a daring, independent, unostentatious, extremely personal neo-Epicurean, too individualistic to have been held long within the circle of a school, too sensitive not to have responded to the multifarious influences of a complex age. Yet just as his individualism was not the ignorant self-proclamation of blatant mediocrity, so was his response to the contemporary world far more than an aimless dashing about hither and thither in a snobbish attempt to be ahead of the times. The man's essentially dynamic personality has a genuine strain of the classic in it; he possesses a rare repose, an intellectual poise, that serves as a most admirable complement to his vibrant ideas. Few writers have ever so well combined matter and manner, which to Gourmont were but two aspects of one and the same thing,—the original thought. He is not, and never will be, a writer for the crowd; he was, by heredity and by choice, an aristocratic spirit, yet as he lived grew to recognize and to admit the importance of true democracy.

His chief importance, historically, was as the recognized interpreter of the Symbolistic movement in French poetry; but behind that movement lay a genealogy of ideas which ramified into such seemingly divergent directions as the pre-Raphaelites in England, the Hegelian idealists in Germany, and thus formed a modern manifestation of primary significance. De Gourmont, like more than one of the Symbolists, outgrew the movement, which from the first was composed of personalities too strong to form a mere school. He was, in the words of one of his commentators, "among the first, if not the first, to realize the insufficiency of Symbolism, in all that did not confine itself amidst the proud ivory walls of an uncompromising lyricism. If he did not combat it, because he had too complaisantly exalted it, he none the less abandoned it more and more, to surrender himself,—with no other discipline than his personal taste and his keen sense of the French genius,—to the fecundity of his nature, retaining of the old verbal magic only that which might contribute to his personal expansion,—notably that precious gift of image and analogies which imparts such poetry, such flexibility, variety and charm to his style. But henceforth the idea (i.e., rather than the word) assumed in him a preponderant importance, and now he was to play with ideas.... as he had previously played with words and images."

II

Gourmont's literary career was particularly identified with the notable French Review, the *Mercure de France*. How he came to join the staff of that organ is interestingly recounted by Louis Dumur, in the same obituary note from which the above quotation was translated. Incidentally we obtain a glimpse of the young man just as he was emerging into note.

"The great writer whom we have just lost," wrote M. Dumur, "was to us more than a friend,

better than a master: he seemed to us the most complete representative, the very expression,—in all its aspects and in all its complexity,—of our literary generation.

"When, in the autumn of 1889, the small group which proposed to found the *Mercure de France* thought first of adding several collaborators to its number," while one went off in search of Jules Renard, another invited Julien Leclercq and a third promised the assistance of Albert Samain,—the late lamented Louis Denise, who was at that time cataloguer of the Bibliothèque Nationale, said to us:

"There is at the Library an extraordinary man who knows everything. He has already published ten volumes and a hundred articles upon every conceivable subject."

"We don't need a scholar, nor a polygraph, but rather a writer who'll be one of us."

"All he asks is to be one of us," declared Denise. "He is filled with admiration for Mallarmé and swears only by Villiers de l'Isle Adam. At the present moment he's writing a novel that will be a revelation."

"Bring along your prodigy."

"That prodigy was Remy de Gourmont."

"We did not know him, not even by name, despite his vast literary labors. He lived in seclusion. He did not frequent any of our literary rendezvous. He was never seen at the François Ier, nor at the Vachette, nor at the Voltaire, nor at the Chat-Noir, nor at the Nouvelle-Athènes. He had not written for any of our little reviews, of which he was later to become the well-informed historian. His signature had not appeared in the columns of *Lutèce*, *la Vogue*, the *Decadent*, the *Symboliste*, the *Scapin*, the *Ecrits pour l'Art*, nor in la *Pléiade*.

"But if we did not know him, he knew us all, together with the Acadiens, the Lapons, the Italian verists, the English novelists, the American humorists, the Jesuits, balloons, volcanos, the thousand subjects upon which his learning and his curiosity had exercised themselves. In publishing houses whose existence we did not suspect or in papers we were hardly familiar with, we, too, in conjunction with the still obscure and mysterious esthetic movement which we aspired to represent, formed the object of his labors and his meditations. This newcomer knew more about our interests than we did ourselves. He had read our most insignificant essays. He shared our enthusiasms, our antipathies, participated in our intellectual research, discerned our tendencies, penetrated into our intentions, which already he was arranging to formulate, and to formulate for us with as keen a perspicuity and clarity as were permitted by the concerted imprecision of our thought and the hazy, delicately shaded, sublimated art that we had just established.

"From his very first pages in the *Mercure de France*,"—those *Proses moroses* which were so perfect in form, so rare in expression and of such singular subtlety,"—he revealed himself as an expert artist in the new coloring, and produced exquisite models of the refined genre which charmed us. In that same year, 1890, he published through the firm of Savine the novel that Denise had spoken about to us," that *Sixtine* which at once consecrated him as a coming master in the exacting eyes of our cenacles. 'A novel of cerebral life,'—a precious subtitle,—and one could find nothing better to suggest the full significance of this book, which is of disturbing originality. Nothing took place in it which the regular public calls by the name of 'action'; everything in it, was, indeed, 'cerebral.' It was filled with a minute, probing analysis. The hero did not love so much as he observed himself in the process of loving. It was charming, complicated, and marvellously written.

"At the times of its appearance the reaction against naturalism and the so-called 'psychological' school of Bourget was at its height.... Symbolism had been born,—musical, suggestive, indirect. But if symbolism had produced its work, it had not yet found its formulas. There was interminable and indefatigable discussion as to just what symbolism was. And it was Remy de Gourmont who undertook to define it. He himself brought to it perfect and delicate products. Among these, in poetry and prose, were *les Litanies de la Rose*, *Lilith*, *le Fantôme*, *Fleurs de Jadis*, *Hieroglyphes* and the dramatic poem *Théodat*, which was given at the Théâtre d'Art at the same time as Maeterlinck's *les Aveugles*, Laforgue's *le Concile féérique* and that *Cantique des Cantiques* by Renard, which was accompanied by a luminous, fragrant musical score so that, by an appropriate harmony of sounds, voices, colors and perfumes, all the senses might be conjointly struck by the same symbol."

Of Gourmont's services to the movement into which he was thus introduced Camille Mauclair, one of Mallarmé's intimate friends, has written:

"The theories of the Symbolists were presented and condensed in excellent fashion in the numerous books and critical articles by Remy de Gourmont, who was not only a most original novelist and a perfect artist in prose, but also one of the most remarkable essayists of the nineteenth century, characterized by an astonishing wealth of ideas, a rare erudition, and an intellectual flexibility that assured him philosophical as well as esthetic culture. Moralist, logician, poet, intuitive as well as deductive, passionate lover of ideas, Remy de Gourmont possessed also the merit of being a voluntary recluse, exceedingly proud, clinging tenaciously to his liberty, disdaining all fame, living as a solitary spirit and as a man truly above all social prejudices. His irony, which excluded neither emotion nor faith, was but the effect of a deep scorn of mediocracy.... His whole life was a model of independence.... Remy de Gourmont, better than any other, formulated the idealism which was at the bottom of the Symbolist doctrine."

Among these services to the new movement were Gourmont's penetrating studies of such figures

as Mallarmé and Verlaine, Huysmans and the de Goncourts, Rimbaud, Corbière, Villiers de l'Isle Adam, Barbey d'Aurevilly, Stendhal, Baudelaire, Maurice de Guérin, Gérard de Nerval, Aloysius Bertrand. Were it not for Gourmont, some of these would perhaps never have been known, and it does little credit to our own poetic advancement that some of them are still but names to American readers. His two *Livres des Masques* are regarded as the beginnings of a history of the Symbolist period, which he never found time to complete. Although many of the writers were, at the time Gourmont considered them here, at the beginning of their careers, he seized upon their distinguishing traits with a rare insight, and revealed such coming celebrities as Maeterlinck, Verhaeren, Régnier, Samain, Vielé-Griffin, Tailhade, Paul Adam, Gide, Laforgue, Moréas, Merrill, Rachilde, Kahn, Jammes, Paul Fort, Maclair, Claudel, Bataille, Ghil. He had a discerning eye for the painters, too, and revealed as well as defended Whistler, Van Gogh, Gauguin, and others.

Despite their modest titles, the *Promenades philosophiques* and the *Promenades littéraires* have been called "without doubt the most important critical works of our epoch." It is from the former that the essays contained in this book are taken; they reveal, in striking degree, the thought and the attitude of their famous author, and may suggest, "though within the limits that all translation connotes, particularly when dealing with so remarkable a stylist," the charm, the simplicity, and the clarity of his writing.

III

Despite the fact that his funeral services occurred during the height of the war—he was born on April 4, 1858 and died on September 27, 1915—they were attended by a numerous gathering of mourners who, in their very cosmopolitan nature seemed to symbolize the universal influence of the departed genius. Tributes were paid by M. Henri de Régnier, of the French Academy, who spoke for the *Mercur de France*, by M. Georges Lecomte, President of the Société des Gens de Lettres, who spoke in the name of that society, by M. Maurice Ajam, for the newspaper *La France*, by M. Fernand Mazade, in the name of the *Depêche de Toulouse*, to which Remy de Gourmont was a contributor, by Xavier Carvalho, in the name of the Portuguese and Brazilian press, and by M. Juliot Piquet, in the name of the great Buenos Aires daily *La Nación* for which Gourmont wrote.

Régnier paid particular attention to the critical labors of the deceased. Gourmont, he said, "was an incomparable critic, in turn a scholar untainted by pedantry, deep without obscurity, ingenious to the point of paradox, sincere to the point of contradiction, but ever mindful of the truth,—a critic in the manner of Montaigne, of inexhaustible variety of means, of the most candid independence,—a critic who is polemist, dilettante, imaginative spirit and poet, and above all, a man, exceedingly human in his alternations of skepticism and faith." Lecomte pointed out the nobility of the man's origin, and the significance of his ancestral connection with François Malherbe, the great stylist of a former age. Ajam, like most who have commented on the man at all, was struck with his paradoxical nature. "A democrat of aristocratic cast, an atheist filled with devotion, an anarchist characterized by order, an agitated spirit infused with calm, he was a human and a divine paradox."

The tributes by Carvalho and Piquet are of particular significance. At a time when even Spain, the mother country, was indifferent to and ignorant of the literary accomplishments of its American colonies, Remy de Gourmont had lent himself to the interpretation and the revelation of the new literary world across the seas. He translated, criticised and supported an almost unknown continental literature. He even went so far as to invent the term neo-espagnol (neo-Spanish) for the modified Spanish spoken in the various republics of the New World,—a proceeding which though philologists may consider it rash, may yet be considered premature rather than totally mistaken. And in any event it shows the man's ready response to new currents in speech and thought, whether native or foreign. "By his precious writings for the reviews and the great dailies of Argentina and Brazil," said Carvalho, "he rendered lasting service to the neo-Latin literatures." M. Piquet's speech was short, yet pithy in its evidence of an entire continent's appreciation.

"I should not venture to approach this tomb if I did not possess in this solemn moment the impersonality of a symbol.

"A few words will suffice for me to fulfil in its formal character the dolorous and too burdensome task that accident has imposed upon me. I come, in the name of the journal *La Nación* of Buenos Ayres, to pay the last respects to its former contributor Remy de Gourmont, the writer, the thinker who, for many years, helped in powerful measure to maintain, on the distant shores of the La Plata, admiration and love for the land of clarity and moderation, justice and liberty, of which he was one of the purest glories."

IV

The complete works of Remy de Gourmont cover almost every form of intellectual activity. He seems equally at home in criticism, in creative effort, "novel, play, poem," philosophy (Nietzsche owes much to him for his intellectual acclimatization in France), in the transvaluation of moral values, in social criticism, in certain aspects of science, in philology, in the renovation of rhetoric. "In his divers attitudes and in his varied researches," says Dumur, "he was the expression of our instable epoch.... When the most distant posterity shall wish to form an idea of what we were between the years of yesterday's estheticism and tomorrow's neo-classic realism, of what our immense literary production was, of what the generation was which bridged the conflict of 1870

and the great war which began in 1914, the page it will have to read will be signed Remy de Gourmont."

The importance of this writer, however, cannot be limited to France; by token of his broad, tolerant humanism and his dynamic method he belongs to the literature that abolishes boundaries and epochs.

HELVÉTIUS AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF HAPPINESS

"M. Helvétius, in his youth," says Chamfort, "was as handsome as love itself. One evening, as he was seated very peacefully before an open fire, at the side of Mile. Gaussin, a renowned financier came and whispered into this actress's ear, loud enough for Helvétius to hear: 'Mademoiselle, would it be agreeable to you to accept six hundred louis in exchange for a few favors?'—'Monsieur,' she replied, loud enough to be heard by Helvétius, and pointing to him at the same time, 'I'll give you two hundred of them if you will kindly call on me tomorrow morning with that fellow over there.'"

Helvétius was not content with being very handsome. He was also exceedingly wise, very rich, and very happy. No mortal, perhaps, received so many gifts from the gods, the rarest of which was Mme. Helvétius, one of the most charming and gifted women of the eighteenth century. Like her husband, she was very beautiful,—so beautiful that persons paused, struck with admiration, to look at her. There is, in this connection,—quoting again from Chamfort, a very pretty anecdote:

"M. de Fontenelle, aged ninety-seven, having just uttered to Mme. Helvétius, young, beautiful and newly wed, a thousand amiable and gallant remarks, passed by her to take his place at table, without raising his eyes to her. 'You can see,' said Mme. Helvétius, 'how much stock I may take in your compliments; you pass me by without so much as looking at me.' 'Madame,' replied the old man, 'if I had looked at you, I would not have passed by.'"

Happiness is often egotistical. It is even a question whether a certain egotism is not necessary to the acquirement of a certain happiness. Helvétius gave a peremptory denial to these sorry notions. Happy himself, he had but one passion: the happiness of humanity. He noticed, in his observation of mankind, that the natural desire to be happy, which each of us bears within, is opposed by a thousand prejudices, the most terrible of which are the religious prejudices, and he determined to combat them with all his strength. M. Albert Keim, who knows Helvétius better than any other man in France, has just republished certain notes written in the philosopher's hand; the first of which runs thus:

"Prejudices. They are to the mind what ministers are to monarchs. The latter prevent their rivals from approaching the king, and in the same way prejudices prevent truths from reaching the mind, for fear of losing the power they usurp over it."

One of the most widespread prejudices is that which considers it impossible to attain happiness; as that does not prevent us from desiring it, such an idea corrupts life and often renders it unbearable. Priests have believed that they could remedy this by inventing a second life, where the person who has consented to be quite unhappy in the first will find at last a sort of equivocal happiness, little calculated to tempt one of intelligence. The people, nevertheless, snap at this bait and accept, in view of future recompense, the direst tribulations of the present life. Thus a frightful slavery is perpetuated, for it is very evident that all this is nothing but a hoax and an imposition. Whoever wishes to taste happiness, if this word stands for anything more than a dream, should set about it in this life, since the other one is but a chimera, lucrative for the clergy alone. But how be happy? Through virtue? Very well, what is virtue?

"Virtue," replies Helvétius, "is only the wisdom which harmonizes passion with reason and pleasure with duty."

He assigns a large place in life to pleasures and passions; but he does not consider them only as elements of happiness; he makes of them sources of activity. Man instinctively seeks pleasure. When he has experienced it, and later loses it, he will work with all his might to win it anew. All forms of pleasure, then, are easily reconcilable to virtue. Who knows whether pleasure taken in wise moderation is not virtue itself? And he dares to write this maxim, which will perhaps frighten some: *One is never guilty when one is happy*. Helvétius, who was a very gentle and kind person, is often, in his writings, rashly bold. His intimate notes are violent, impassioned, even brutal. He speaks in them of love with magnificent frankness, and one readily divines that it is chiefly in the exercise of this amiable virtue that he found happiness.

I am not at all writing here a study of Helvétius, one of the most skilful demolishers of the ancient regime; I am running through a portfolio of private notes, printed at first in a few copies, and the reading of which will reveal at once an ingenious philosopher and the most spirited of poets. He is, on the subject of love, inexhaustible; he is in turn tender, subtle, passionate, raving. His delirious attacks are of a beautiful candor; the majority of his thoughts are charming and most seductive: "Each moment of pleasure is a gift of the gods."

This verse, which would be greatly admired and celebrated if it had been found in André Chenier, —does it truly come from the pen of Helvétius? This is what M. Albert Keim asks himself. That is a query to propound to the erudite spirits of *l'Intermédiaire*, who have read all the old authors; in the meantime I consider it as being highly characteristic of the philosophy and the poetry of the

author of *Bonheur* (Happiness). One can imagine nothing more pagan, more gently anti-Christian. And anti-Christianism is the real basis of Helvétius' philosophy. He oversteps the bounds a trifle when he adds: "Pleasure is the sole occupation of life." The ardor of this young man is excessive. He himself will soon learn and declare that life has other employments, such, for example, as composing a philosophy.

His second motto will be: "Minerva and Venus in turn," which is wisdom itself; he will devote himself to plucking at once "the fruits of reason and the fruits of pleasure." He is forever recurring to voluptuousness, whose images pursue him: "Who takes all pleasures takes very few of them." Love to him is the most noble of passions because it is the fecund passion and mother of life. This is what makes him say: "It is not, moreover, without a certain secret melancholy," for, he avers, "The flower that one plucks is ready to wither."

Do you wish to see him in his rôle of a serious philosopher? He will say, as if he foresaw the war against science, in which, in our own days, we have seen the Veillots and the Brunetières distinguish themselves: "There are things over which the veil of skepticism should be spread; but, in the matter of science, it would be necessary, in order to win the right of skepticism, to know all that the human mind may learn: then one might permit himself to declare that science is nothing." Like the modern positivists, like Renan, remarks M. Keim, Helvétius had the greatest confidence in science. He is forever celebrating the triumphs of human intelligence. He believes in progress, in the transformation of society by the scientific mind. Thus he launched a powerful attack against Rousseau's thesis upon the ills of civilization. Yet at times one notes in him a little discouragement, and he will confess: "Almost all philosophical views are worthless. Not that they are not excellent, but because there are too few persons who can understand them."

The number of persons who can understand Helvétius has greatly increased, and besides, it is not so difficult as he believed; all one needs is a little common sense. It is a good sign of our intellectual health that Helvétius is coming back into fashion. Tomorrow it will be d'Holbach, d'Alembert, Tracy, the master of Stendhal,—all those eighteenth-century philosophers who are so clear, so simple, so human. The absurd German metaphysics has annihilated them for sixty years, but it seems that the day of their revenge has come. The dry notion of abstract duty according to Kant has outlived its day. It is beginning to be understood that man's first duty is to be happy. Otherwise, what is the use of living?

THE PLAYER'S ILLUSION

The player at games of skill is always tempted to attribute to himself a capacity superior to his real power. Such is the theorem advanced in a curious study, half psychological and half algebraic, by an Algerian engineer, Monsieur V. Cornetz. The player's desire to win, the recollection of his past successes, his confidence in himself, necessarily cause him, at a given moment, to think himself stronger than he really is. So that, if he wins, he is not surprised; but if he loses, he will tell himself: "I could have done better; I didn't do my best, I didn't concentrate all my attention." For such an estimate of himself to be just, it would be necessary for the player to base the idea of his strength not only upon the average of his previous victories, but also of his defeats. Self-conceit, however, prevents unsuccessful contests from coming to his mind to counterbalance the remembrance of his winnings. It comes about, then, that the player constantly overrates himself, and in all good faith. Whatever be his character, he is never tempted to attribute to himself a value less than his real worth. The modesty of certain players is all upon the surface and the mistrust of themselves, which they proclaim, is transformed into excessive confidence as soon as the game has begun. A player is a man who always compares himself to other men. He judges himself, not as an individual independent of his surroundings, but under the pressure of a vanity that is ever egged on by the presence of rival vanities. The moment two such vanities clash, each of necessity seeks victory, and begins by attributing to itself, without the least regard for reality, the strength necessary for success. To accept the combat is in itself, is it not, to believe that one is the stronger?

Monsieur Cornetz deals particularly with the chess-player, but his observations, as he himself says in his preface, are applicable to all games that are not purely games of chance, and even to athletic contests, fencing matches, and one might add, military operations, even of the most serious nature. To wage battle is to play a game. This psychology of the player is also that of the general. How many battles have been lost because the general overestimated himself. How many governments even have fallen because they were abandoned to the illusions of their self-conceit! Does not Napoleon III gayly setting out for the frontier provide the spectacle par excellence of the player who overrates himself? There is no such thing as a disinterested contest; the dullest game of cards excites in the opponents a certain desire to win. The very persons who boasted of their entire detachment are often the most eager to win once the game has started; they enter into it excitedly and when worsted keep watching for a favorable opening. Those players who believe that they play the game for the sole interest of its combinations, its emotions, are then, admitting their good faith, the victims of an illusion: they judge themselves to be other than they are. This is a rather common attitude in life. We all of us believe ourselves more or less to be other than we really are; so much so that an ingenious philosopher, M. Jules de Gaultier, has created a special term by which to denominate this universal penchant. He calls it *Bovaryism*, referring to the heroine of Flaubert's novel, who thought herself a *grande amoureuse* when she

was really nothing but a poor little sick woman. The player who pretends that he plays without any interest in victory is afflicted with *Bovaryism*. But perhaps he is also intent upon shielding his self-conceit in case of failure. Beaten, he will vow that he had as good a time as if he had won. This is a manner of self-consolation that does not lack a certain elegance. The fox who found the grapes too sour has furnished us with a charming example of this disdainful attitude. M. Cornetz has seen, in Algiers, on an old Arabian chess-board, this motto: "The loser always has his excuse." The basis of these excuses is this: "I should have played otherwise. If I had used such and such a pawn, or queen, or card, I would doubtless have won." Who has not been present at those post mortems where the players forget only this, that they know, at the moment of discussion, things that they did not know while the game was in full swing? The truth is that at a given moment, when one is seriously playing the game, one is playing as well as he can, no more and no less. The loser has an excuse; very well. But it is precisely because he is the loser. The winner needs none. To be winner is a fact; to be loser is another. There is in facts a logic, and the reason of the strongest is always the best. To believe, when one has been beaten, that one might not have been, is by that very fact to suppose that one might, at that moment, have been another person, which is absurd. But perhaps this illusion is due to inevitable causes. The chief point is, as I have already said, that at the moment when we have been beaten we recall, not our former defeats, but rather our former victories, and the victories only. We attribute to ourselves a general capability, a capability that is a matter of principle, and which may not be shaken by an accidental momentary inferiority. It never occurs to us, "our vanity prevents it," that our real worth is probably but a fairly equitable composite of equally accidental inferiorities and superiorities. The balance will always incline toward the side of our self-conceit.

It should be recognized that, if this illusion of our self-conceit has its great inconveniences, if it vitiates our critical judgment, not only of ourselves but of others, if it betrays us into false estimates, it possesses, on the other hand, great advantages. "The illusion that accompanies man in the course of his life," says M. Cornetz, "is a necessary condition of existence, a precious product of the vital instinct." The man who overestimates himself is also he who is capable of surpassing himself. It is necessary, in this great game of life, to have confidence in oneself. If one estimated oneself only at his proper value, one would not estimate himself sufficiently. If we did not grant to ourselves a power superior to our real power, we would never dare to undertake the impossible; now it is perhaps only the impossible that is worthy of being undertaken. From the purely practical point of view, if the end to be attained were not embellished by illusion, would we ever set about the task? It is well for a man, after a game of chess, to be able to say in all simplicity: "I could have played otherwise." That is not true, of course, but it may create in the future a great truth. Error is a great generator of truths. The truth of today has its root in the error of yesterday. Illusions have often created real powers. "You could do better," says the teacher to his pupil. He thus implants in the child's mind a belief, an idea which will at once engender a hope, and in the future, a force. Then let us not scoff too gayly at the player who has such firm confidence in himself. Doubtless this selfsame confidence will lead him to accept unequal battles in which he will be worsted; but it will happen also that he will emerge victor from struggles into which he would not have dared to venture had not beneficent illusion considerably magnified in his eyes his real capacity. And finally, it happens in many cases that the real worth of a person coincides with the estimate placed upon him by his self-conceit. One need not trust to it too much; it's only a matter of a game. On the other hand one need not on that account fear to repeat the old proverb: "Nothing venture, nothing have." All languages of the world have similar proverbs. This helps to show that all peoples have recognized that certain efforts are impossible without certain illusions, and that, of all principles of action, the most powerful and the most fruitful is still self-confidence.

THE BEYOND

Much is being said of the beyond in these days, perhaps because people no longer believe in it. Then there is Eusapia Palladino, whose performances, it seems, favor mysterious beliefs. Tables dance and tilt, violins play by themselves, and this puts perspicacious folk on the road to the beyond. Huysmans was converted in just this way. It is far easier to confuse the human reason than the laws of gravity.

Nevertheless, what is the beyond? I believe only in that country which I can locate. Where do you place it? The spirits locate it about us. Do you wish to speak with Mme. de Montespan? Here she is. With Napoleon? He hastens to respond. Would you consult Saint Anthony in regard to some lost object? Nothing more easy. The inhabitants of the beyond are at our disposal. They come as soon as they are bidden and reply most gently. And in order to prove that the two realms bear a strong resemblance to each other, they are even glad to talk plenty of nonsense: their intelligence never rises above the level of those who summon them.

This benevolent and familiar beyond does not, however, win universal approval. The immense majority of believers need a truly mysterious beyond, one that shall be inaccessible and unfathomable. Where is this beyond? Yonder, yonder, very far away.—But just where?—Far, far off, I tell you; farther than you could ever calculate.—And how are you assured of its reality?—By reason itself. It is impossible that man should die totally. This is proved by his very desire for immortality.

The early Christians were not in the least embarrassed in the matter of placing heaven. They beheld it on high, beyond the clouds, in a brilliant, serene region. Christ, by his ascension, had shown them the way. The expression has gone into the language: to rise to heaven. It no longer means anything since it has become known that the earth rotates on its own axis and that, consequently, there is for us in space neither above nor below. In order to rise to heaven at midnight one would have to take the same direction by which, at noon, he would descend. Heaven, then, cannot be situated on high. As to hell, which was formerly placed in the interior of the earth, let us not speak. The theologians of today make many reservations as to hell; they have learned that the prospect of cooking eternally in a huge caldron is not of a nature to excite much religious enthusiasm in the crowds. The beyond to which we are invited is a benign place. It is not quite the paradise of Mahomet; it is that of Fénelon,—a perfumed landscape where the streams are of milk, the pebbles of candy, the soil of chocolate. It still remains to locate this celestial confectionery in space.

Some have thought of the planets. But suppose they are really inhabited, as M. Flammarion hopes, and as is moreover fairly probable? Then let us seek farther, farther still. Let us question the uttermost stars,—those which our naked eye cannot see,—even those that the telescopes will never discover.

Their answer is known. They reply that they are worlds, suns, surrounded by earths, some living like ours, others dead like the moon. Analogy permits us to believe that what we do not see resembles greatly what we do see. If we were transported to the regions where simple folk place the beyond, we would turn back to our own earth and say, doubtless: The beyond is situated yonder.

There is no reasonably conceivable beyond. The entire universe is built upon the same plan and its component parts are limited by nothing. An immensity in which grains of sand whirl about at the mercy of the wind of infinity.

Beyond—Beyond what? One must know what he is talking about. We are creatures habituated to precision. When a man of the fourteenth-century thought of future life, his notion was very simple, but fairly clear. He beheld the blessed ranged upon the steps of a vast stage. In the background was an organ, played by an angel, and the music was so sweet that the whole audience was spell-bound: and this was to continue for all eternity! Today we would with difficulty accept such a paradise fashioned in the manner familiar to the devotees of large concerts. A little variety would be welcome. The taste for extended travel, for example, has gradually influenced the notion that certain persons form of the blessed life. Whereupon it becomes a paradise for Cook's tourists. Excursions are made to the rings of Saturn, just as, in their earthly life, they journeyed to the White Nile or to Japan. Somewhat farther than the first, but of the same genre.

The most ardent travelers rise, in their imaginations, from sun to sun, thrilled with the idea of a never-ending exploration filled with ever-renewed wonders.

These perpetual vacations seem a bit boresome to me. What will be proposed to me next? Here are the modern religions and philosophies, the Christians and the spiritualists, who offer me the contemplation of God. Very well. But God is no more admirable in the rings of Saturn or in Sirius than in the wings of a butterfly or in the eyes of a woman. What next? Wait. You speak of a woman,—doubtless of her whom you love? Here is the paradise of Mahomet, with its white, buxom houris, their hands ever perfumed, their caresses ever new.

Yes, that is more tempting. It is human, at least. But do the women, too, find lovers to their taste there? This paradise bears too much resemblance to a conquered town, where the victors disport themselves with the women captives. And it resembles altogether too much something less honest. At the end of an hour I should feel like leaving.

Well, suppose we remain upon earth, after all? Suppose we bravely accept the death of our dreams at the same time as the death of our bodies? This beyond is decidedly uncertain, quite vague and mobile. I do not believe that it exists everywhere; I believe that it is nowhere except in our infantile imaginations. Born with us, it will end at the same moment that we do, to be born anew in our posterity.

The beyond is the earthly tomorrow, as we bequeath it to our heirs and as they modify it by their efforts and in accordance with their tastes.

THE QUESTION OF FREE WILL

Those physicians were wise who, at a recent congress, voted to refuse making any statement upon the problems of responsibility propounded to them by the courts. What does responsibility mean? Where does it begin? What are its boundaries? One finds himself here not in the presence of a question of simple legal medicine; to speak of responsibility is to speak of free will, and to speak of free will is to be plunged into the fundamental mysteries of human philosophy. These mysteries, to tell the truth, are mysteries only because it is to man's interest that things should be so. We are accustomed to consider human acts as free acts, voluntarily consented to; the adoption of a contrary view would so interfere with our habits that social life would become exceedingly difficult. Our teachers or experience have taught us that our body is capable of two

kinds of movement,—the one involuntary and necessary, such as respiration, or the circulation of the blood, and the other voluntary, accomplished at will,—the movement of our limbs, our tongue, our lips. But a closer examination would soon show us that this division is very arbitrary. It is impossible for us to make our heart stop beating; but is it really possible to stop our finger from moving, and if it is, for how long? We can cease eating: but for how long? We can even stop breathing; for how long? In reality, the freedom of our bodily movements, if it exists, is a limited freedom, a freedom exercised within a very narrow circle,—the freedom of a prisoner who can pace back and forth in his cell. Similarly, the exercise of our external activity is subjected to rather strict conditions: we can speak, walk, work in a thousand different ways, but during a certain time only. At the end of this time we feel that our freedom is exhausted we are at the end of our chain. There is nothing more to do: we must obey. In whatever direction we may turn we behold looming forth the obstacle that will certainly bar our way. Sometimes there is annexed to the prison a little courtyard where we may walk about a little, but this courtyard is itself only a prison: the boundary has been set back a few paces, that is all.

If we now pass to the examination of the most delicate organs of our body,—the brain and the nervous system,—we see that the motions executed within these organs are likewise limited in their evolutions. I employ these simple terms expressly, that I may be better understood. We perceive these motions in the form of sensations or thoughts. Are we free to be hot or cold, to be hungry or thirsty? Are we independent of the ideas that come to us, the images that are formed in our mind, that is to say, our brain? No, most assuredly. At least, then, we are free to receive them or reject them, to show them the door or smilingly invite them in? Here we reach the crux of the question, for it is at this point that the will intervenes. What, indeed, is the will? The will is nothing more than the realization, effected by our mind, that of two motives one is more powerful than the other. The will is perhaps the least voluntary and the least free element in our make-up. Before it declares itself, we are often in a state that gives us the illusion of liberty. We are still in ignorance as to whether we shall go to right or to left. These moments of vacillation are sometimes agreeable and sometimes disagreeable. Most often they pass unperceived, and we find ourselves started on one of the two paths, totally unawares. Our will has acted mechanically. Our mind has worked like an automatic scale.

Whatever we do, there is a cause, and this cause itself depends upon another, and so on to infinity. If I am at this moment smoking a cigar, it is because Christopher Columbus discovered America. The search for causes leads to authentications of this order. But our acts have only a single direct cause. Several influences have combined and weighed upon the lever. Often, when we reflect upon the motives for our acts, we imagine that we have found them, yet the most important motive has escaped us. To enter into examples of this would be to enter the absurd; Pascal has given one which has become famous,—his epigram about Cleopatra's nose. It is saying little to aver that effects and causes are united like the links of a chain. I see effects and causes rather in the guise of an extremely complicated fabric, of which every thread depends upon the others. But such a representation may not be made materially. Let it suffice for us to understand and to admit that none of our actions is the beginning of a series. There is only a single series, which does not seem to have had a beginning and whose end it is impossible to foresee.

Notwithstanding, we have the sentiment of liberty, and consequently, of responsibility. These are very curious illusions and very mysterious, but illusions none the less. Among those of which our life is composed, they are perhaps the most useful; they are even more,—they are necessary. We are not free, yet we cannot act except by believing ourselves free. If for a moment we actually ceased to believe in free will, we should at once cease to act altogether. In his book on *Duplicisme Humain*, M. Camille Sabatier has written: "Liberty is as inexplicable as it is certain." It is, in my opinion, the illusion of liberty that is as inexplicable as it is certain, and, I add, necessary. Where I agree fully with him is when he asserts that the matter presents "a mystery of our nature." He has attempted a most ingenious explanation, but which, I believe, leaves still standing the determinist objections, of which I have summarized several of the features. It is the eternal opposition of feeling and, not reason but reasoning. But it matters little whether they teach and adopt one or the other theory; that could have no influence upon the conduct of men or upon their judgments. Nor would it have any influence upon our manner of looking upon crime and the various infractions of the law and moral conventions. If men are free and consequently responsible, there need be no change in our judicial institutions. If men are not free, if they are irresponsible, there need still be no change, for a crime is a crime just the same,—always an anti-social act against the repetition of which it is necessary to protect ourselves. It even seems that the determinists, to whom I belong, would be inclined rather to a very severe repression. A philosophic doctrine is not necessarily a social doctrine. A determinist, doubtless, could not admit the idea of punishment, but he will readily admit that of repression. And it all comes to the same thing. We must live. Societies have no choice. But it is easy to understand why the physicians, who are almost all determinists, should have resolved not to take a stand upon questions of responsibility. That is not within the province of medicine, which should limit itself to declaring whether the subject is healthy or ill, and to caring for him if he is entrusted into its hands.

One may, moreover, in agreement with Dr. Grasset, and also with the facts and common sense, admit that there are mentally sick persons, and that these persons vary as to the degree to which they are affected, that is to say, they are more or less conscious, more or less able to resist their impulses. The hypothesis of determinism cannot make us forget all the visible shades of difference between the normal individual and the typical madman. The normal man receives varied impressions, external and internal; some impel him to action, others hold him back: he establishes an equilibrium. Normal life is nothing but that,—a state of equilibrium, a static condition. The man who is termed abnormal is, on the contrary, more or less constantly out of

balance. He is impelled by one force that is not counterbalanced by another: he falls. When the wind blows always from the same direction upon a row of pines, it bends them all in the same direction. If the wind, though violent, blows alternately from opposite directions, the trees remain erect. These rows of pines will provide us, not with the image, but with the schema of the normal and the abnormal man. Neither one nor the other,—and the man as little as the tree,—is responsible either for the origin, or the power, or the direction of the wind which bends them and straightens them in turn or, on the contrary, breaks them forever as if they were mere reeds; there remains however, the fact, that while the one kept itself erect in a healthy posture, despite occasionally rude shocks, the other, subjected to a constant pressure, bent over from day to day with its head nearer to the ground, or even, as the result of a more than usually violent tempest, broke altogether.

It is a fact, and one must keep it in mind when he passes judgment upon trees or upon men. It is a fact, and that is all. Nevertheless, if the tree has been uprooted by a violent tempest, there is nothing left but to call the wood-cutters, who are the judges of trees. If they inquire into the cause of the disaster, it will be through pure curiosity; their business does not lie there; they know their duty and will perform it.

When we shall have exhausted all the arguments for and against all the degrees of responsibility that may be discovered in a healthy or a sick person, we shall find ourselves in agreement with the social wood-cutters, with the magistrates, on the necessity of removing and forever ridding society of him. Then, having once more become philosophers, we shall try to reach agreement upon this point: that it is a matter not of administering punishment but of preserving ourselves; our interest should be centered not upon the author, but the purpose of the crime. Let us not even speak of crime; let us speak of danger. Ah! How simple it all would be, or at least more simple than at present, if the notion of criminal act was superseded by that of dangerous act. The idea of crime is a metaphysical idea; the idea of danger is a social idea. The opinions of MM. Baudin, Faguet and de Fleury, which frighten M. Grasset, are in principle highly acceptable. On the occasion of each new crime society cannot institute a new philosophical debate nor set about resolving questions which, ever since there have been men who think, have troubled human thought. For some time they have not been asking the jury for their opinion upon the materiality of a fact; they subject them to an examination in philosophy. It's ridiculous.

There are on one side the assassins and on the other the assassinated. What difference does it make to me whether the fellow who'll split my head be an *apache* or a lunatic? What does matter to me, is to live. I feel intense compassion for the sick, but I am very anxious that persons suffering with madness be shut in.

All men are ill, said Hippocrates. We all need care; so I see nothing wrong about criminals attracting special attention from the medical corps. There are so many interesting cases among them!

THE INSURRECTION OF THE VERTEBRATES

It is well known how the spiritualists tried to capture Pasteur, because his theories, denying spontaneous generation, seemed to them his consecration of the old dogma of a Creator. Pasteur never professed such ideas; he limited himself to pursuing brilliantly his profession as a scientist. It was not without a feeling of sadness that, pestered by the admiration of a too pious gentry, he wrote to Sainte-Beuve, I believe: "Let us continue our labors, without giving heed to the philosophic or religious deductions that may be drawn from them."

Well, here is that same gentry trying, very maladroitly moreover, to turn to their profit the results of a new scientific theory which is beginning to make a stir in the world,—the law of vital constancy. M. Dastre expounded it the other day at the solemn session of the Institute and demonstrated its supreme importance. If one is eager to keep abreast of intellectual novelties, one should possess some notion of this recent scientific theory; just as one would blush not to possess any notion of Darwin's labors and the theory of evolution, which has now become a part of general culture.

Man is the product of an evolution the origin of which is contemporaneous with the very origins of the world. He has as ancestors not only men, but reckons in his genealogy all manner of animal species. His descent from the monkey through the medium of a semi-human form that is still little known, is today authenticated. The monkey, like all other mammals and also the marsupials (kangaroo, opossum) is a transformation of a reptile; the reptiles, to continue, were born of fishes, who are the first vertebrates to appear, and the fishes in turn descend from the annelides, humble little marine animals. But let us not go any farther back than the fishes, for, in this species we possess a certainty that may be daily demonstrated. At a certain stage of its development the human embryo has the chief characteristics of a fish. All of us were, at a certain moment of our unborn life, fishes; this is as certain as the most easily verified scientific fact. From this piece of evidence, and a hundred others, it has been possible to draw up this aphorism, which unites the evolution of the individual to general evolution: "Every individual, in his embryonic development, goes through the same phases through which the evolution of his species has gone in traversing the ages."

This monumental discovery of the transformation of species is, as we know, due almost entirely

to Darwin. It is he who propounded and demonstrated the principle of evolution. But if, in his so abundant books, he explained the *how*, he did not discover the *why*. He registered facts, but did not show why these facts should have been absolutely necessary. It is this gap which the theories of M. Quinton now fill, at the same time confirming in a brilliant manner the selfsame principles of Darwinism, evolutionism and transform-ism. Before M. Quinton, one might, strictly speaking, with a semblance of good faith, contest *Darwin's conclusions: henceforth, it is impossible*: the facts are interconnected; we know their necessary, implacable cause. Thanks to M. Quinton, evolutionism should rather be termed *revolutionism*.

There are in this theory, two things to consider: life itself, and the environment amid which it develops. Life is a fixed phenomenon. It began in a marine milieu, at the very beginnings of the world, and it tends constantly to preserve, through all the transformations of a terrestrial milieu, the original conditions of its appearance. As a consequence, the most highly developed animals, the superior animals, among which man takes first place, are those which have been able to preserve in the interior of their bodies, in the form of blood, a vital milieu almost identical with the original marine milieu,—the environment in which life was born: in fact, the degree of saltness in our blood represents the saltness of the sea at the moment life made its appearance, and, moreover, our internal temperature represents the mean temperature of the globe at the moment our species was born.

The terrestrial milieu is unstable. Its heat has constantly diminished. Formerly, in the most remote epochs, the vicinity of the poles, now an ice-covered and inaccessible extent, had a climate hotter than that of the tropics. Life was born amid this tropical environment, at the bottom of an ocean that had a far higher temperature than the Caribbean sea or the sea of Java. Nevertheless the poles grew colder and all the other parts of the world as well. Then animal life found itself faced with this alternative: either to accept the new conditions of the milieu, or to rebel against these conditions,—struggle and maintain internally despite the external temperature, the high temperature of its origin.

That is a solemn moment in the drama of the world. What is to happen? If the new conditions are accepted, it spells fatal decline. If they are repulsed, it means a magnificent future development. Almost all animal life submitted: it is today represented by the lowest class of living creatures: the invertebrates. A single representative of the animal world revolted, made a prodigious effort, entered into strife with the hostile milieu and dominated it: the vertebrate. Thus life, in its superior aspects, affirmed itself from the very earliest times as an insurrection.

M. Quinton, says: "The vertebrate stands forth as marked by a particular character, which distinguishes him from the rest of the animal kingdom, giving him a position apart, above. While the balance of the animal kingdom accepts, or rather undergoes, in the face of the progressive shrinking of the seas and the cooling of the globe, the new conditions that have come about, and to which it can yield only at the cost of intense suffering, the vertebrates give evidence of a special power; they refuse to accept the conditions and confronted by hostile circumstances maintain the sole conditions favorable to their existence.... They are not, then, like the invertebrates, the passive toys of circumstances that dominate them, but, in part, the masters of the fundamental conditions necessary to their welfare. In the midst of the physical world that surrounds him, ignores him and oppresses him, man is not the *sole insurgent*, the only animal in revolt against the natural conditions, the only one tending to found, in an instable, hostile medium, the fixed elements of a superior life. The simple fish, the simple mammal ... hold the essential physical laws in check. When man attacks the natural forces that surround him, in order to dominate the hostile elements in them, he first participates of the genius of the vertebrate."

I have purposely underscored the words *sole insurgent*. These words, in fact, indicate the orientation of our efforts the moment we attempt to apply the biological principles enunciated by M. Quinton to the social domain. Far from teaching stagnation, resignation, acceptance, he counsels on the contrary, if one understands him, revolt against all that bars the progress of life and the maintenance of its highest conditions of power and intensity. These ideas are related to the basic ideas of Nietzsche's philosophy: we must grow or succumb. It is the same with individuals and persons as with the animal species: those who accept the conditions provided by their traditional environment, those who do not react, are condemned to decadence: they are invertebrates. The traits of a superior organism, on the contrary, are reaction through deep, continued evolution, or by a brusque revolution against the mediocrity of the milieu which tends to dominate and reduce it.

In certain places it is freely asserted that the peoples of the future are the wise peoples slumbering in the tradition of a political order, of a religious order, or a moral order: those peoples, on the contrary, are in their decline. But there is something worse: there are political—or social groups that dream, not of attaining to the genius of the vertebrate, which spells perpetual combat against the hostility of the environment, but of becoming once again invertebrates, and of falling asleep gently in the lap of ancient traditions.

There is, according to the theories of M. Quinton, in the social realm as in the biological, a fixed point, and one that must remain fixed unless decline is to set in, and that is life; but we must not confuse life with the environment in which it evolves. Life is constant and the milieu is variable. The most diverse political and social institutions have been successively imagined by man to assure, according to the needs of the moment, the development of his life. And as, in the course of time, they have appeared to him insufficient, he has rejected them to imagine others more in conformity with his requirements: and thus social progress appears as a necessity, in the same way that anatomical progress has transformed an ocean worm into a fish and the fish into a mammal or a bird. In the two cases there is a certain end sought. It is for man to create for

himself the social conditions that will permit his life to maintain its loftiest aims.

When the social conditions that the old regime brought about in France appeared to men unsuited any longer to the maintenance of their life, they acted like good vertebrates,—they revolted. Civilization is nothing but a succession of insurrections, now against the hostility of physical forces,—especially against the cold,—now against social forces, which, after a period of usefulness, tend almost always to evolve in the direction of parasitism.

THE PESSIMISM OF LEOPARDI

Leopardi has never been widely read in France. While Schopenhauer has achieved a certain literary popularity, Leopardi has remained, even for scholars, in the shade. This is due in large measure to the mediocrity of his translators and his commentators....

Leopardi's poetry is difficult to enjoy. M. Turiello says that it is obscure even to Italians of the present generation. It is true that Leopardi is somewhat addicted to archaism and that, moreover, the Italian language has since his day undergone rapid development under the influence of French. His prose, despite its severe form, now too concise and now a trifle oratorical, is more approachable.... But if translation, is always a difficult task, it is particularly difficult to translate Leopardi.

In prose as in verse he is a pessimist more by nature than as a result of reasoning. It is his sensibility rather than his intellect that speaks. He constructed no system; he gathers his impressions, his observations, and attempts, not without arbitrariness, to generalize them. His philosophy is entirely physiological: the world is bad because his personal life is bad. He conceives the world in most terrifying fashion, and supposes that if all men do not judge it as he does, it is because they are mad. Optimism, in fact, is fairly widespread. While there is life there is hope. The fable of Death and the Wood-cutter is a fair symbol of humanity's out-look. On the other hand it is certain that literatures and philosophies, even those which aim to produce laughter as well as those which exalt life, are generally pessimistic. There is a tragic background to Molière's plays and a gloomy background to Nietzsche's aphorisms. Absolute, beatific optimism is compatible only with a sort of animal insensibility and stupidity: only idiots are constantly laughing and are constantly happy to be alive. Absolute pessimism, however, can develop only in certain depressed organisms: its extreme manifestations are plainly pathological and connected with maladies of the brain.

Schopenhauer affirms that life is evil, yet he loves it and enjoys it. Let fame come, and he expands with cheer. His character is by no means gloomy. He is at the same time a philosopher and a humorous writer. Leopardi never knew these expansions. He affects to despise even glory, for which he nevertheless labors. But he, too, is a keen, witty spirit, although ever bitter; and he, too, is a humorist. He certainly takes pleasure in writing. If he does not know life's other joys, he knows that of being able to impart a beautiful, puissant form to a lucid thought. Nevertheless his existence, much more logical than Schopenhauer's, is in exact accord with his philosophy. Sickly, isolated, not understood, Leopardi lacked the strength to react; but if he allowed himself to be swept along by his sadness, it was at least in full knowledge of the fact. He questions his despair and enters into discussion with it. And this questioning presented us with those fine dialogues which, together with a few thoughts, were gathered together under the title *Operette Morali*.

Leopardi died in 1837. His writings seem of this very day. Almost all the questions touched upon with unparalleled sagacity in the Dialogue Between Tristan And A Friend are such as still interest philosophers and critics. "I understand," says Tristan, "and I embrace the deep philosophy of the newspapers, which, by killing off all other literature and all other studies of too serious and too little amusing a nature, are the masters and the beacon-light of the modern age." Already, in his day, the flatterers of the crowd were saying, like the Socialists of today: "Individuals have disappeared in the face of the masses." Already sober stupidity affirmed: "We live in an epoch of transition," as if, resumes Tristan, all epochs and all centuries were not a transition toward the future!

The theme itself of the dialogues is the idea of the wickedness of life and the excellence of death. It recurs time and again and Leopardi manages to avoid monotony only by the ingeniousness of his imagination, the beauty of his style, the keenness of his wit. For example, the magnificent passage in which, after having said that although the world is rejuvenated every spring it is continually growing older, he announces the supreme death of the universe: "Not a vestige will survive of the entire world, of the vicissitudes and the infinite calamities of all things created. An empty silence, a supreme calm will fill the immensity of space. Thus will dissolve solve and disappear this frightful, prodigious mystery of universal existence, before we have been able to understand or clarify it."

Without a doubt. But in the meantime we must live, or else die. And if we choose to live, it is reasonable to do our best to adapt ourselves to life. Pessimism has but the slightest of philosophical value. It is not even a philosophy; it is literature, and, too often, rhetoric. This man is a bit ridiculous, tranquilly pursuing his existence, daily adding a page to his litany of death's delights. In short, Leopardi, like many another man, humble or exalted, suffers from not being happy; his originality consists less in taking pleasure in his suffering, which is not very rare, than in finding reasons for this pleasure and expounding them logically and resolutely. His sincerity is

absolute.

Considered in opposition to the base reveries of the promissors of happiness, this literature is useful. But it is good that it should be rare, for if we finally got to take pleasure in it alone, it would prove only depressing. Life is nothing and it is everything. It is empty and it contains all. But what does the word *life* mean? It is an abstraction. There are as many *lives* as there are living individuals in all the animal species. These lives are developed according to curves and windings of infinite variety. It is the height of folly to bring a single judgment to bear upon the multitude of individual lives. Some are good, others bad, the majority colorless, according to every possible degree. In this order of facts there is no justice, and the reign of justice is particularly chimerical in this case, because the joys and sorrows of a life are related far less to the events by which it is crossed than to the physiological character of the individual.

Abstractions do us much harm by impelling us to the quest of the absolute in all things. Joy does not exist, but there are joys: and these joys may not be fully felt unless they are detached from neutral or even painful conditions. The idea of continuity is almost self-negating. Nature makes no leaps; but life makes only bounds. It is measured by our heart-beats and these may be counted. That there should be, amid the number of deep pulsations that scan the line of our existence, some grievous ones, does not permit the affirmation that life is therefore evil. Moreover, neither a continuous grief nor a continuous joy would be perceived by consciousness.

Whether we deal with the transcendental theories of Schopenhauer or the melancholy assertions of Leopardi, we arrive at the same conclusion. Pessimism is not admissible, any more than is optimism. Heraclitus and Democritus may be dismissed back to back, while fearlessly and with a moderate but resolute hope, we try to extract from each of our lives,—we men,—all the sap it contains, even though it be bitter.

Leopardi was not only the poet and the moralist of despair. At the age of seventeen he had already achieved note as a scholar and a Hellenist, with his *Essay Upon Popular Errors Of The Ancients* (1815). During the two years that followed he produced several dissertations on the *Batrachomyomachia*, on Horace, on Moscus, and Greek odes in the manner of Callimachus, the perfection of which was such that it was believed some forgotten manuscript had been brought to light. Niebuhr affirmed in 1822 that the *Notes On The Chronicle of Eusebus* would have done honor to the foremost German philologists. Leopardi had reached this point when in a flash his personal genius was revealed to him, and then there appeared his *Poems*, followed by his *Moral Tracts*. He died at the age of thirty-nine (1837), leaving a series of labors of which each separate division achieves perfection: the scholar, the poet, the writer of prose, the translator, the man of wit are equally admirable in Leopardi. Were it not for the lingering illness that accompanied his deeply sensitive career, he would have been one of the most luminous geniuses of humanity. His originality lies in his having been the most sombre.

II

"The three greatest pessimists who ever existed," said Schopenhauer one day,—"that is to say, Leopardi, Byron and myself,—were in Italy during the same year, 1818-1819, and did not make one another's acquaintance!" One of these "great pessimists," Leopardi, happened just at this time to be writing a little dialogue that might well be reprinted at the beginning of every year. It would always seem new.

Life is bad, says Leopardi, and here is the proof: nobody has ever found a man who would wish to live his life over again exactly as it happened at first:—who would wish even, at the beginning of a new year, to have it exactly the same as the year just past. What we love in life is not life such as it is, but rather life such as it might be, such as we desire it to be.

But since this *Dialogue Between The Passer-By And The Almanac-Vendor*, if it has ever been translated, has remained buried in unreadable volumes, here is a version of this excellent, though somewhat bitter, page:

The Almanac-Vendor.—Almanacs, new almanacs! New calendars! Will you buy some almanacs, sir?

The Passer-by.—Almanacs for the new year?

Vendor.—Yes, sir.

Passer-by. Do you think it will be a happy one,—this coming year?

V.—Oh, yes, sir! Certainly!

P.—As happy as the one just past?

V.—Oh! Far, far more so!

P.—As happy as the one before that?

V.—Far, far more.

P.—As happy as which other one, then? Wouldn't you be glad to have the coming year the same as any one of the recent years?

V.—No, sir. No. That would hardly please me.

P.—How long have you been selling almanacs?

V.—For twenty years, sir.

P.—Which of those twenty years would you prefer the new year to resemble?

V.—I? I don't know.

P.—Can't you recall some year that seemed happy to you?

V.—Upon my word, no, sir.

P.—Yet life is a good thing, isn't it?

V.—Oh, yes indeed!

P.—You would be willing to live these twenty years all over again, and even all the years since you were born?

F.—I should say so, my dear sir. And would to God that were possible!

P.—Even if this life were to be exactly the same that you lived before,—no more no less,—with the same pleasures and the same sorrows?

F.—Oh, that! Indeed no!

P.—Then what sort of life would you wish?

F.—Just a life, that's all,—such as God would grant me, without any other conditions.

P.—A life left to accident, of which nothing would be known in advance,—a life such as the coming year brings?

F.—Exactly.

P.—That's what I, too, would desire, if I had my life to live over again,—what I and everybody else would wish for. But that means that fate, up to this very day, has treated us badly. And it is rather easy to see that the common opinion is, that in the past evil has triumphed greatly over good, since nobody, if he had to go over the same road again, would consent to be reborn. That life which is good is not the life we know, but the life we do not know,—the life ahead of us. Beginning with the new year, fate is going to deal kindly with us,—with you and me and everybody,—and we are going to be happy.

V.—Let us hope so.

P.—Well, let me see your handsomest almanac.

V.—Here you are, sir. It costs thirty cents.

P.—Here's your money.

V.—Thanks, sir. See you again. Almanacs! New almanacs! New calendars!

There is, perhaps, a slight error in Leopardi's reasoning. It is not because our life has been bad that it would be a burden to begin it all over again. Even a happy life lived twice would scarcely possess any greater pleasures. The element of curiosity must be taken into account. There is no human being, however resigned to the monotony of a becalmed existence, who does not in the bottom of his heart hope for some unforeseen event.

But is it really true that this idea is not contained in Leopardi's dialogue? It is there, although hidden, and doubtless I have taken it from there. Wherever it may come from, it is true, at least if it be applied to life as a whole. For everybody cherishes the remembrance of hours, and sometimes days, which he would gladly live over again. It is often one of the occupations of men to seek to create in their lives circumstances that plunge them for a moment back into the joys of the past, even if they must pay for this momentary resurrection with subsequent pain....

Leopardi, who was a distinguished philologist, an excellent Hellenist, a great poet and an ingenious philosopher, endowed with eloquence, was unable to discover happiness or even peace in the exercise of these multiple gifts. His health was of the most wretched; his heart, left empty, sounded in his bosom at the slightest shock; he was timid and his nerves quivered at every jar, like those harps which were in fashion during his youth. He was born four years before Victor Hugo and died young, without having tasted fame, while Manzoni, who was destined to fill an entire century, had been for a long time known throughout Europe. Is the source of Leopardi's pessimism to be sought among these divers causes? That is hard to believe. The invalid, far from cursing life, is filled with hope; he is an optimist, and wishes to get well; he knows that he will recover. He is not the person with whom to speak of the infinite vanity of all things. It would rouse his fury to listen to the condemnation of those boons that are momentarily out of his reach but which he is preparing to seize and reconquer. Scarron was more sickly and more deformed than Leopardi, yet he was none the less a gay, all too gay, fellow. As for not being understood, or at least, not being received at one's proper value,—there is nothing in that to make a healthy mind pessimistic. The superior man, after all, scorns the opinion of men so long as it remains only an opinion,—that is to say, a matter without practical consequences. And this was Leopardi's situation, for he could have lived in independence upon his scant, but honorable patrimony.

Pessimism is related to character, and character is an expression of physiology. The case with writers, philosophers and poets is exactly the same as with men of other professions. They are gay, sad, witty, morose, avaricious, liberal, ardent, lazy, and their talent assumes the color of their character.

If one were to make a study of literature from this point of view,—a procedure which would not lack interest,—one would very probably discover a great number of pessimists, or, as they were called formerly, sad spirits. There are few men of worth who have not at times found a bitter

taste to life, even among those who, like M. Renan, professed eternal joviality. There is no great writer without great sensibility; he is capable of keen joys, and of excessive pain as well. Now pain, which is depressive, leaves deeper traces in life than joy. If intelligence does not rule, if it does not intervene to establish a hierarchy, or an equilibrium of sensations, then the sad ideas triumph because of their superior numbers and power. Renan's serenity is perhaps only the apathy of indifference; Goethe's serenity represents the victory of intellect over sensibility.

Pessimism is neither a religious sentiment nor a modern one, although it has often assumed religious form and although the most celebrated pessimists belong to the nineteenth century. The Greeks, who knew everything, knew the despair of living: the pessimism of Heraclitus had preceded the optimism of Plato. There are few pages more bitter than those in which the naturalist Pliny summarizes the miseries of human life. Nature casts man upon the earth; of all animals he is the only one destined to tears; he cries from the moment of birth and never laughs before his fortieth day. And after having enumerated all the evils and the passions which desolate mankind, Pliny concludes by approving the ancient Greek epigram: "It is best not to be born or to die as soon as possible."

Leopardi has scarcely done more than paraphrase these elementary ideas, but this he has done with abundance and ingeniousness. So funereal is his spirit that he throws a veil of mourning over the most charming things: "Enter a garden of plants, herbs and flowers," he says, "even in the gentlest season of the year. You cannot turn your glance in any direction without discovering traces of misery. All the members of this vegetable family are more or less in a 'state of suffering.' There a rose is wounded by the sun that has given it life; it shrivels, blanches, and withers away. Further on, behold that lily, whose most sensitive, most vital parts are being sucked by a bee.... This tree is infested by a swarm of ants; others, by caterpillars, flies, snails, mosquitoes; one is wounded in its bark, tortured by the sun, which penetrates into the wound; the other is attacked in the trunk or in its roots. You will not find in all this garden a single small plant whose health is perfect.... Every garden is, in a way, nothing but a vast hospital,—a place even more lamentable than a cemetery,—and if such beings are endowed with sensibility, it is certain that non-existence would to them be far preferable to existence." Leopardi here commits the error of him who wishes to prove too much. His pessimism abdicates reason, and the sentence about nothingness being preferable to life, which in Pliny was beautiful and philosophic, acquires in the Italian philosopher a somewhat ridiculous sentimentality.

Jouffroy, perhaps with this page in mind, has put tender souls on guard against any belief in the sensibility of plants: let us leave that to the reveries of Pythagoras,—so noble, from other standpoints,—or to the fairy tales, whither we may go of an evening in spring to pluck the rose that speaks. But if he had possessed a more intimate knowledge of nature, and of the relations between insects and plants, what a picture at once admirable and cruel would not Leopardi have been able to draw! Those mosquitoes, upon whom he looks as allies of the caterpillars in ravaging the leaves of some cherry-tree, are ichneumons, and it is the caterpillars themselves that they have come to attack, piercing them with a long, hollow borer which permits the mosquito to lay in the very flesh of the caterpillar eggs which, when they become larvae, will gnaw the living flesh like terrible little vultures.

If Leopardi had known this and many another thing,—if he had known that every living creature is in turn prey and depredator, in turn eater and eaten, he would have considered with even greater bitterness the arrival of the new year, which hastens from the very first days of its springtime, to impart full strength and full passion to the instincts of life and devastation.

Leopardi despairs: he is, therefore, a weakling. His humble almanac-vendor is made of better clay. He hopes; he wishes to live and live happily; he possesses at least a little of that energy without which other gifts prove only too often to be blemishes and burdens.

THE COLORS OF LIFE

It was formerly the custom in such provinces as Normandy, for example, or Brittany, to consecrate children to the color blue. The vow was limited to a certain number of years,—seven, fourteen, or twenty-one,—probably because of the virtues of the number seven, as considerable as they are mysterious. Most often the final figure was decided upon,—the age of reason, says the Church, which considers it never too soon to place its hand upon the conscience and the will. It was charming for the little girls, though somewhat monotonous; on the contrary, it was troublesome to the little boys. But it seems the custom was efficacious in warding off the illnesses of childhood, and that it drew to the "consecrated one" the protection of the gods—I mean, of the Virgin—and of the celestial court. The divine personages, inhabiting the sky, which is blue, were in fact seen in blue by the popular imagination, and to adopt their color and assume their livery was to put oneself in the shelter of their power and win their good grace.

Women, through an analogous, though much more complicated and varied symbolism, often select a color and match all the elements of their toilette to it as far as fashion permits. It is exceedingly difficult to ascertain the reason for their choice. They themselves are at a loss for explanation. Often they believe that they have chosen the color or the shade that best frames their complexion or that harmonizes best with the color of their hair. But often they go astray. Those who are fond of bright blue would look far prettier in very pale green or in deep red, for

example. They admit this, but for form's sake only: a secret power holds them to the color that they have desired through instinct,—the color under which they will live, under which they will know love and all the joys and all the tears of life.

Not only women, but men have their color. We seem to do the choosing, but it is nature that imposes it upon us,—it is she that dedicates us to the shade that shall be our favorite atmosphere.

One who will never feel merry amid red hangings will grow cheerful amid green or yellow. Astrologers say that we are dominated by a planet that controls our destiny. This is not very easy to understand. On the contrary, nobody would deny the rôle played in our lives by colors. Would such and such a woman have evoked the passion which is today her happiness if her gown, on that evening, had been rose and not mauve? Who can tell? It requires so little to entrance the eye and so little to provoke it. A false note, and the concert that was thrilling us fills us with laughter. If Cleopatra's nose, said Pascal, had been shorter, the face of the world would have been changed. As for me, I believe that Cleopatra rather resembled Dido, who, according to Scarron's mot, was "somewhat snub-nosed, in the African style." Perhaps it was really the happy shade of her tunic, the harmonious hue of her peplum that vanquished Antony and brought him to the feet of the queen of Egypt. History, which so often gossips beside the point, is mute upon this capital question. Nevertheless, were I to write the life of Cleopatra, I should write it in green,—Nile green, of course,—and nobody, I believe, would have the effrontery to contradict me.

Writing lives or stories in such and such a color is one of the things I have recently tried to do, and the attempt has in some instances proved to be a rather delicate affair to manage. There are blue women; there are rose ones, and mauve and red; that is to say, they may be scarcely represented except in association with one of these colors or shades. Conceiving an old maid who had retained her good looks, who was very pious and yet of very equivocal habits, I could see her only in violet. The story is violet from beginning to end; it was impossible for me to introduce a different hue; I would have felt that I was committing a gross offence against harmony. The lady is vowed to violet: to place upon her head a blue or rose hat would have been a sort of sacrilege which would have terrified even her. Can this be the reason why her narrow life as an old maid found late in life so many happy, if perverse, days? Without a doubt, for violet, which is her color, is also her logic, and it is always well to have respected the logic of one's destiny.

Now, in thus amusing myself, I have not made any pretensions toward reforming esthetics, nor toward revolutionizing the conditions of the art of writing. I have simply been playing with a box of pastels, loving the colors for themselves, one by one, somewhat in the manner of the great and singular artist Odilon Redon, whose flowers are so real that one is moved to smell them.

We have our favorite colors. Tastes and colors.... This aphorism is not at all so frivolous as one might believe. Nietzsche, who was by no means a superficial spirit, cites it willingly. It is an argument that favors individualistic philosophy and freedom of thought. It is an argument, too, and not the least valuable, that supports determinism and the philosophy of necessity. For the colors we love are not dictated by choice but by a secret sympathy which it is impossible for us to reason out. The study of tastes and colors should form part of psychology. Perhaps there might even be discovered here the elements of a new science. Being fond of red or of green is not a matter to be dismissed with indifference.

A preference for red indicates rudeness, and the fondness for green reveals tenderness of character. It is known, moreover, that red is an excitant, while green induces repose, and meditation. The studios of the firm of Lumière, where photographic plates are prepared, were at first provided with red panes of glass; but this led to such effervescence,—the men and women, after several hours of red gazed at one another with such sparkling eyes, that it was necessary to have recourse to panes of a soothing color. Men that come from large cities, overexcited by the disharmony of sounds and colors, can regain a bit of calm only amid the forests and the prairies or at the sea-shore, which is green when it is not blue. Blue is the most soothing of colors, and it is doubtless thanks to its blue sky that the South may endure the brilliancy of its springs, the purple of its autumns.

Color has its importance. Before making friends with anyone, before undertaking the conquest of a woman, observe what their favorite colors are. Think at the same time of your own, and try to make happy combinations. If you are fond of red, take to yourself a dash of blue, thus forming an agreeable lilac; and if it is blue that charms you, do not reject yellow; this combination will give you all the shades of green and will assure you lifelong peace. How many misfortunes have been caused by the maladroit mixing of hostile colors! But above all, beware of violet. There is no more perfidious hue; it is, among the colors of life, the least stable and the most hypocritical.

THE ART OF SEEING

Mon voyage dépeint
Vous sera d'un plaisir extrême.
Je dirai: J'étais là; telle chose m'advint:
Vous y croirez être vous-même.

(The tale of my travels will be extremely pleasant to you, I'll say: "I was there; such and such things happened to me." You'll imagine that you're there yourself.)

"Alas!" the loving dove would have replied, if he had taken courses under M. Claparède, professor of psychology at the University of Geneva. "Alas! What faith may I have in your testimony? You will tell me what will take place in your head and I'll not have the consolation, as a reward for your absence, of knowing your real adventures!" But this was not what La Fontaine had in mind. In his day they believed in the value of testimony offered in good faith. An eye-witness inspired full confidence. People bowed with mute deference before the honest man who said: "I was there; such and such things happened to me." And the custom continues. Nevertheless, in certain places, they are beginning to show a little less confidence. They have been observing and reflecting and have arrived at the conclusion that the majority of men report far less what they have seen than what they believed they saw. They repeat much less what they heard than what they believed they heard. A dozen persons having witnessed an accident will present a dozen different accounts, or, at least, accounts that do not harmonize exactly. Still better, among the dozen there will be one, perhaps, who will have seen nothing, and another who will have seen the contrary to what his companions saw.

I have made many observations in regard to this subject. One of these observations is that, if by accident I have had direct and exact knowledge of an event reported by a newspaper, the newspaper report will very often be in contradiction to the facts personally known to me. Another observation is, that every time I have read the description of a place that is familiar to me, the description, in almost every case, has seemed to me inexact, incomplete,—in short, false. Huysmans was a meticulous observer; more than any one else he possessed the gift of seeing things well; his sharp eye pierced and bored into men and things. More, he had a passion for exactness, and he would scour all Paris to verify the color of a door or the height of a house. He would have considered it a sort of literary crime to describe anything he had not seen with his own eyes. Well! This man with the miraculous eye said to me one day, speaking of the Bièvre, a little stream which at that time still flowed in the open, between the fortifications and the Botanical Garden: "There is where you may see the last poplars of Paris." This old Parisian, who loved the banks of the Seine, had never beheld its poplars, some of which are truly wonderful, as at the Pont Royal,—the poplars which grow almost along its entire distance. A year ago, a group of us, all serious-minded gentlemen of Paris and of the quartier, were discussing the number of arches that comprise the bridge of Saints-Pères. One may walk every day across a bridge without knowing the number of its arches, but one of us who confessed that he had looked at this bridge from the barge or from the quay perhaps a thousand times in his life, was unable to settle the matter for us. I knew a librarian who was exceedingly fond of the Memoirs of Casanova and who mangled his name, calling him always, and emphatically, Casanova de Seignalt instead of Seingalt, which is the right form. I have been conducting regularly, in the same review, for some twelve years, a chronicle under the title *Epilogues*; one of my friends, a fellow staff-member of the same review, has said or written to me at least ten times: "I have read your latest *Episodes*...."

This reminds me of the English historian Froude, with whom Dr. Gustave Le Bon recently entertained us, dealing with this very question of testimony. Froude possessed a genius for seeing things exactly opposite to what they really were. A curious example of this is given; it concerns the description he gives of the town of Adelaide, Australia. "I saw at our feet," he said, "in the plain cut by a stream, a city of one hundred and fifty thousand inhabitants, of which not one has ever known or ever will know, the least uncertainty upon the matter of the regular return of his three meals per day." Now, Adelaide is built upon a height, and, at the time Froude visited it, its population, half as numerous as he said it was, was a prey to a terrible famine. And this is the testimony of a grave personage, with a European reputation,—one of the English historians most esteemed by those who have not read him.

"If Froude had lived several centuries earlier," adds M. Le Bon, "all his affirmations would have been held as precious documents, since they came from an eye-witness whose good faith there was no reason for suspecting. How many very serious histories are written with details as little trustworthy as this!"

Jules Simon was astounded "that so many honest persons contradict each other when giving accounts of events that they have witnessed. At every step I encounter this frightful spectacle. Man is least sure of his own spirit. He is not sure of his eyes: the fact is that his eyes and his memory are in strife with his imagination. He believes that he is seeing; he believes that he is remembering, and he is really inventing."

This is what explains those ancient and modern, and even contemporary tales of miracles, apparitions and wonderful happenings that are often attested by a large number of witnesses. The number of witnesses signifies nothing, nor does their honesty or their good faith. On the contrary, good faith, in the matter of testimony, is an element to be on guard against. It is far better to deal with bad faith, which betrays itself always by some blunder. Saint Paul attests that Christ resurrected was beheld by more than five hundred persons; well, it is a matter of doubt now as to whether there ever existed a person named Jesus and surnamed the Christ. Thousands upon thousands of persons in the Middle Ages, and even later, saw the Devil, and, adds M. Le Bon, if unanimous testimony may be considered as proving anything, one might say that the Devil is the personage whose existence has been best demonstrated. Gregory of Tours, an historian of evident good faith, was present during his life at hundreds of miracles, which he describes most complaisantly. He saw them, controlled them: yet the majority of them are pure extravagances, inadmissible in our day even by the most obtuse of pietists. Contemporary history and judicial reports prove to us constantly the worthlessness of evidence. At the time of the *Liban*

catastrophe, when the vessel went down in broad daylight as the result of a collision, it was impossible to learn from the surviving members of the crew whether the captain was or was not on the bridge at the time of the accident. Some had seen him there, while others swore that he was not on the bridge. In a certain criminal trial it becomes necessary to identify a person who has been but glimpsed; they succeed in identifying him, but only by influencing the witnesses, placing them on the possible track or upon that which justice desires them to follow. According to M. Claparède's experiments, a person of whom only a glimpse has been got, if the witnesses are not influenced, is hardly recognized by one person in four, and at that hesitantly.

Really good observers are very rare. Napoleon pretended to recall every face he had looked upon once. This has become legendary, but it is not quite so. He confused all the names. One day, he sees a certain face in a deputation and thinks that he recognizes it. It was a scholar who was well known in that day, named Ameilhon. The following dialogue takes place: "Aren't you Ancillon?"—"Yes, sire, Ameilhon."—"Librarian of Sainte-Geneviève?"—"Yes, sire, of the Arsenal."—"Continuator of the History of the Ottoman Empire"—"Yes, sire, of the History of the Low Empire." After which Ameilhon, enchanted with the honor, went off, declaring everywhere most emphatically: "The emperor is amazing. He knows everything." And we, in our turn, might say: men are amazing; they imagine that it is enough to have witnessed an event to be sure of that event! The matter is far more complicated. Certainty is difficult to acquire.

Nothing is more difficult than that which is too easy. Nobody would imagine that he could play the violin without having learned how; and if he did, the least attempt would at once extinguish his pretense. But to see? What more simple than that? All one has to do is open one's eyes. "I saw it," is the reply of a witness whose story is contested; "Do you take me for a fellow suffering from hallucination?" Precisely, or else for a purblind person, as the case may be. As a matter of fact, when it comes to seeing, men display two tendencies: they see what they wish to see, what is useful to them, what is agreeable. The second is the tendency toward inhibition; they do not see what they do not wish to see, what is useless to them, or disagreeable.

The great rule by which almost everything may be explained, is the rule of utility. Certain artisans were visiting the Universal Exposition. They looked about, walked along, and had seen nothing. Farther on they continued to look about, and this time they stopped; they had caught sight of a machine that could be of use to them in their particular work. We do not see that to which we are indifferent. The image glides by, fades and dies out before having had time to become fixed, and we make no effort to retain it.

I knew a colonial functionary who had travelled around the globe, and who spent years in our various colonies in Africa, Asia and America. Once in a while I am tempted to question him. But he is at a loss for reply. Occupied only with his advancement and with his family affairs, he really saw nothing. Of Singapore, the strange city whence a young writer, M. Cassel, has brought us such dazzling, magic impressions, this fine fellow said to me: "Pretty place; a few houses in the European style." I have asked many a question in my life, but never have I received so stupid an answer. But I understand that questions are always indiscreet. To ask anybody what he has seen is to subject him to torture. He sinks a fishing-line into his memory and brings up nothing. Then he tries to invent, and the result is wretched. Hence, for tourists, the great usefulness of the guide-books. Without these books they would have seen nothing, and without them they would recall nothing. "What did I see at Rome?" They open to the marked page. "Rome, Rome?" said a hosier whom his wife had dragged off to Italy. "Ah! I remember! That's the place where I purchased this miserable flannel waistcoat."

In company of those who see nothing or almost nothing are those who see crooked or inversely altogether,—those who allow themselves to be guided far less by their eyes than by their sensibility, who believe that a thing exists because it seems to them that they have received such an impression. Whoever has a department under him, said a telegraph inspector, has been able to prove how inexact the reports he receives often are, and how necessary it is to verify the assertions of agents as to events in which they have been actors or spectators. The account of an event that has just taken place is founded upon the impressions received rather than upon direct observation. At the end of several days the imagination has come into play and it adds the finishing touch to the crystallization of one's conviction. At this moment, if there was an initial error, it has become ineradicable. This explains all those disputes between the public and administrative agents. Each one is actuated by good faith, but each has beheld the event in a different light,—that of his own particular interest,—the one intent upon upholding respect for law or rule, the other eager only to violate it or circumvent it. If the case is taken to court, the judge, whose authoritarian tendency is very marked, almost always finds the agent of the law in the right. It is nevertheless quite certain that the agent is not to be believed more than once out of two times on the average. Even this proportion is perhaps highly exaggerated.

It so happens that according to special plans there is, at the University of Geneva, a large window opening upon an interior corridor, which is to the left as the students enter opposite the janitor's lodge. One day, M. Claparède questioned fifty-four students as to the existence of this window, which they passed by every day. Do you know how many asserted categorically that the window did not exist? Forty-four! Astounded, M. Claparède declares that such a collective testimony is disconcerting and discouraging. And who would not agree with him? Who does not think with horror, after this experiment, of all those criminal trials where a verdict is rendered on the strength of witnesses' testimony? M. Claparède comes to the conclusion that a single witness may be right despite many opposing witnesses whose stories agree. Unanimity itself should be severely controlled, and he adds, quite in accord with my own notions upon the matter: "One is led to ask whether it is not the rule to disregard those objects about us which are without interest

to us, and if it is not only by accident, and exceptionally, that such objects leave an imprint upon the sensitive plate of our memory?" Accident, of a surety, or else a particularly sensitive plate. If indeed our eye functions mechanically somewhat in the manner of a photograph lens, we are compelled, in order not to clutter the storehouse of our memory, to make a choice of the images which we classify therein. In this an instinct guides us, though not always infallibly, and calls to our attention those images useful to the conservation or the defense of our life.

Without education, without civilized habits, which constantly increase the number of our requirements of every kind, we should, like animals, have need to retain but a small number of images.

The life of animals moves in a rather restricted circle, and there is not one of their acts that is not dictated by utility. Men, too, obey the rule of utility, but their imagination magnifies this field of the useful in a singular manner, and they find themselves obliged, for the purpose of mere existence, to open their memory to a considerable number of images to which animals are absolutely indifferent. We behold on a table, in a single glance, the plates, the food, the flowers, the glasses and all the rest; the dog sees only the food; the flowers that give us pleasure, the general arrangement that charms us, leave him utterly insensible to their attraction. There are also things to the sight of which we are ourselves insensible: those which are neither beautiful nor ugly, nor useful, nor harmful, neither good nor bad,— everything that is not worth the trouble of being qualified, everything that is neutral to our senses as to our imagination. If, then, we are asked to give testimony regarding the existence of these objects, regarding the reality of those things that cause us neither pain nor pleasure, and which, therefore, we have neglected to retain in our memory, we should be greatly embarrassed.

In general, when we are questioned we have a tendency to affirm that which we believe probable and to deny the case that seems to us improbable. Thus, in the case of the window, this window, opening upon an interior corridor, seemed to the students who were questioned quite improbable, since the thing was useless, even absurd.

In the second place, and this is very important, we hold in our minds a series of types of fact to which invariably we relate the new events that we happen to witness. If, for example, we are in principle assured that every automobile accident is due to the drivers of these vehicles, it is with difficulty that we admit, even if we have seen it with our own eyes, that the accident was the fault of the victim. The case will be just the contrary with the chauffeur: to him, the victim is always in the wrong. But if, for us, the chauffeur is always wrong, our attitude is equally unreasonable. In either case, the images will be distorted and if we are questioned, we will reply with lies uttered in all good faith: "This is so because it ought to be so." M. Claparède even goes so far as to admit that the evidence of various individuals may be erroneous, even if they all agree. I am of his opinion, because it is quite normal that the same interest or the same absence of interest unconsciously guides witnesses of diverse origin and condition. All the ancient explorers of the Kerguelen Isles saw there only sterile and uninhabitable lands. Yet in recent days a colony composed of men from Havre and Norwegians has established itself there and finds the country rough, but healthful and well suited not only to fishing but also to pasturage.

It appears, from all this, that our eyes are uncertain. Two persons look at the same clock and there is a difference of two or three minutes in their reading of the time. One has a tendency to put back the hands, the other to advance them. Let us not too confidently try to play the part of the third person who wishes to set the first two aright; it may well happen that we are mistaken in turn. Besides, in our daily life, we have less need of certainty than of a certain approximation to certainty. Let us learn how to see, but without looking too closely at things and men: they look better from a distance.

THE RIVERS OF FRANCE

A river is a beautiful thing. It runs along, it sings, it laughs, it glints in the sunlight and becomes darker beneath the trees. Sometimes one may see the bottom, where there are stones and grasses, while at times it is a sombre abyss that fills one with shudders. The river comes from afar and goes no one knows whither. True, people say that it has a beginning and that its source lies yonder, in the mountains, but that is not at all so certain. What is a source? When you see a river, it is already a river and it never occurs to you that it may ever have been only a tiny ribbon of water trickling down from a rock. In olden days, when the world was happy, things were far different. Rivers flowed from a marble pitcher which was held in the hands of an eternally youthful, drooping maiden. But the wicked god of the Christians, who is not fond of maidens' beauty, broke those marble pitchers; the mothers of rivers died of grief and now the rivers are born by accident, as best they may be. If we are not so well informed about their birth, we know their life and their death. Their life is to bound along or to flow nonchalantly on, to prattle over the pebbles and dream amid the rushes. Often, when traversing the blooming meadows they love to spread across the grass. If dikes or tree-trunks bar the way they are provoked and even wax furious. But if it is a mill that rises before them, they turn its wheels with docile promptness, and continue on their way unperturbed. The river is the mother of men and trees, of beasts and plants. Without the river there are no fish; there are no birds. There are no crops, no flowers, no wine, no cattle, and man flees, parched by the sun. After having given life, the river has two ways of dying; either it expands into the bosom of a larger river or flows directly to mingle with the

sea; the sea is the vast cemetery of all the rivers,—of the smallest as well as the greatest. But the river that dies is nevertheless just as eternal as the ocean that receives it into its depths. The clouds are born of the sea, and the wind wafts them toward the forests, where they make rain and swell the streams. There is in the world a circulation of water as in our bodies there is a circulation of blood. All this is well regulated. The sea loves the river. It comes to meet the stream and sends it as greeting the salt tang of its waves. The river fears this infinitude. For a long time it resists. At last, the sweet waters yield and melt under the powerful kisses of the brine: the swell of the waves lulls the wedded waters to rest.

The river is a person. It has a name. This name is very ancient, because the river, although perpetually young, is very old. It existed before men and before birds. Ever since men were born they loved the rivers, and as soon as they learned how to speak they gave them names. Even when we no longer understand them, the names of the rivers are the most beautiful in the world. There is the Gironde and the Adour; the Loire and the Vienne, the Rhône and the Ariège. But perhaps it is possible to understand these names. Let us try, by having recourse to the studies of a geographical scholar, M. Raoul de Félice. Our rivers have received their names from the various races that anciently occupied Gaul: The Iberians, an unknown people, the Ligurians, the Celts. At the moment of the Roman conquest, almost all the streams of France possess a name. So that modern names are very rare. The Iberians were probably Basques, if not in race at least in language. Even if this is contested, that would not prevent us from tracing the word Adour back to the Basque word *iturria*, which means spring, source. It is to the Iberians that we likewise owe names such as the Aude, the Orbieu, the Urugne. Here probably came a people yet unknown, but of Indo-European language, which was perhaps the godfather to many of our rivers. To this people it may be we owe the names Somme, Sèvre, Herault,—names that are derived from various roots signifying water, liquid, source. According to the same theory, Durance, Drôme, Drot, Drac might be translated by "the running water," and the same idea would be found in the name Rhône, while the Loire would be "the stream that waters;" the Meurthe, "she who moistens." As to the Garonne, that would be, "the rapid one"; but the matter is still under discussion: the Garonne has not given up its secret, any more than the Gironde. We may note, in passing, that there are in France three other Garonnes, without taking into account a Garon, a Garonnette, and a Garonnelle; there are seven or eight Girondes, of which two are in the environs of Paris, tributaries of the Orge and the Marne. The Oise and the Isdre stand for the same thing, namely, "the rapid one," which seems rather hazardous to me in the case of the Oise. Certain rivers flow in a deep-cut bed; thus they have received a name which would signify something like case, vase or sheath: these are the Couse, the Cousin, the Cusom, the Cousanne, the Couzeau, and the names Couzon.

We now come to the part played by the Ligurians. In their language they called the alder-tree that grows along the banks of so many rivers, *alisos*, *alsia* or *alison*. They gave this name to a number of streams; Alzon, Alzou, Alzau, Auzon, Auzonne, Auzonnet, Arzon, Auze, Auzenne, Auzelle, Auzotte, Auzette, Auzigue, Auzolle, Auzone,—all of which would signify the rivers of the alder-trees. There would also be left to be explained the origin of names ending in *enque*, such as Allarenque, Laurenque, Durenque, Virenque, but it is not known what they mean. Finally, one could not deny to the Ligurians the name Ligoure, which seems to be the name of the people itself. The Aude and the Orb probably owe their designation to the Phoenician settlers; the second of these is perhaps Greek. With the Celtic period the etymologies become a trifle less uncertain. The Celtic word for water, *dour*, is clearly found in the Dourbie, the Dourdene and the Dourdèze, the Dourdon, the Dore and the Doire. Another Celtic name for water, *esca* is seen in the Ouche, the Essonne. They called a river *avar*; hence, the Abron, the Jabron, the Aveyron, the Arveiron, the Auron; hence probably also the Eure, the Auterne, the Authre, the Automne, the Autruche. *Aven* means river in the present Breton dialect; now, we find rivers called: Avène, Avon, Avègne, Avignon. From *glanos*, meaning brilliant, gleaming, are perhaps derived the Gland, the Glane; from *vern*, alder-tree, they have like the Ligurians christened many rivers: the Vern, the Vernaison, the Vernazon; from *der*, oak, came the *Dère*. It should be added that all these words came down to us through the Latin form before acquiring their French form. Thus *Bièvre* and its derivatives Beuvron, Brevenne, Brevonne, derive from the Latin *bibrum*, itself borrowed from a Celtic word meaning beaver. Is it to the Gauls or the Romans that we owe the names Dive, Divette, Divonne? Does this mean here the fairy, or the divine one? It is difficult to ascertain. There were great resemblances between the tongues.

French and its dialects have naturally named a large number of rivers, either by rechristening them or modifying the old names to give them a French meaning. In this class we have the names suggested by the appearance or the qualities of the river:^[1] the Blanche, the Claire, the Brune, the Noire, the Brillant, the Hideuse, the Vilaine, the Furieuse, the Rongeant, the Sonnant, the Creuse, the Sensée. At other times the names come from plants,^[2] such as Fusain, Orge, Viorne, Liane, Gland, Orne, Oignon, Trèfle, Rouvre, Lys, Aunes, Bruyère, Troène; names of animals:^[3] Oie, Loir, Louvette, Chèvre, Heron, Ourse, Lionne, Autruche; names of every kind:^[4] Mère, Cousin, Sueur, Coquille, Oeil, Oeuf, Rognon, Brèche, Vie, Automne, Blaise, Armance, Abîme. Some proudly bear absolute names: le Fleuve (the Stream), la Rivière (the River); it so happens that they are only rivulets, the one in la Manche, the other in the Alps. And finally, a little river that is probably very wise is called la Môme (the Same). The majority of these later names I have taken directly from the map, but a good part of my learning I have borrowed from M. de Félice, who has given us a great deal, free from all pedantry, in his book upon *les Noms de nos Rivières* (The Names of our Rivers.) Is it not pleasant to know that the Seine means "the gushing one?" Those who wish to learn more may consult the source I have indicated. It is with pain that I wrest

myself away from the charms of the rivers of France, for

La rivière est la mère de toute la nature.

The river is the mother of all nature.

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- [1] These signify, in the order of occurrence: white, dear, dark, black, gleaming, hideous, ugly, furious, gnawing, tinkling, hollow, sensible.
 - [2] Prickwood, barley, liburnum, liana, acorn, flowering-ash, onion, clover, common oak, lily, alder-trees, heather, privet.
 - [3] Goose, dormouse, she-wolf, goat, heron, bear, lioness, ostrich.
 - [4] Mother, cousin, sweat, shell, eye, egg, kidney, breach, life, autumn, Blase, Armanche, abyss.
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THE FALL OF DAYS

There is a fall of days as there is a I fall of leaves. I do not know what wind, blowing from the infinite, shakes the years, and sends falling from them one by one the sere and yellow days. Whither do they go? Whither go the sere and yellow leaves? To the great laboratory, no doubt, where Nature fashions her annual resurrections. They will return to us from this laboratory as green as ever, and everlastingly the same in their unchangeable designs, those of the poplar, which are hearts, the chestnut, which are hands, the aspen, which are tridents, and the willow leaves, which are lances. But what becomes of days when they have fallen, sere and yellow? To what remote, unknown, chimerical worlds are they carried off forever? For they are never seen again. New days come,—the foliage of the years,—unheralded days, unexpected days, surprising days, days that one loves and days that one fears; but the olden days, those which were familiar to us, those that we desire, that we wait for, will never return. The foliage of the year will be so well renovated that we shall no longer be able to recognize it at all.

Yes, they are days. They have a beginning and an end, they have light and shadow, they are born of night and into night withdraw to die. They are days, without a doubt, but not the same. Their smiles are different, and also their frowns. The joys they bring us are not distributed with less niggardliness, but they have neither the same perfume nor the same color. Hope not to find again the smile that enchanted you. It is dead. It will not return to the face you love any more than the day of your birth will return. But may you at least hope to see once more the face you love, as it was. Alas! You will perhaps have the illusion of seeing it thus, but it will not be reality, for the days, as they vanish into the night, carry off with them somewhat of the countenances of men as a remembrance. It may well be that with these tiny bits they fashion brand new faces, yonder in the chimerical world, but that is not at all sure.

No, never the same, never. Slowly or rapidly, an indefatigable motion whirls everything about in a farandola whose ends never can meet. The year passes by: one day more! The day passes by: an hour longer! The hour passes by: only another minute! In vain. But all this will at least come back? I have already told you, No. Why insist? Bow to fate.

One never crosses the same river twice, said the Greek philosopher, and if this be to some a source of bitterness, others will find in it good reason to take heart. The latter are those whose memories are filled chiefly with evil days. Let them, then, be content. Neither will they ever behold the same days. Tears flow and smiles fade to the same rhythm of life, to disappear together in the bottomless abyss.

Nothing returns, nothing begins anew; it is never the same thing, and yet it seems always the same. For, if the days never return, every moment brings forth new beings whose destiny it will be to create for themselves, in the course of their lives, the same illusions that have companioned and at times illuminated ours. The fabric is eternal; eternal, the embroidery. A universe dies when we die; another is born when a new creature comes to earth with a new sensibility. If, then, it is very true that nothing begins all over again, it is very just to say, too, that everything continues. One may fearlessly advance the latter statement or the former, according to whether one considers the individual or the blending of generations. From this second point of view, everything is coexistent; the same cause produces contradictory, yet logical effects. All the colors and their shades are printed at a single impression, to form the wonderful image we call life.

And there is neither beginning nor end, nor past nor future; there is only a present, at the same time static and ephemeral, multiple and absolute.

It is the vital ocean in which we all share, according to our strength, our needs or our desires. Then what matters that which we call the fall of the days or the fall of the leaves?

Neither the leaves nor the days fall at the same time for all men, and the hour that marks the end of a year is likewise that which marks the birth of another.

It is thus I dream, during these closing days of December, of life which is nothing, since it dies incessantly, and which is all, since it is ceaselessly reborn. It is the drop of water that flows off as soon as it falls, but which is followed by another drop that presses upon it in its course. We are that, nothing but that,—drops of water that are formed, fall, and flow away; and during such brief moments we nevertheless have the time to create a world and live in it. It is the nobility and the

mystery of life that it should be of such little account and yet be capable of such great things, for the most humble creature is still very important,—one of the atoms without which the mass would possess neither its proper weight nor form. It has its part in the universal movement; it is one of the elements of the movement's equilibrium and its periodicity.

Each one, then, should love his life, even though it be not Very attractive, for it is the only life. It is a boon that will never return and that each person should tend and enjoy with care; it is one's capital, large or small, and can not be treated as an investment like those whose dividends are payable through eternity. Life is an annuity; nothing is more certain than that. So that all efforts are to be respected that tend to ameliorate the tenure of this perishable possession which, at the end of every day, has already lost a little of its value. Eternity, the bait by which simple folk are still lured, is not situated beyond life, but in life itself, and is divided among all men, all creatures. Each of us holds but a small portion of it, but that share is so precious that it suffices to enrich the poorest. Let us then take the bitter and the sweet in confidence, and when the fall of the days seems to whirl about us, let us remember that dusk is also dawn.

INSINUATIONS

Esthetic Morality.

Perhaps we ought to renounce such distinctions as beautiful and ugly, good and bad, good and evil, and so on, and consider in life's acts only the curve of movements. Thus morality and esthetics would blend. Already men of more than average culture consider the subject of a painting only to judge whether the painter has submitted to the same logic the subject of the picture itself, the composition that compasses it, the color that unites it to the vital milieu. A subject, in art, may be criticized only in relation to the purpose of the work and the manner in which it is treated. It might be the same with human acts, in which case they would be judged only according to their opportunity and their esthetic curves. One must act,—must be always stirring; life is a series of movements, the lines of which interlace. This forms a design. Is it harmonious? That is the whole question; that is all of morality.

Another Point of View.

In order to make a system of morality by separating what is good from what is evil we must have fixed principles, a definite belief,—and we live in an age of skepticism. Doubtless religion is not true, but neither is anti-religion true: truth dwells in a perfect indifference. Governments should restrict themselves to a truly scientific neutrality and consider all manifestations of intelligence or feeling legitimate, whatever their nature. The State should be but a visible providence, a sovereign police that would protect the exercise of all human activity, opposing only those deeds which could fetter the plenitude of all liberties, of every kind.

It is here that one must make a distinction, though it is hardly scientific, between the body and the mind, sensitive matter and the will. Without a doubt acts directed against bodily sensibility should be repressed; but the case is not the same with acts against the intellectual sensibility. Acts called immoral may be prohibited in such a measure as custom recommends; provocations to immoral acts should be permitted. The only crime is the crime of violence. It matters little that I am asked to do something by written or spoken word; the evil begins only when I am made to do so by force.

The Word "God."

Renan loved it, finding it convenient for the connotation of an entire order of ideas, none of which is easily limited verbally. It is undefinable; and moreover, if it were defined it would lose all its value. God is not all that exists; God is all that does not exist. Therein resides the power and the charm of that mysterious word. God is tradition, God is legend, God is folklore, God is a fairy-tale, God is a romance, God is a lie, God is a bell, God is a church window, God is religion, God is all that is absurd, useless, invisible, intangible, all that is nothingness and that symbolizes nothingness. God is the *nihil in tenebris*—(nothing in the darkness)—men have made of him light, life and love.

Money.

It is hard to read without irritation the old pleasantries of the journalists and the ancient lamentations of socialists upon the worship of the golden calf. To rail at money, to wax indignant against it, are equally silly. Money is nothing; its power is purely symbolical. Money is the sign of liberty. To curse money is to curse liberty,—to curse life, which is nothing, if it be not free.

Popular simplicity adores money. Look at that poor huckstress: she makes the sign of the cross with the first coin she takes in during the morning. A God has come to visit her and bless her. It is a communion at once mystic and real, in the guise of metal.

Money, which is liberty, is also fecundation. It is the universal sperm without which human societies would remain but barren wombs. Paganism, which knew and understood everything, opens to a shower of gold from on high the conquered thighs of Danaë. That is what we should see on our coins, instead of a meaningless head, if we were capable of contemplating without embarrassment that religious tableau.

Antinomy

The most interesting thing about man is man as the human animal. Almost all the rest is folly. As soon as he loses contact with nature, with primitive nature, man wanders. Yet it is this very divagation that is called reason, wisdom, morality. And the natural conduct that man might follow, and which he sometimes does follow, is called unreason, immorality. But, through a balance of logic, this immorality that we disparage we make the sole object of our dreams, our desires, our speeches, our acts, our meditations, our dissertations, our art and our science.

The Supernumerary.

Monsieur Tarde, an ingenious and bitter philosopher, has thus defined life: "The pursuit of the impossible through the useless."

That deserves to endure. It is one of those sentences that one would like to see engraved in gold upon the marbles at street corners. It is undeniable that in endowing man with an immortal soul Christianity gave to life an inestimable worth.

Deprived of the infinite, man has become what he always was: a supernumerary.

He hardly counts; he forms part of the troupe called Humanity; if he misses a cue, he is hissed; and if he drops through the trapdoor another puppet is in readiness to take his place.

FOOTPRINTS ON THE SAND

Posterity is a schoolboy who is condemned to learn a hundred verses by heart. He learns ten of them and mumbles a few syllables of the rest. The ten are glory; the rest is literary history.

Traditions? Of course, tradition. But do you not believe that there is a beginning to everything, even to tradition?

Anti-clericalism works for the benefit of the dissident sect. In England, religious radicalism recruits Catholics; in France it recruits Protestants.

Man can no more see the world than a fish can see the river bank.

Many a time have I written the word "beauty," but almost never without being conscious of writing down an absurdity. There are beautiful things, but there is no such thing as Beauty: that is an abridged expression. It cannot be taken in an absolute sense; there is no Absolute.

Civilization is the cultivation of everything that Christianity calls vice....

For two thousand years Christianity, impudently playing with the meaning of words, has been telling us: Life is death, death is life. It is time to consult the dictionary.

Politics depends upon statesmen in about the same measure that the weather depends upon astronomers.

There are two courses open to the prophet: either to announce a future in conformity with the past,—or to be mistaken.

An imbecile is never bored: he contemplates himself.

Nothing is better for "spiritual advancement" and the detachment of the flesh than a close reading of the "Erotic Dictionary."

The greater part of men who speak ill of women are speaking ill of a certain woman.

The man of genius may dwell unknown, but one always may recognize the path he has followed into the forest. It was a giant who passed that way. The branches are broken at a height that other men cannot reach.

Werther possesses great interest because Goethe afterward wrote *Faust*, *Wilhelm Meister*, and so many other works, all different. The *Werther* of those who revamp their first book fifteen or thirty times loses with each new work a little of its initial worth; after the third book it is worth almost nothing. At first, however, one cannot tell whether that *Werther* is the product of a brain or of a mould; that is why the first book is sacred.

An unnamable critic notes some of the flaming errors of Verhaeren,—a few "among a hundred others." It is thither, toward the error, toward the stain, toward the wound, that the mediocre spirit, like the fly, wings its way unerringly. He looks at neither the eyes, the hair, the hands, the throat, nor all the grace of the woman passing by; he sees only, the mud with which some churl has bespattered her gown; he rejoices at the sight; he would like to see the spot grow and devour both the gown and the flesh of its wearer; he would have everything as ugly, as dirty and despicable as himself.

Dialogue.—GOD: Who has made you man? MAN: Who has made you God?

Religions turn madly about sexual questions.

The world will never forgive the Jews for having disdained the religion which they gave to the world. There is in this a sort of intellectual treason which reminds one of those merchants who do not wear, or eat, or drink their own merchandise.

When one comes to define the philosophy of the nineteenth century, one will discover that it was only theology.

An opinion is shocking only when it is a conviction.

Nothing so imparts the satisfaction of having accomplished one's duty as a good night's sleep, an excellent meal, a beautiful moment of love.

What is life? A series of sensations. What is a sensation? A remembrance.

One does n't live. One has lived. Life, said an old man, is a regret.

The terrible thing about the quest for truth is that you find it.

There are things which one must have the courage not to write.

As to possessing the truth: I think of those explorers who have with them a tame lion, and who sleep with one eye open.

Those men who live with the greatest intensity are often the ones who seem to take least interest in life.

To have a solid foundation of skepticism,—that is to say, the faculty of changing at any moment, of turning back, of facing successively the metamorphoses of life.

Learning for learning's sake is perhaps as coarse as eating for eating's sake.

It is a singular thing: in literature, when the form is not new, neither is the content.

Man is an animal that "arrived"; that is all.

It was an accident that endowed man with intelligence. He has made use of it: he invented stupidity.

Sexual modesty is an advance over the exhibitionism of monkeys.

Modesty is the delicate form of hypocrisy.

Nothing so softens the obduracy of chaste hearts as the certainty of secrecy.

The notion that the dead are not dead assumes, in the crowd, comical forms. I read in a novel (1901): "Madeleine read the letter over again. M. Piot was dead, the poor man! How cold he must be in that north wind!" Men are stupid.

You have doubts? About what? About whom? About God? Why, that's a very simple matter: write to him.—I haven't his address.—Such, in fact, is the state of the question.

Revolutionary socialists make me think of the fellow who, having a piano that was out of tune, would say: "Let's smash this piano and throw the pieces into the fire; in its place we'll install an Aeolian harp."

Christianity has already won three great victories: Constantine, the Reform, the Revolution. A fourth is being awaited, Collectivism, after which it is probable that the Strong, wearied at last of being bullied, will revolt against the Weak and reduce them to slavery—once again.

Property is necessary; but it is not necessary that it should forever remain in the same hands.

To ameliorate and raise the standard of the workingmen to the bourgeois level, is perhaps to create a race of slaves content with their lot,—a cast of comfortable Pariahs.

Thought harms the loins. One cannot at the same time carry burdens and ideas.

Said Sixtus: "Believe in nothing, not even the trade you follow, not even the hand you caress, the eyes in which you are mirrored, not even yourself,—above all, not in yourself."

The true philosopher does not desire to see his ideas applied. He knows that they would be ill carried out, deformed, vulgarized. If need be, he would actually oppose such a course: this has happened.

Modesty is a timid confession of pride.

The ill are always optimistic. Perhaps optimism itself is an illness.

There is a simulation of intelligence, just as there is a simulation of virtue.

Mr. X used to say: "Some people need a great deal in order to retain a little; as for me, I need a little to retain a great deal."

Science is worth what the scientist is worth.

Scholars spread the rumor that science is impersonal. Scholars? They are scholars as much as the masons are architects.

The people may make uprisings; but revolutions, never. Revolutions always come from above.

Descartes wrote to Balzac: "Every day I walk amidst an immense people, almost as tranquilly as you may walk in your lanes. The men I meet produce upon me the same impression as if I were gazing upon the trees of your forests or the flocks of your country-side." All the weakness of the metaphysicians is explained by these two scornful sentences. In order to understand life it is not only necessary not to be indifferent to men, but not to be indifferent to flocks, to trees. One should be indifferent to nothing.

The superstition which, among the ancients, caused them to look upon new-born weaklings, lame, blind and hunchbacked infants, as tokens of divine anger, and to sacrifice them, was happier than the religious or scientific sentimentality that tolerates them, brings them up, making of them half-men and introducing eternal germs of decrepitude among the race.

Pity is perhaps at bottom only cowardice. We pity only ourselves or those whom we fear.

Nietzsche stupefies. Why? Calm reflection will show that he almost always expresses common-sense truths.

Nietzsche was a revealer, in the new photographic sense. Contact with his work has brought to light truths that were slumbering in men's minds.

Happiness, like wealth, has its parasites.

One does not dwell in a house; one dwells in himself.

Put a pig in a palace and he'll make a pen of it.

Paul Bourget still believes in duchesses. What is there astonishing about that? There are many people who believe in ghosts.

The crowd has no idea of how much sensibility, and intelligence it requires to enjoy the perfume of a rose or the smile of a woman.

Sainte-Beuve is too scholarly. He cannot stand nude before a nude statue; he has to have pockets from which to take out note-books and papers.

A woman sometimes feels pity for the sorrows that she causes remorselessly.

The little girl expects no declaration of tenderness from her doll. She loves it, and that's all. It is thus that we should love.

The craze for decorations has reached such a height that actors, they say, are proud to play the rôle of an Officer of the Legion of Honor.

I'm very fond of going to the butcher shop and looking at a sheep's brains. We have in our heads a reddish sponge of the same kind, which thinks.

Love disposes one to religiosity. I knew an atheist who wished to go to church one evening to exchange vows with his mistress; through scruples, she refused.

Intelligence is perhaps but a malady,—a beautiful malady; the oyster's pearl.

There are anti-clericals who are in reality somewhat excessive Christians.

Is not the poet who recites his verses before an audience really the nightingale singing his song? Not quite. The instinct has gone astray: sexual mimicry, without actual application. The useful has become a game: and this is the whole history of civilization.

"How many contradictions!"

"Eh! If I loaded my wagon all on the same side, I'd tumble it over."

Persons full of morality preach. Everything that they judge criminal I either practise or think. And nevertheless....

Love ye one another. How do that, without knowing one another? No, no; a little modesty, a little dignity.

It is shameful to be ashamed of one's pleasures.

To be above everything. To scorn everything and love everything. To know that there is nothing, and that this nothing, none the less, contains everything.

In order to be true, a novel must be false.

To be impersonal is to be personal in a particular manner: for instance, Flaubert. In the literary jargon one would say: the objective is one of the forms of the subjective.

Proudhon said: "After the persecutors, I know nothing more hateful than the martyrs." Not having thought of this myself, I feel pleasure in copying it.

To be seen. The man of letters loves not only to be read but to be seen. Happy to be by himself, he would be happier still if people knew that he was happy to be by himself, working in solitude at night under his lamp; and he would be indeed happiest of all if, after he has closed his door, his servant should open it for a visitor and show to the importunate fellow, through the chink, the man of letters happy to be by himself.

Man begins by loving love and ends by loving a woman.

Woman begins by loving a man and ends by loving love.

Said a country vicar to a fanatically scrupulous devotee: "God is not so silly as that."

He has known Claude Bernard, Flaubert, Barbey d'Aureville, Goncourt, Manet, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, Renan, Taine, Pasteur, Verlaine, Tarde, Mallarmé, Puvis de Chavannes, Marey, Gauguin, Curie, Berthelot; he knows Rodin, Ribot, Renoir, France, Quinton, Monet, Poincaré,—and he complains! He bewails his country's decadence: The ingrate!

Nietzsche opened the gate. Now one may walk straight into the orchard of which, before him, it was necessary to scale the walls.

I am vexed that people should have thought so many things before me. I seem like a reflection. But perhaps some day I'll cause another man to repeat the same thing.

I do not vouch for the fact that none of these observations may be found in my previous writings, or that none will figure in any future work. They may even be found in writings that are not mine.

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