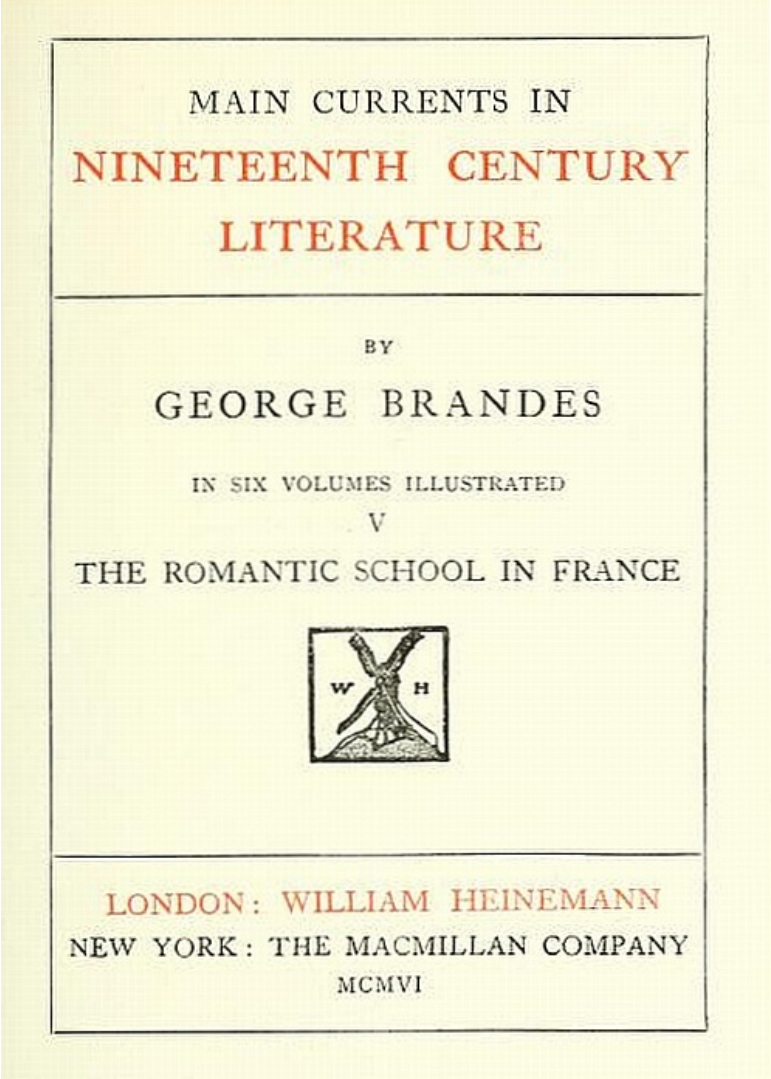
Title: Main Currents in Nineteenth Century Literature - 5. The Romantic School in France

Author: Georg Brandes
Translator: Mary Morison
Translator: Diana White

Release date: January 12, 2015 [EBook #47950]

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Jens Guld and Marc D'Hooghe
(http://www.freeliterature.org) (Images generously made
available by the Internet Archive.)



MAIN CURRENTS IN NINETEENTH CENTURY LITERATURE

BY

GEORG BRANDES

IN SIX VOLUMES

V.

THE ROMANTIC SCHOOL IN FRANCE

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

1904

DE MUSSET

Dis-nous mil huit cent trente.
Époque fulgurante,
Ses luttes, ses ardeurs....
—TH. DE BANVILLE

Nicht was lebendig, kraftvoll sich verkündigt
Ist das gefährlich Furchtbare. Das ganz
Gemeine ist's, das ewig Gestrige,
Was immer war und immer wiederkehrt
Und morgen gilt, weil's heute hat gegolten.
—SCHILLER.

CONTENTS

LIST OF PORTRAITS

I

THE POLITICAL BACKGROUND

The literature produced in France between the years 1824 and 1828 is important and admirable. After the upheavals of the Revolution, the wars of the Empire, and the lassitude of the reign of Louis XVIII., there arose a young generation that applied itself with eager enthusiasm to those highest intellectual pursuits which had so long been neglected. During the Revolution and the wars of Napoleon the youths of France had had other vocations than the reformation of literature and art. The best energies of the nation had been diverted into the channels of politics, military enterprise, and civil administration. Now a great volume of intellectual force which had long been confined was suddenly set free.

The period of the restored Bourbon kings and the Monarchy of July may be defined as that of the decisive appearance of the bourgeoisie on the historical stage. With the fall of Napoleon the industrial period of history begins. Confining our attention to France, we observe that the new division of the national property which had been made during the Revolution, and which it had been Napoleon's economic mission to vindicate to the rest of Europe, now began to produce its natural consequences. All restrictions had been removed from industry and commerce; monopolies and privileges had been abolished; the confiscated lands of the Church and estates of the nobility, broken up and sold to the highest bidder, were now in the hands of at least twenty times as many owners as before. The result was that capital, free, floating capital, now began to be the moving power of society and consequently the object of the desires of the individual. After the Revolution of July the power of wealth gradually supersedes the power of birth and takes the power of royalty into its service. The rich man is received into the ranks of the nobility, acquires the privileges of a peer, and, by utilising the constitution, manages to draw ever-increasing profit from the monarchical form of government. Thus the pursuit of money, the struggle for money, the employment of money in great commercial and industrial enterprises, becomes the leading social feature of the period; and this prosaic engrossment, which contrasts so strongly with the revolutionary and martial enthusiasm of the foregoing period, helps, as background, to give the literature of the day its romantic, idealistic stamp. One only of its eminent authors, one of the

greatest, Balzac, did not feel himself repelled by the period, but made the newborn power of capital, the new ruler of souls, money, the hero of his great epic; the other artists of the day, though it was often the prospect of material gain which inspired their labours, kept in their enthusiasms and their works at as great a distance as possible from the new reality.

The decade 1825-35, the most remarkable and most fertile period from the literary point of view, was from the political, colourless and inglorious. Its focus is the Revolution of July, but this Revolution is a solitary blood-spot amidst all the grey.

The first half of the decade, 1825-30, the reign of Charles X., is the period of the religious reaction. The three ministries—Villèle, Martignac, and Polignac—do not mark so much three stages of the reaction as three different tempos: Allegro, Andante, and Allegro furioso. During the Villèle ministry the Jesuits attained to almost unlimited power. The monasteries were restored; laws of mediæval severity regarding sacrilege were enforced (death, for example, being the punishment for the robbery of a church); aid was refused to all poor people who could not produce certificates of confession; and in 1827 a law circumscribing the liberty of the press was proposed which would have reduced the enemies of the Church to silence; but this proposal the Government was obliged to retract, owing to the opposition of the Chamber of Peers. The citizen troops were disbanded, the censorship was restored; then the ministry was defeated by a majority in the Chambers, and resigned in January 1828. The cabinet of uncompromising churchmen was followed by one which pursued the policy of concession; the Martignac ministry made a feeble endeavour to stem the power of the Jesuits, but the only result of this was that the King seized the opportunity of the first reverse the Government suffered in the Chambers, to dismiss it and replace it by a ministry whose leader, Polignac, previously ambassador to the court of England, was a man after his own heart. Polignac believed in the monarchy as God's shadow upon earth; believed (and was confirmed by visions in his belief) that he had received from God the mission to restore it to its ancient glory. But his Government was so unpopular that its one military achievement, the conquest of Algiers, was coldly received by the country and openly regretted by the strong Opposition. The dissolution of the Chambers led, in spite of the pastoral letters of the bishops and the personal interference of the King, to the re-election of the Opposition, and on this followed the *coup d'état*. There were three days of fighting, and the ministry was swept away by the wave of popular feeling which carried with it the throne and the house of Bourbon.

But although the first half of the decade was, politically speaking, a period of reaction, it presents a very different aspect when regarded from the social and intellectual point of view. In the first place, the oppression itself produced the desire for freedom. The bourgeoisie and the professional classes, who finally, with the aid of the populace of the capital and the students, dethroned the house of Bourbon, were during the whole period in a state of increasing discontent and opposition. One of the consequences of this was that literature, which at first was as fully inspired as politics with the spirit of reaction against the doctrines and doings of the close of the eighteenth century, and which started with any amount of enthusiasm for Catholicism, monarchy, and the Middle Ages, completely changed its tone. Chateaubriand's dismissal from the Villèle ministry gave the signal (see *Main Currents*, iii. 293). In the second place, it is to be observed that the intellectual life of those highest circles of society which prescribed the tone and style of literature, was only outwardly in sympathy with the political reaction. Regarded from one point of view, the Restoration was an aftermath of the eighteenth century in the nineteenth, of the age of humanity in the age of industry. From the powdered court emanated courtly manners and customs, from the salons of the old nobility emanated the free-thought on moral and religious subjects in which the eighteenth century had gloried. One of the strong points of that national tradition which these highest circles defended and endeavoured to continue, was the recognition of talent in every shape; they envisaged literature and art with many-sided culture and wide sympathy. A tolerant, sceptical spirit in religious matters, genial unrestraint and delicate forbearance in the domain of morality, was, so to speak, the atmosphere inhaled and exhaled by good society; and no atmosphere could be more favourable and more fructifying for a literature in active process of growth. As the oppression of the reaction begot liberalism in politics, so the culture of the best society allowed unpolitical literature free play both in the domain of feeling and that of thought, demanding nothing but refinement and perfection of form. Hence literature was in a most favourable position to give the reins, to give a start, to a new intellectual movement.

The July dynasty was founded, the tri-coloured citizen-monarchy was established, Louis Philippe was stealthily elevated to the throne of France, holding the difficult position of king by the grace of the Revolution.

The pregnant characteristics of his government revealed themselves during the first five years of his reign. There was, in the first place, that want of a decided, dignified foreign policy inevitable in a monarchy that was supported exclusively by the prosperous middle classes. The cautious, peace-loving King brought one humiliation after another upon France. For the sake of the peace of nations, he refused the throne offered by the Belgians to his second son, and with the same motive he quietly allowed Austria to suppress the Italian revolutions, which the French nation correctly regarded as the offspring of the Revolution of July. He was incapable of preventing the suppression of the Polish insurrection and the surrender of Warsaw, which occasioned real national mourning in France. The country, as one of the great powers, lost daily in prestige and influence. And in its internal relations the Government displayed an equal want of dignity. The constant demands for money which were made by the royal family and almost invariably refused by the Chambers produced a most disagreeable impression.

For a short time Louis Philippe was popular, popular as the soldier of Valmy and Gemappes, as the citizen King, the former exile and schoolmaster, whom Lafayette himself had called "the best republic." But he had not the faculty of preserving popularity, though he made an eager bid for it to begin with. He was a gifted and, essentially, a prudent man. His family life was admirable; he was thoroughly domestic, and regular in his habits; his sons attended the public schools; he himself, in the attire of an ordinary citizen, carrying the historical umbrella, walked unattended in the streets of Paris, always ready to return a bow or a "Vive le Roi!" with a friendly word or a shake of the hand. But the bourgeois virtues which he displayed are not those which Frenchmen value in their rulers. The cry: "We want rulers who ride," shouted at gouty Louis XVIII., describes one of the feelings which led to the dethronement of Louis Philippe.

For when Louis Philippe did ride, the spectacle was anything but an inspiring one. In June 1832, after one of the innumerable small insurrections in Paris, he declared the city to be in a state of siege, and on this occasion held a review of 50,000 citizen troops and regular soldiers, who were drawn up on each side of the boulevard. The King did not ride along the middle of the street, but first along the right side, where the citizen soldiers were stationed, leaning from his saddle the whole time to shake hands with as many of them as possible, and two hours later back in the same way along the line of the regular troops. He looked as if his ribs must inevitably be broken. He kept on smiling the whole time; his cocked hat slipped down over his forehead and gave him an unhappy look; his eyes wore a beseeching expression, as if he were entreating favour, and also forgiveness for having declared them all to be in a state of siege. What a spectacle for an impressionable, imaginative people, for a crowd of which the older members had seen Napoleon Bonaparte ride past "with his statuesque, Cæsar-like countenance, his fixed gaze, and his inapproachable ruler's hands."[1]

In spite of the King's eager endeavour to win popularity, there was a wider gulf between his court and the people than there had been between the people and the paternal monarchy of the Restoration. The old nobility kept away from the new court, and there was a more distinct separation of class from class. With enmity and disgust the landed proprietors saw the magnates of the stock-exchange usurping all power. Legitimists and the superior bourgeois class, politicians and artists, ceased to associate. One by one the salons of the old monarchy were closed, and with them disappeared the gaiety and naturalness of the refined *beau monde*. With the old form of government vanished its accompaniments of magnificent elegance and graceful frivolity, vanished the fine lady's lively wit and charming audacity. In the circle of the wealthy bankers whom the King patronised and the Crown Prince associated with before his marriage, the place of all this was taken by English sport and club fashions, a vulgar addiction to the pleasures of the table, and tasteless magnificence and luxury. The King was originally a Voltairian, and in his family alliances he had shown a leaning to Protestantism, but in his anxiety for the safety of his throne he made a hasty change of front; he humbled himself (in vain, as it proved) to win the favour of the clergy, and the tone of the court became pious. The upper middle classes simultaneously developed a half-anxious, half-affected piety, originating in fear of the Fourth Estate. Hypocrisy, which the aristocratic reactionary literature had fostered, now began to spread into the bourgeois class, and free-thought was considered "bad form" in a woman. Morals became outwardly stricter; a more English tone prevailed; but in reality men were less moral; society was lenient to the fraud of the millionaire, pharisaically severe to the woman whose heart had led her astray. "The previous generation had not," as one of the historians of the day observes, "placed under the ban of society either the priest who forsook his church or the woman who forsook her husband, so long as their motives were unselfish; now it was the sign of *mauvais ton* to desire the re-institution of divorce, not to mention the marriage of priests." The Faubourg St. Honoré, the quarter of the financiers, set the tone.

Little wonder that the umbrella soon became the symbol of this monarchy, and the expression *Juste-milieu*—which the King had once cleverly used in speaking of the policy that ought to be employed—the nickname for everything weak and inefficient, for a power without lustre and dignity.

If we take the decade 1825-35 as a whole, it is easy to understand how hopeless it must have seemed from the aesthetic point of view.

[1] Expressions used by Heinrich Heine, who witnessed the scene and instituted the parallel.

II

THE GENERATION OF 1830

It is against this grey background, this foil of Legitimist cowls and Louis-Philippe umbrellas—in this society where the new-born power of capital, strong as Hercules, has, even in its cradle, strangled all the external romance of life—on this stage upon the grey walls of which an invisible finger has written in grey letters the word *Juste-milieu*—that a fiery, glowing, noisy literature, a literature enamoured of scarlet and of passion, suddenly makes its appearance. All the conditions were present in combination which were certain to impel young, restless minds towards romantic enthusiasm, towards ardent contempt for public opinion, towards worship of unbridled passion and unrestrained genius. Hatred of the bourgeoisie (as in Germany a generation earlier hatred of the Philistines) becomes the watchword of the day. But whereas the word "Philistine" conjures up a picture of the chimney-corner and the pipe, the word "bourgeois" at once suggests the

omnipotence of economic interests. Its essential antipathy to utilitarianism and plutocracy turned the intellectual current of the day, in the case of the men of talent already before the public, and still more strongly in the case of the budding geniuses, in the direction of antagonism to everything existing and accepted, at the same time mightily increasing the force of the current. The religion of art, and enthusiasm for liberty in art, suddenly took possession of all hearts. Art was the highest, art was light, art was fire, art was all in all; its beauty and audacity alone imparted value to life.

The young generation had heard in their childhood of the great events of the Revolution, had known the Empire, and were the sons of heroes or of victims. Their mothers had conceived them between two battles, and the thunder of cannon had ushered them into the world. To the young poets and artists of the day there were only two kinds of human beings, the flaming and the grey. On the one side there was the art which meant blood, scarlet, movement, audacity; on the other, a strictly regular, timid, bourgeois, colourless art. Everything in the life of their day seemed to them unpoetic, utilitarian, devoid of genius, grey; they desired to show their contempt for such a day, their admiration of genius, and their hatred of the bourgeois spirit. For now, since the middle-class had become the influential one, this spirit had become a power.

Seen from the point of view of our own day, the young men of those days appear to have been younger than youth generally is—younger, fresher, more richly gifted, more ardent and hot-blooded. And we see the youth of France, who in the days of the Revolution had by their devotion changed the political and social conditions of the country, and in the days of the Empire had risked their lives on every battlefield in France, Italy, Germany, Russia, and Egypt, now devoting themselves with the same ardour to the culture of literature and the arts. Here, too, there were revolutions to be made, victories to win, and countries to conquer. During the Revolution they had worshipped liberty, under Napoleon martial glory; now they worshipped art.

For the first time in France the word art came to be regularly applied to literature. In the eighteenth century literature had aimed at transforming itself into philosophy, and much was then included under this denomination to which we no longer apply the word; now it aimed at the name and dignity of art.

The explanation of the change is, that the analytical and reasoning tendency which distinguishes both the imaginative and reflective works of the classical period, had in the new century slowly made way for interest in the actually existing, in what is perceivable by the senses. And the deeper-lying reason of this new preference was that men now placed nature, original, unconscious, rustic, uncultivated nature, above all the culture of civilisation. Why? Because a historically minded age had succeeded to a rationalising one. A man no longer coveted the title of philosopher, for it was now considered a greater distinction to be original than to be a self-conscious thinker. The poetical literature of the eighteenth, nay, even that of the seventeenth century was despised, because it was purely intellectual; because, bloodless and elegant, it seemed to have been produced by attention to conventions and rules, not to have been born and to have grown. For whereas the eighteenth century had held thinking and acting to be the highest forms of activity, the children of the new age regarded origination, natural genesis, as the highest. It was a German idea, Herder's and Goethe's, by which men's minds were unconsciously occupied, and which produced in them an aversion for rules and academic principles. For how could art as unconscious, natural production be subjected to arbitrary external rules!

An intellectual movement had begun which recalled the Renaissance. It was as if the air which men breathed intoxicated them. In the long period during which France had been at an intellectual standstill her great neighbours, Germany and England, had hastened past her, had got a long start in the work of emancipation from old, hampering traditions. She felt this, felt it as a humiliation, and the feeling gave a sharp impulse to the new art enthusiasm. And now the works of foreign authors, both the new and the hitherto unknown older books, made their way into the country and revolutionised the minds of the young; every one read translations of Sir Walter Scott's novels, of Byron's *Corsair* and *Lara*, and devoured Goethe's *Werther* and Hoffmann's fantastic tales. All at once the votaries of the different arts felt that they were brothers. Musicians studied the literature both of their own country and of other nations; poets (such as Hugo, Gautier, Mérimée, Borel) drew and painted. Poems were read in painters' and sculptors' studios; Delacroix's and Devéria's pupils hummed Hugo's ballads as they stood at their easels. Certain of the great foreign authors, such as Scott and Byron, influenced poets (Hugo, Lamartine, Musset), musicians (Berlioz, Halévy, Félicien David), and painters (Delacroix, Delaroche, Scheffer). Artists attempt to overstep the limits of their own in order to embrace a kindred art. Berlioz writes Childe Harold and Faust symphonies, Félicien David a Desert symphony; music becomes descriptive. First Delacroix and then Ary Scheffer choose subjects from Dante, Shakespeare, and Byron; the art of the painter at times becomes illustration of poetry. But it was the art of painting which was most powerful in influencing the sister arts, especially poetry, and that distinctly for good. The lover no longer, as in the days of Racine, prayed his mistress "to crown his flame." The public demanded naturalness of the author, and refused to accept representations of impossibilities.

In 1824 Delacroix exhibits his *Massacre of Scios*, a picture with a Grecian subject and a reminiscence of Byron, in 1831 *The Bishop of Liège*, which illustrates Scott's *Quentin Durward*, in May 1831 *Liberty at the Barricades*. In February 1829, Auber's opera, *La Muette de Portici*, makes a great sensation; Meyerbeer's *Robert le Diable* follows in 1831. In February 1830 Victor Hugo's *Hernani* is played for the first time at the Théâtre Français; in 1831 Dumas' *Antony* is a grand success. The authors Dumas and Hugo, Delacroix the painter, the sculptor David d'Angers,

the musical composers Berlioz and Auber, the critics Sainte-Beuve and Gautier, Frédéric Lemaître and Marie Dorval the scenic artists, and, corresponding to them, the two great dæmonic musical virtuosi Chopin and Liszt—all these make their appearance simultaneously. One and all proclaim the gospel of nature and of passion, and around them assemble groups of young men who apprehend and cultivate literature and art in a spirit akin to theirs.

These men did not always realise that in the eyes of posterity they would constitute a natural group. Some of the greatest of them felt as if they stood alone, and believed that the spirit and tendency of their work was different from that of their contemporaries', nay, actually antagonistic to it. Nor were they entirely wrong, for there are very essential points of difference between them. Yet common excellences, common prejudices, common aims, and common faults unite them and make of them a whole. And it happened much more frequently than is generally the case, that those whom reflection inclines us to class together actually did feel themselves drawn to each other; many of the best among them early joined hands and formed a league.

Seeking the connecting links we find, as it were, a chain which binds the group together.

When, after the lapse of many years, we dryly say or write the words, "they formed a school," we seldom take the trouble to conjure up any adequately vivid impression of what the formation of a school of literature and art signifies. There is a mysterious magic about the process. Some one remarkable man, after a long unconscious or half-conscious struggle, finally with full consciousness, frees himself from prejudices and attains to clearness of vision; then, everything being ready, the lightning of genius illuminates what he beholds. Such a man gives utterance (as did Hugo in a prose preface of some score of pages) to some thoughts which have never been thought or expressed in the same manner before. They may be only half true, they may be vague, but they have this remarkable quality that, in spite of more or less indefiniteness, they affront all traditional prejudices and wound the vanity of the day where it is most vulnerable, whilst they ring in the ears of the young generation like a call, like a new, audacious watchword.

What happens? Scarcely are these words spoken than there comes with the speed and precision of an echo a thousand-tongued answer from the wounded vanities and injured interests, an answer like the furious baying of a hundred packs of hounds. And what more? First one man, then another, then a third, comes to the spokesman of the new tendency, each with his own standpoint, each with his revolt, his ambition, his need, his hope, his resolve. They show him that the words he has spoken are incarnated in them. Some communicate directly with him, some with each other in his spirit and his name. Men who but lately were as unknown to each other as they still are to the public, who have been spiritually languishing, each in his separate seclusion, now meet and marvel to find that they understand each other, that they speak the same language, a language unknown to the rest of their contemporaries. They are young, yet all are already in possession of what to them constitutes life; the one has his dearly-bought joys, the other his bracing sufferings; and from these life-elements each has extracted his own portion of enthusiasm. Their meeting is electric; they exchange ideas with youthful haste, impart to each other their various sympathies and antipathies, enthusiasms and detestations; and all these well-springs of feeling flow together like the streams that form a river.

But the most beautiful feature in this crystallisation of artistic spirits into a school is the reverence, the awe which, in spite of the unanimity of their opinions, and in spite of their good comradeship, each feels for the other. Outsiders are apt to confuse this with what is satirically called "mutual admiration." But nothing is in reality more unlike the interested homage paid in periods of decadence than the naïve admiration of each other's talents exhibited by the men who are unconsciously forming a school. Their hearts are too young, too pure, not to admire in real earnest. One young productive mind regards the other as something marvellous, which holds surprises in store. To the one the workshop of the other's mind is like a sealed book; he cannot guess what will next appear from it, has no idea what pleasures his comrade has in store for him. They honour in one another something which they value higher than the personality, than the usually as yet undeveloped character, namely, the talent by virtue of which they are all related to the deity they worship—art.

Seldom, however, in the world's history has the mutual admiration accompanying an artistic awakening been carried to such a pitch as it was by the generation of 1830. It became positive idolatry. All the literary productions of the period show that the youth of the day were intoxicated with the feeling of friendship and brotherhood. Hugo's poems to Lamartine, Louis Boulanger, Sainte-Beuve, and David d'Angers; Gautier's to Hugo, Jehan du Seigneur, and Petrus Borel; De Musset's to Lamartine, Sainte-Beuve, and Nodier; and, very specially, Sainte-Beuve's to all the standard-bearers of the school; Madame de Girardin's articles; Balzac's dedications; George Sand's *Lettres d'un Voyageur*—all these testify to a sincere, ardent admiration, which entirely precluded the proverbial jealousy of authors.

They did not only praise one another, they communicated ideas to each other and helped each other. Now it is an inspiring influence, now an artistic criticism, now some actual service rendered, which knits the bond of friendship between two authors of this period. Émile Deschamps inspires Victor Hugo to borrow themes from the old Spanish Romancero; Gautier writes the beautiful tulip sonnet in Balzac's *Un grand Homme de Province a Paris*, and helps him to dramatise certain of his plots; Sainte-Beuve reads George Sand's manuscripts and aids her with his criticism; George Sand and De Musset influence one another powerfully at a certain stage of their career; Madame de Girardin, Méry, Sandeau, and Gautier collaborate in a novel written in letters; Mérimée is the bond of union between the realists Beyle and Vitet and the romanticists.

The short period during which all meet and combine is the blossoming time of literature. Before many years pass Nodier is in his grave, Hugo is living in exile in Jersey, Alexandre Dumas is turning literature into a trade, Sainte-Beuve and Gautier are to be found in Princess Mathilde's circle, Mérimée is presiding over the Empress Eugenie's courts of love, De Musset sits solitary over his absinthe, and George Sand has retired to Nohant.

One and all in their riper years made new connections, connections which aided their development; but their boldest and freshest, if not always their most refined and beautiful work was done at the time when they were holding their first meetings in Charles Nodier's quarters at the Arsenal, or in the apartments in the Rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs where Hugo and his pretty young wife kept house on their 2000 francs a year, or in Petrus Borel's garret, where the host's Hernani cloak decorated the wall in company with a sketch by Devéria and a copy of a Giorgione, and where, owing to lack of chairs, at least half of the company had to stand.

These young Romanticists felt like brothers, like fellow-conspirators; they felt that they were the sharers in a sweet and invigorating secret; and this gave to the works of the school a flavour, an aroma like that of the noble wines of a year when the vintage has been more than ordinarily good. Ah! that bouquet of 1830! There is no other in the century that can be compared with it.

In all the arts a break with tradition was aimed at and demanded. The inward fire was to glow through and dissolve the old musical forms, to devour lines and contours and transform painting into colour symphonies, to rejuvenate literature. In all the arts colour, passion, and style were aimed at and demanded—colour with such urgency that the most gifted painter of the period, Delacroix, neglected drawing for it; passion with such ardour that both lyric poetry and the drama were in danger of degenerating into hysteric foolishness; style with such artistic enthusiasm that some of the younger men, such as those two opposite poles, Mérimée and Gautier, neglected the human groundwork of their art and became devotees of style pure and simple.

The original, the unconscious, the popular was sought after and demanded. "We have been rhetoricians," men cried; "we have never understood the simple and the illogical—the savage, the people, the child, woman, the poet!"

Hitherto the people had only served as a background in literature—in Victor Hugo's dramas the passionate plebeian, the avenger and requiter, appeared on the scene as the hero. Hitherto the savage had talked like a Frenchman of the eighteenth century (Montesquieu, Voltaire)—Mérimée in *Colomba* and *Carmen* depicted savage emotions in all their wildness and freshness. Racine's child (in *Athalie*) had spoken like a miniature edition of a grown-up man—Nodier with a childlike heart put simple, innocent words into his children's mouths. In the French literature of an earlier period, woman had generally acted with full consciousness, arriving at conclusions like a man; see the works of Corneille, Racine, and Voltaire. Corneille paid homage to virtue, Crébillon the younger to frivolity and vice, but both the virtue and the vice were conscious and acquired. George Sand, on the contrary, depicted the innate nobility and natural goodness of a noble woman's heart. Madame de Staël in her *Corinne* had represented the gifted woman as a being of great and commanding talent—George Sand, in *Lélia*, represented her as a great sibyl. In olden days the poet had been a courtier, like Racine and Molière, or a man of the world, like Voltaire and Beaumarchais, or simply an ordinary decent citizen, like Lafontaine. Now he became the neglected step-child of society, the high-priest of humanity, often poor and despised, but with the starry brow and the tongue of fire. Hugo hymned him as the shepherd of the people, Alfred de Vigny represented him in *Stello* and *Chatterton* as the sublime child who prefers dying of hunger to degrading his muse by common work, and dies blessing his fellow-men, who acknowledge his worth when it is too late.

III

ROMANTICISM

At first Romanticism was, in its essence, merely a spirited defence of localisation in literature. The Romanticists admired and glorified the Middle Ages, which the culture of the eighteenth century had anathematised, and the poets of the sixteenth century—Ronsard, Du Bellay, &c.—who had been supplanted by the classic authors of the age of Louis XIV. They attacked pseudo-classicism, the tiresome and monotonous Frenchifying and modernising of all ages and nationalities. They took as their watchword "local colouring." By local colouring they meant all the characteristics of foreign nations, of far-off days, of unfamiliar climes, to which as yet justice had not been done in French literature. They felt that their predecessors had been led astray by the premise that every human being was simply a human being, and, moreover, more or less of a Frenchman. In reality, there was not such a thing as universal humanity; there were separate races, peoples, tribes, and clans. Still less was the Frenchman the typical human being. It was imperative, if they were to understand and represent human life, that they should free themselves from themselves. This idea gave the impulse to the art and criticism of nineteenth-century France.

Authors now made it their endeavour to train their readers to see things from this new point of view. They no longer wrote to please the public—and it is this fact which gives value to the books of the period. Therefore a critic who, like myself, is engaged in tracing the main currents of

literature, must dwell upon many a seldom read and still more rarely bought Romantic work, and do little more than mention such a talented dramatist as Scribe, who for a whole generation dominated the stage in every country in Europe.

For if an author does not penetrate to the essential in the human soul, to its deepest depth; if he has not dared, or has not been able to write his book regardless of consequences; if he has not ventured to represent his ideas in statuesque nakedness, has not imaged human nature as it showed itself to him, improving nothing and modifying nothing, but has taken counsel with his public, been guided by its prejudices, its ignorance, its untruthfulness, its vulgar or sentimental taste—he may have been, probably has been, highly distinguished by his contemporaries, he may have won laurels and wealth by his talents; for me he does not exist, to what I call literature his work is valueless. All the offspring of the author's *mariage de convenance* with that doubtful character, public opinion, all those literary children which their author begets, giving a side-thought to the taste and morality of his public, are defunct a generation later. There was no real life and heat in them, nothing but timorous regard for a public which is now dead; they were nothing but the supply of a demand which has long ceased to exist. But every work in which an independent writer has, without any side-thought, uttered what he felt and described what he saw, is, and will continue to be, no matter how few editions of it may be printed, a valuable document.

There is only a seeming contradiction between this condemnation of the literary work produced to please the public, and the doctrine of the sound natural influence of society on the author. It is certain that the author cannot separate himself from his age. But the current of the age is not an undivided current; there is an upper and an under one. To let one's self drive with or be driven by the upper one is weakness, and ends in destruction. In other words, every age has its dominant and favourite ideas and forms, which are simply the results of the life of former ages, that were arrived at long ago and have slowly petrified; but besides these it owns another whole class of quite different ideas, which have not yet taken shape, but are in the air, and are apprehended by the greatest men of the age as the results which must now be arrived at. These last are the ideas which form the unifying element of the new endeavour.

In 1827 an English theatrical company visited Paris, and for the first time Frenchmen saw Shakespeare's masterpieces, *King Lear, Macbeth, Othello*, and *Hamlet*, admirably played. It was under the influence of these performances that Victor Hugo wrote that preface to *Cromwell* which is regarded as the programme of the new literature.

The literary war of liberation began with an assault upon French classical tragedy, the weakest and most exposed point in literary tradition. Hugo knew very little about the attacks upon its authority which had been made in other countries; and to those who have read the utterances delivered on the same subject many years previously by Lessing, Wilhelm Schlegel, and the English Romantic writers, his manifesto offers little that is new. But it was, of course, an important step to carry the war into France itself. The vigorous arguments expended in proving the unnaturalness of compressing the action of every drama into twenty-four hours and a single pillared hall, seem to the reader of to-day almost as uninteresting as the absurdities attacked; but he must remember that Boileau's authority was then still supreme, still unshaken in France.

Of interest as regards Hugo's own development are the passages in which he expounds his private theory of poetry; although he is so much of the poet and so little of the thinker that his arguments are, as a rule, sadly inconclusive.

What he attacks is the idealistic, pseudo-classic tendency of tragedy. This he does, oddly enough, in the name of Christianity, and by means of a great historical survey, made on as false a system as any of those of his contemporary, Cousin, of whom it reminds us. He distinguishes three great periods—the primitive, when poetry is lyric; the period of ancient civilisation, when it is epic; and the age of Christianity, which is the period of the drama. The peculiar characteristic of the poetry of the Christian, which he treats as synonymous with the modern, period is that it (having learned from religion that man consists of two elements, an animal and a spiritual, body and soul) makes place in the same work for the two elements which in literature have hitherto excluded each other, the sublime and the grotesque. It is no longer imperative that tragedy should be solemn throughout; it may venture to develop into drama.

If we pay less heed to what Hugo says than to what he really intends to say, we find that the sum and substance of this tolerably foolish argument is a naturalistic protest against pure beauty as the proper or highest subject of art. His idea is: We will renounce convention; we will not feel ourselves in duty bound to exclude everything from serious poetry which directly reminds us of the material world. We see this from the examples he gives. The judge is to be allowed to say: "Sentenced to death. And now let us dine." Queen Elizabeth is to be allowed to swear and speak Latin; Cromwell to say: "I have the Parliament in my bag and the King in my pocket." Cæsar in his triumphal car may be afraid of its upsetting. And Hugo calls Napoleon's exclamation: "There is only one step from the sublime to the ridiculous," the cry of anguish which is the summary of both drama and life.

Exaggerated as Hugo's language may be, his meaning is plain. What he asserts is the aesthetic value of the ugly. He maintains that the beautiful only comprehends form as absolute symmetry, form in its simplest relations and most intimate harmony with our being, whereas the ugly is a detail in a much greater, harmonious whole which we are unable fully to discern. He declares that the ugly has a thousand types, whereas the beautiful is poor, and has but one; which last theory we may be excused for calling one of the most absurd ever advanced by a poet. It was parodied by his opponents in the axiom: *Le Laid c'est le Beau* ("Foul is fair," as the witches sing

in *Macbeth*), and combated with the objections which the Romanticists themselves offered in the Seventies to extreme realism.

Was not this French Romanticism, then, after all simply a thinly-veiled naturalism? What did Victor Hugo demand in the name of the young generation but nature—faithful reproduction, local and historical colour? Is not George Sand Rousseau's daughter? the preacher of a gospel of nature? And Beyle and Mérimée, are they not half-brutal, half-refined worshippers of nature? Is not Balzac nowadays actually honoured as the founder of a naturalistic school?

The answer is simple. Hugo's watchword was, undoubtedly, nature and truth, but it was at the same time, and first and foremost, contrast, picturesque contrast, antithesis founded upon the medieval belief in the confliction between body and soul; that is, a dualistic Romanticism. "The salamander heightens the charm of the water-nymph, the gnome lends beauty to the sylph," he says. He desired truth to nature, but he believed it was to be arrived at by making nature's extremes meet, by placing opposites in juxtaposition—Beauty and the Beast, Esmeralda and Quasimodo, the courtesan's past and the purest love in Marion Delorme, bloodthirstiness and maternal tenderness in Lucrèce Borgia.

In his early youth nature was to Victor Hugo a great Ariel-Caliban, the product of a superhuman ideality and an unnatural bestiality, the result obtained by the combination of two supernatural ingredients. But this conception of nature, which corresponded exactly with that of Germanic Romanticism, at times made way in Hugo's case for the magnificent pantheism which found typical expression in that profound and beautiful poem, "Le Satyre," in *La Légende des Siècles*.

The combination of love of nature with predilection for the unnatural, is to be traced far on into the new literature. All its authors chant the praises of nature. But what they detest and shun under the name of the prosaic and the commonplace is very often the simple nature that lies nearest them. Romantic nature alone is dear to them. George Sand escapes from the world of dreary, hard realities into that of beautiful dreams, Théophile Gautier into the world of art. George Sand in *Lelia*, Balzac in *Père Goriot*, make the ideal or the omnipotent galley-slave the judge of society; Balzac actually writes fantastic legends in Hoffmann's style. And they are even more inclined to shun the plain and simple in their language than in their characters. They soon evolved a pompous diction, which far outrivalled that of the classic periods. These were the golden days of the glowing, dazzling adjective. Picturesque, enthusiastic words, with which the narrative was inlaid as with so many transparent jewels, opened up endless vistas. In so far, therefore, it may be said that both the style and the predilections of these young authors were purely romantic. But only in so far.

In Victor Hugo, the founder of the school, the dual love of the natural and the unnatural was the result of a personal peculiarity. His eye naturally sought and found contrasts; his mind had an innate tendency towards antithesis. In *Inez de Castro*, the melodrama of his earliest youth, and later in *Marie Tudor*, we have the throne on one side of the stage, the scaffold on the other, the monarch and the executioner face to face. About the time when the preface to *Cromwell* was written, Hugo was, his wife tells us, in the habit of walking on the Boulevard Montparnasse. "There, just opposite the Cemetery, tight-rope dancers and jugglers had erected their booths. This contrast of shows and funerals confirmed him in his idea of a drama in which extremes meet; and it was there that the third act of *Marion Delorme* occurred to him, the act in which the tragic, fruitless attempt of the Marquis de Nangis to save his brother from the scaffold forms the counterpart to the antics of the jester." In the preface to *Cromwell*, when he is asserting the necessity of representing an action in the place where it actually happened, he writes: "Could the poet dare to have Rizzio murdered anywhere but in Mary Stuart's chamber? ... or to behead Charles I. or Louis XVI. anywhere but on these sorrowful spots within sight of Whitehall and the Tuileries, which seem as if they had been chosen in order that the scaffold might contrast with the palace?" In spite of all his asseverations this poet does not really see natural environments with an understanding eye. He does not see them act as formative influences upon the human soul; he employs them as great symbols of the tremendous reverses of fate; he arranges them like the stage scenery of a melodrama.

If we look deeper, what reveals itself to us in this? A characteristic which is to a certain extent distinctive of many of the French Romanticists, and which may be most briefly expressed thus: French Romanticism, in spite of all the elements it has in common with general European Romanticism, is in many ways a classic phenomenon, a product of classic French rhetoric.

Words undergo strange vicissitudes in this world of ours. When the word *romantic* was introduced into Germany it signified almost the same as Romanesque; it meant Romanesque flourishes and conceits, sonnets and canzonets; the Romanticists were enthusiastic admirers of the Roman Catholic Church and of the great Romanesque poet Calderon, whose works they discovered and translated and lauded. When, a century later, Romanticism reached France, the same word meant exactly the opposite thing—it meant the German-English tendency as opposed to the Greco-Latin Romanesque tendency; it meant Teutonic. The simple explanation of this is, that whatever is strange and foreign produces a romantic impression. The art and literature of a people of a homogeneous civilisation and culture, like the ancient Greeks, are classic; but when one civilised, cultured nation discovers another civilisation and culture which seem to it strange and wonderful, it is at once impressed by it as romantic, is affected by it as by a landscape seen through coloured glass. The Romanticists of France despised their own national excellences, the perspicuity and rational transparency of their own literature, and extolled Shakespeare and Goethe because these poets did not, like Racine and, to a certain extent, Corneille, break up human life into its separate elements, did not represent isolated emotions and passions which offered dramatic contrasts, but, without any rhetorical recurrence to the fundamental elements,

flung real human life on the stage in all its complex cohesion. The Frenchmen determined to follow this great example.

But what was the result? Under their treatment, in the hands of Lamartine, Alfred de Vigny, George Sand, Sainte-Beuve, real life was dissolved and disintegrated anew. In the hands of Victor Hugo and Alexandre Dumas its extremes formed symmetrical contrasts, exactly as in classic tragedy. Order, moderation, aristocratic refinement, a transparent, severely simple style distinguished Nodier, Beyle, and Mérimée, exactly as they had done the classic authors of the eighteenth century. The light, free, airy fancy which intermingles all the most varied imaginations of the poetic mind, which unites near and far, to-day and hoary antiquity, the real and the impossible, in one and the same work, which combines the divine and the human, popular legend and profound allegory, making of them one great symbolic whole—this real romantic gift was not theirs. They never saw the dance of the elves, nor heard the thin, clear tones of their music floating across the meadows. Although Celts by birth, these men were Latins; they felt and wrote as Latins; and the word Latin is equivalent to classic. If we understand by Romanticism what is generally understood, that is, an overwhelming of the style by the subject-matter, contents uncontrolled by any laws of form, such as we have in the writings of Jean Paul and Tieck, and even in Shakespeare and Goethe (*A Midsummer Night's Dream* and the second part of *Faust*), then all the French Romanticists are classic writers—Mérimée, George Sand, Gautier, and even Victor Hugo himself. Hugo's romantic drama is as disintegrative, regular in construction, perspicuous, and eloquent as a tragedy of Corneille.

At the mention of this name my thoughts turn involuntarily and naturally from the characteristics common to the periods to the common characteristics of race. In Hugo, Corneille's apparent antagonist, Corneille lives again.

There are many veins in the French character. There is a vein of scepticism, jest, sarcasm—the line Montaigne, La Fontaine, Molière, Mathurin Régnier, Pierre Bayle, &c.; there is the true, thoroughbred Gallic vein—Rabelais, Diderot, Balzac; and amongst the rest there is the heroic vein, the vein of enthusiasm. It is this last which pulsates so strongly in Corneille; and in Victor Hugo the blood begins to course in it again. If we compare Hugo in his stateliness with other poets, we shall find that there is probably not one in the whole world whom he resembles so much as he does old Corneille. There is something Spanish about the French eloquence of both, and Spain had certainly made its impression on them both; in Corneille's case a literary impression, in Hugo's a personal, received in his childhood. The drama to which Corneille owes his fame is the *Cid*, in which a Spanish theme is treated in a Spanish spirit, in imitation of Spanish models. The drama which makes Hugo famous is *Hernani*, Spanish in its subject, and permeated by the spirit of Calderon's code of honour. But in both these dramas it is heroism pure and simple which is inculcated and exhibited. They are schools for heroes. It is not human nature in its manysidedness, but heroic human nature which Corneille represents; in Victor Hugo this same heroic human nature is merely symmetrically complemented by wildly passionate human nature.

Let us glance at this *Hernani*, round which the great conflict between the party of the future and the party of the past raged. The story of the first performance has often been told. Adherents of the old school listened at the doors during the rehearsals, and picked up single lines, which they caricatured; and a parody of the play was acted before the play itself. The author had a hard struggle with the censor; he had to fight for his play almost line by line. There was a long correspondence on the subject of the one line: "C'était d'un imprudent, seigneur roi de Castille, et d'un lâche." And the actors and actresses regarded the work with equal disfavour; only one of the company applied himself with goodwill to the study of his part. Hugo was determined to dispense with the paid claque, but he arranged to have three hundred places at his disposal for the first three nights. The most faithful of his followers, young men who, according to their own confession, spent their nights in writing "Vive Victor Hugo!" all over the arcade of the Rue de Rivoli, with no other aim than to annoy the respectable citizen, now enlisted a corps of young painters, architects, poets, sculptors, musicians, and printers, to whom Hugo gave the watchword *Hierro*, and who were prepared to present an iron front to the foe. The moment the curtain rose the storm burst, and every time the play was performed there was such an uproar in the theatre that it was with the greatest difficulty it could be acted to the end. A hundred evenings in succession was *Hernani* hissed, and a hundred evenings in succession was it received with storms of applause by young enthusiasts, who for their master's sake did not weary of listening to the same speeches evening after evening and defending them line by line against the hate, rage, envy, and superior power of his opponents. The fact may seem unimportant, yet it is worthy of observation, that France is the only country in which such *esprit de corps*, without the existence of any tangible *corps*, such unselfish devotion to the cause and honour of another, has ever been witnessed.

The enemy took boxes and left them unoccupied, in order that the newspapers might report an empty house; they turned their backs to the stage; they made disgusted grimaces, as if the play were more than they could stand; they affected to be absorbed in the newspapers; they slammed the box doors, or laughed loud and scornfully, or hooted and hissed and whistled; so that a resolute defence was absolutely necessary.

There is not an emotion in *Hernani* which is not strained to its extremest pitch. The hero is a noble-minded man of genius, the genius and noble-mindedness being of the type which exists in the imagination of a young man of twenty. His genius impels him to lead the life of a brigand chieftain, and out of pure high-mindedness and contempt for ordinary prudence he does the most foolish things—betrays himself, lets his mortal enemy escape, gives himself up again and again.

As chieftain he exercises unbounded power over other men, but it seems to be his courage alone which gives him this, for all his actions are as unreasoning as a child's. Nevertheless there is life and reality in the play.

This noble and disinterested highwayman, who lives at war with society and is the leader of a band of faithful enthusiasts, reminds us of the poet himself, the literary outlaw, who filled pit and gallery with a band of young men quite as remarkable in appearance and attire as his brigand troop. Madame Hugo describes the contingent of spectators who appeared on the first evening in answer to her husband's invitation as "a troop of wild, extraordinary creatures, with beards and long hair, dressed in every fashion except that of the day—in woollen jerseys and Spanish cloaks, Robespierre waistcoats and Henry III. caps—displaying themselves in broad daylight at the doors of the theatre with the clothing of all ages and countries on their backs." Their frantic devotion to Hugo was as great as that of Hernani's band of robbers for its captain. They knew that Hugo had received an anonymous letter in which he was threatened with assassination "if he did not withdraw his filthy play," and, improbable as it was that the threat would be literally fulfilled, two of them accompanied him to and from the theatre every evening, though he and they lived in the farthest apart quarters of Paris.

Amongst Hugo's papers of this date there is a quaint note from the painter Charlet, which expresses the feelings of these youths.

> "Four of my Janissaries offer me their strong arms. I send them to prostrate themselves at your feet, begging for four places for this evening, if it is not too late. I answer for my men; they are fellows who would gladly cut off heads for the sake of the wigs. I encourage them in this noble spirit, and do not let them go without my fatherly blessing. They kneel. I stretch out my hands and say: God protect you, young men! The cause is a good one; do your duty! They rise and I add: Now, my children, take good care of Victor Hugo. God is good, but He has so much to do that our friend must in the first instance rely upon us. Go, and do not put him you serve to shame.—Yours with life and soul,
>
> "CHARLET."

Supported by such devoted enthusiasts as these in its struggle with fanatic opposition, romantic art stormed the enemy's first redoubt and won its first important victory.

What these young men heard from the stage was the expression of their own defiance and thirst for independence, of their courage and devotion, their ideal and erotic longings, only pitched in a still higher key; and their hearts melted within them.

The time was February 1830, five months before the Revolution of July. The dullest materialism made life colourless. France was as regularly ordered as the avenues of the gardens of Versailles; it was ruled by old men, who patronised only such young ones as had written Latin verse to perfection at school, and had since qualified themselves for office by absolute correctness of behaviour. There they sat, these correct, faultlessly-attired youths, with their neckcloths and stiff standing collars. Contrast with them the youths in the pit, one with locks reaching to his waist and a scarlet satin doublet, another with a Rubens hat and bare hands. These latter hated the powerful Philistine bourgeoisie as Hernani hated the tyranny of Charles V. They gloried in their position; they, too, were freebooters, poor, proud—one a cherisher of Republican dreams, most of them worshippers of art. There they stood, many of them geniuses—Balzac, Berlioz, Théophile Gautier, Gérard de Nerval, Petrus Borel, Préault—taking the measure of their opponents of the same generation. They felt that they themselves were at least not place-seekers, not tuft-hunters, beggars, and parasites like those others; they were the men who a few months later made the Revolution of July, and who in the course of a few years gave France a literature and art of the first rank.

We know how they regarded Hernani. What did they see in the second great character, King Charles of Spain? He repels at first. We cannot place much faith in this cold, cautious monarch's ardent love for Donna Sol; and he, moreover, employs violent and dishonourable means to get her into his power. But the poet soon raises him to a higher level, and makes us feel the great ambition which fills his soul.

It was Charles's tremendous monologue at the tomb of Charlemagne which decided the fate of the drama that evening. And this much criticised and ridiculed monologue is in reality the work of a young master. It is easy to perceive, even if we did not know, how untrue it is to history, how impossible it is that Charles V. should have thought thus; but we are fascinated by the faithfulness with which the political ideas and dreams of 1830 are mirrored, and by the marvellous political insight displayed. This is the historical insight which sometimes astonishes us in poets; Schiller showed it at the age of 21, in *Fiesco*. Listen to Don Carlos's description of Europe: A building with two human beings on its pinnacles, two elected chiefs, to whom every hereditary monarch must bow—the Emperor and the Pope. Almost all the states have hereditary rulers, and are, in so far, in the power of chance; but the people are at times able to elect their Pope or their Emperor; chance corrects chance, and the balance is restored. The Electors in their cloth of gold, the Cardinals in their scarlet, are the instruments by means of whom God chooses.

> "Qu'une idée, au besoin des temps, un jour éclose;
> Elle grandît, va, court, se mêle à toute chose,
> Se fait homme, saisit les cœurs, creuse un sillon;
> Maint roi la foule aux pieds ou lui met un baîllon;
> Mais qu'elle entre un matin à la diète, au conclave,

Et tous les rois soudain verront l'idée esclave
Sur leurs têtes de rois que ses pieds courberont
Surgir, le globe en main ou la tiare au front."

The poet was certainly not thinking of Charles V. when he wrote this, but of an Emperor much nearer his own day, the Emperor of whom he had just written in the *Ode à la Colonne de la Place Vendôme*, that his spurs outweighed Charlemagne's sandals. It must not be forgotten that men's enthusiasm for Napoleon in those days by no means implied that they were Bonapartists; it only signified that they belonged to the party of progress. The Napoleon they worshipped was not the tyrant of France, but the humiliator of kings and of hereditary authority. The Emperor, as compared with the King, was regarded as the personified people; therefore the young generation was deeply moved when Charles in his monologue exclaims: "Rois! regardez en bas! ... Ah! le peuple!—Océan! Vague qui broie un trône! Miroir où rarement un roi se voit en beau!"

They are, thus, revolutionary and perfectly modern reminiscences and comparisons which occur in rapid succession to Charles V. At the grave of Charlemagne he matures into the popular Emperor who has been so often dreamed of in modern times, and his passionate ambition is purified by his intense desire to solve gigantic problems and accomplish prodigious tasks. The man who was, to begin with, so obnoxious to the youthful part of the audience, whose brutal desire made him so inferior to his noble-minded rival Hernani and the proud lady they both love, ends, when he is Emperor, by renouncing his claims and showing mercy—and suddenly the two happy lovers seem small and insignificant beside him.

With his hand on his heart he says softly to himself:

"Éteins-toi, cœur jeune et plein de flamme!
Laisse régner l'esprit que toujours tu troublas.
Tes amours désormais, tes maîtresses, hélas!
C'est l'Allemagne, c'est la Flandre, c'est l'Espagne!"

And with his eye on the imperial banner he adds:

"L'empereur est pareil à l'aigle, sa compagne.
A la place du cœur, il n'a qu'un ecusson!"

Such words as these produced a powerful effect on the ambitious young men who were the real audience of the play. The drama, the tragedy, of ambition moved them as deeply as the drama of independence. They knew that great public aims are attained, great tasks accomplished only by manly resolution nourished upon the intensest emotions, longings, and joys of the heart, which have been offered as a burnt-offering on the altar of the aim—therefore they understood Carlos.

Nevertheless the fifth act, with the duet between the lovers, is in its purely lyric excellence the gem of the play. Here was love as those young men felt it and desired to have it represented. This dialogue on the threshold of the bridal chamber which the lovers are never to enter; this blending of a happiness so great and intense that, as Hernani says, it demands hearts of bronze on which to engrave itself, with all the horrors of annihilation; this sensual feeling, which is chaste and harmonious in her, pure and ardent in him, blissful in both; Donna Sol's supra-mundane enthusiasm; Hernani's longing to forget the past in the present and its peace—all this was Romanticism of the kind the youth of the day demanded and greeted with thunders of applause.

As a drama *Hernani* is extremely imperfect; it is a lyrical, rhetorical work, containing much that is extravagant. But it has the one, all-important merit, namely, that in it an independent and remarkable human soul has expressed itself unrestrainedly. From such a work it is possible to learn much of its author's mental idiosyncrasy. He is there with his genius, his limitations, his character, his whole past—with his conceptions of liberty and authority, of honour and nobility, of love and of death.

And the work presents to us not only Victor Hugo and a bit of the Spain of 1519, but the young generation of its own day and a piece of the France of 1830. *Hernani* is the essence of the spirit which inspired the youth of France at the time of the Revolution of July; it is an image of France which, seen in a romantic light, expands into an image of the world.

But when, instead of confining our attention to a single work, we proceed, as now, to study a whole literature, hosts of pictures of moods and thoughts, of portraits, and of images of the world, pass before us. We shall detain them to compare them with one another and see in what they agree, by this means attaining to a certainty of what the fundamental characteristic of the age is; then we shall let them pass before us in historical succession, and try, by carefully observing in what they differ from one another, to discover the law which produces these differences; we shall watch, as it were, the flight of the arrows which indicate the direction of the spiritual currents.

IV

CHARLES NODIER

From the year 1824 onwards Hugo, Dumas, Lamartine, Sainte-Beuve, De Musset, and De Vigny met almost every Sunday evening at the house of a friend who that year took up his residence in the outskirts of Paris, near the Arsenal, in a modest dwelling which went by the name of the Little

Tuileries. Their host was a man who in point of age belonged to the previous generation (he was born in 1780), but who in his mental attitude had anticipated the nascent literature, which he consequently at once and without hesitation took under his protection. His name was Charles Nodier.

Nodier's life had been one of strange vicissitudes; he had been an *emigré* in the Jura, a newspaper editor in Illyria, and now he was a librarian in Paris.[1] His most remarkable characteristic as an author is that he is always from ten to twenty years in advance of every literary movement. His novel *Jean Sbogar*, the story of a species of Illyrian Karl Moor, which he planned in Illyria in 1812 and published in 1818, although improbable and uninteresting as a tale, is remarkable from the fact that its author, long before the days of Proudhon and modern communism, has put some of the most striking truths and untruths of the communistic faith into the mouth of his hero. Jean Sbogar writes:—

"The poor man's theft from the rich man would, if we were to go back to the origin of social conditions, prove to be merely the just return of a piece of silver or of bread from the hands of the thief to the hands of the man from whom it was stolen."

"Show me a power which dares to assume the name of law, and I shall show you theft assuming the name of property."

"What is that law which calls itself constitution and bears on its brow the name and seal of equality? Is it the agrarian law? No, it is the contract of sale, drawn up by intriguers and partisans who have desired to enrich themselves, which delivers a people into the hands of the rich."

"Liberty is not such a very rare treasure; it is to be found in the hand of the strong and the purse of the rich. You are master over my money. I am master of your life. Give me the money and you may keep your life."

Jean Sbogar is, we observe, not a common but a philosophic highwayman. The most natural thing about him is that he wears gold earrings, and this realistic trait Madame Nodier had almost succeeded in eliminating. Nodier allowed himself to be, as a rule, guided by his wife's taste and wishes. But when he once in a way felt inclined to rebel, and, to excuse himself, pled his submission on all other occasions, Madame Nodier always said: "Don't forget that you refused to sacrifice Jean Sbogar's earrings to me." This is declared to have been the one and only literary disagreement which ever occurred between the couple.

Men had forgotten the existence of such a book as *Jean Sbogar*, when Napoleon's memoirs came out and informed them that he had had it with him at St. Helena, and had read it with interest. The little novel belongs to Nodier's transition period. It was written before he had developed his characteristic individuality. This he did about the time of the formation of the Romantic School proper. He stood then, so to speak, at the open door of literature, and bade that school welcome. His review of Victor Hugo's boyish romance, *Han d'Islande*, is a little masterpiece of criticism, sympathetic and acute. It was the beginning of the warm friendship between the two authors. The appreciation of Hugo is so marvellously correct that in reading it to-day one can hardly believe that its writer was unacquainted with all the master's later works. It required no small amount of cleverness to foresee them in *Han d'Islande*.

The stories which Nodier now began to write possess a charm and attraction unique in French literature. They are distinguished by a mimosa-like delicacy of feeling. They treat chiefly of the first stirring of passion in the hearts of youths and maidens; the fresh dew of the morning of life is upon them; they remind us of the woods in spring. It is a well-known fact that there is some difficulty in finding French books of any literary value which are fit for young girls' reading; but such tales as Nodier's *Thérèse Aubert*, or the collection of stories entitled *Souvenirs de Jeunesse*, meet both requirements. The only risk run would be the risk of imbuing the young readers with fanciful platonic ideas; for these tales are as sentimental as they are chaste; the love which they describe may be a friendship with little of the sexual element in it, nevertheless it completely engrosses the little human being. It owes its charm to the fact that as yet no experience has made these minds suspicious and that no false or true pride prevents these hearts from revealing their emotions. As all the tales are founded on reality, on memories of their author's youth, the terrors of the Revolution form the dark background of them all, and they all end with a parting or the death of the loved one.

A childlike delicacy of feeling is the fundamental characteristic of Nodier's character. To the end of his days he remained a big, unworldly child, with a girlish shrinking not only from the impure, but even from the grown-up standpoint.

Above this groundwork of naïve freshness of feeling there rises, as second story, a wildly exuberant imagination. Nodier possessed such a gift of extravagant invention that one can hardly help believing that he must have been subject to visions and hallucinations; he had the dangerous quality peculiar to a certain type of poetic temperament, that of scarcely being able to speak the truth. No one, not even he himself, ever knew for a certainty whether what he was relating was truth or fiction. Jest is the mean between the two. Nodier was considered one of the most entertaining of Frenchmen, and he was not the least offended when he was told by his friends that they did not believe a word of what he was telling them.

On a tour which he and Hugo, accompanied by their wives, made together in the south of France, they arrived at an inn in the little town of Essonne, where they were to breakfast. It was in this inn that Lesurques had been arrested, a man who was executed in 1796 for a murder of which he was afterwards proved to have been innocent. Nodier, who had known him, or at any rate said he

had, spoke of him with an emotion that brought tears into the eyes of the two ladies, and disturbed the cheerfulness of the repast. Noticing Madame Hugo's wet eyes, Nodier promptly began: "You know, Madame, that a man is not invariably certain of being the father of his child, but have you ever heard of a woman not knowing if she is her child's mother?" "Where did you hear of such a thing?" asked Madame Hugo. "In the billiard-room next door," was the reply. Pressed for an explanation, Nodier related with much gusto how, two years previously, a coachful of wet-nurses, coming from Paris with children who were to be reared in the country, stopped at this very inn. That they might breakfast in peace, the nurses deposited their charges for the time on the billiard-table. But whilst the women were in the *salle-à-manger* some carriers, coming in to play a game of billiards, lifted the children off the table and laid them at random on the bench. When the nurses returned they were in despair. How was each to recognise her own nursling? The children were all only a few days old, and indistinguishable one from the other. At last, merely making sure of the sex, each took one from the row; and now there were in France a score or so of mothers who discovered a likeness to beloved husbands or to themselves in children with whom they had no connection whatever.

"What a story!" said Madame Nodier. "Were the children's clothes not marked?"

"If you begin to inquire into the probability of a thing, you will never arrive at the truth," answered Nodier, nothing daunted, and quite satisfied with the effect produced.

He himself never inquired into probabilities. The world of probabilities was not his; he lived in the world of legend, of fantastic fairy-tale and ghost story. If a fairy has ever stood by the cradle of a mortal, that mortal was Charles Nodier. And in this fairy he believed all his life; he loved her as she loved him, and she had a part in all that he wrote. What though he was married by law and in earthly fashion to Madame Nodier! The marriage had no more spiritual significance than Dante's with Gemma Donati; his true bride and Beatrice was the fairy Bellas, once the Queen of Sheba, whose praises he and Gérard de Nerval so often sang.

The world in which he lives is the world in which Oberon and Titania dance, in which strains from the *Thousand and One Nights* blend with the melodies of Ariel's celestial orchestra, in which Puck makes his bed in a rosebud, whilst all the flowers perfume the summer night. It is a world in which all the personages of real, wide-awake life appear, but grotesquely magnified or grotesquely diminished, to suit the comprehension of the child and the requirements of the fantast.

Here, as Nodier himself somewhere says, we have Odysseus the far-travelled, but he has shrunk into Hop-o'-my-thumb, whose tremendous voyage consists in swimming across the milk-pail; here is Othello, the terrible wife-murderer, only his beard is not black but blue—he has turned into the notorious Bluebeard; here is Figaro, the nimble lackey who flatters the grandees so cleverly, only he is transformed into Puss in Boots, a less entertaining personage, though almost as interesting from the psychological point of view.

No author of the French Romantic period is more closely related to the German and English Romanticists than Nodier. Any one who does not know his works may form some idea of them by recalling Sir Walter Scott's ghost stories and Hoffmann's audacious fantasies. But these, of course, do not convey an idea of Nodier's artistic individuality. His peculiarity is, that in his representation of Romantic subjects he is not what we are in the habit of calling Romantic, but, on the contrary, severely Attic, classically simple, sparing in the matter of colour, and devoid of passion; there is none of the Scotch mist we are conscious of in Sir Walter, or of the fumes of the Berlin wine-vaults which we inhale in reading Hoffmann. His peculiarity as a stylist is that, whilst the young Romanticists around him were sensualising language and supplanting the idea by the picture, he himself transcribed his wildest Romantic fancies into the clear and simple language of Pascal and Bossuet. Enthusiastic champion as he was of the new tendency in literature, in the matter of style he remained old-fashioned, and expressed the fantastic imaginations of the nineteenth century in the severe, perspicuous language of the seventeenth. Audacious to the verge of insanity in his fantasies, he is sober and clear in his style. As Prosper Mérimée has cleverly said, a fanciful tale by Nodier is like "the dream of a Scythian, told by an old Greek poet."

His *Inès de Las Sierras* is a ghost-story the beauty of which renders it infinitely superior to the ordinary ghost-story. The horror produced by the unaccountable apparition is blent with the admiration aroused by the supernatural visitant's gentle grace; these feelings do not neutralise each other, but act in combination with a peculiar power; and it is this combination which is the secret of Nodier's effects. It is a pity that he has spoiled the beautiful story by a trivial and improbable conclusion, which explains away the ghost in the most commonplace manner. The apparition seen in the old castle at midnight is not the ghost of the young dancing-girl, murdered 300 years before, but a living Spanish maiden who happens to bear the same name, and whom a fantastic and incredible concatenation of circumstances has led to dance there, dressed in white. There is genuine Latin rationality in this solution of the mystery, but it is offered to us, as it were, ironically. A story like *Inès de Las Sierras*, however, is what most exactly demonstrates the poetic progress made since the eighteenth century, which was such an enemy of the supernatural, even in fiction, that Voltaire regarded himself as an audacious reformer when (in his *Semiramis*) he allowed the ridiculous ghost of Minus to howl some alexandrines through a speaking-trumpet in broad daylight.

La Fée aux Miettes seems to me the best of Nodier's fantastic tales. There is undoubtedly too much of it; it is not without an effort that one follows all the wild twists and turnings of a fantasy which occupies 120 quarto pages, even though much of it is both interesting and charming. A poor, harmless lunatic in the asylum of Glasgow tells the story of his life. This is the setting of the

tale, but we forget it altogether in the marvellousness of the events related. All the chords of human life are touched, jarringly and wildly. It is as if life itself passed before one's eyes seen wrong side out, seen from the perfectly permissible standpoint of the dreamer or the delirious fever-patient.

In the little town of Granville in Normandy lives a worthy, simple-minded young carpenter, Michel by name. In the same town lives an old female dwarf, shrivelled and ugly, who, because she gathers up the scraps of the school-children's breakfasts, is called "la fée aux miettes." Four or five centuries ago she might have been seen in Granville, living in the same way, and she has made her appearance at intervals since. This being is assisted by the young carpenter with small sums of money, and she in return assists him with all manner of wise advice. She always speaks to him as if she were passionately in love with him, and she begs him to promise to marry her, so that by this means his money may in time return to him again. She gives him her portrait, a picture which does not resemble her at all, but represents the fairy Belkis, who in olden days was the Queen of Sheba beloved by Solomon. The youth falls in love with this picture of a beautiful, dazzling, bewitching woman. Wherever he goes her name meets him; when he determines to try his fortune in a foreign country, the ship he sails in is called the *Queen of Sheba*. He wanders about the world dreaming of Belkis, as we wander, one and all of us, dreaming of our castle in the air, our ideal, our fixed idea, which to our neighbours is madness.

Falsely accused of a murder committed in the room in which he had slept at an inn, poor Michel is sentenced to be hanged. He is carried through a hooting crowd to the gallows. There proclamation is made that, according to old custom, his life will be spared if any young woman will have pity on him and take him for her husband. And behold, Folly Girlfree, a merry, pretty girl who has always liked him, approaches the scaffold, prepared to save him. But he asks time for reflection. He likes Folly Girlfree, and she is both good and beautiful, but he does not love her; he has only one love, his ardently, secretly adored ideal, the Fairy Belkis. He looks tenderly and gratefully at Folly, deliberates, and—requests to be hanged. This deliberation with the rope round his neck, this conclusion that, as Shakespeare puts it, "many a good hanging prevents a bad marriage," is described with delightful humour, with a naïve philosophy which is unforgettable from the fact that some such idea has occurred at one time or other to all of us.

They are proceeding to hang Michel, when loud cries are heard, and the Crumb Fairy, followed by all the street boys, arrives breathless, bringing proofs of the prisoner's innocence. He marries her out of gratitude, but hardly has the door on the wedding night been hermetically closed between him and his aged wife, hardly has he shut his eyes than Belkis in her bridal veil approaches his couch.

"Alas! Belkis, I am married, married to the Crumb Fairy."

"I am she."

"Nay, that is impossible; you are almost as tall as I."

"That is because I have stretched myself."

"But this beautiful, curly, golden hair falling over your shoulders, Belkis? The Crumb Fairy has none of it."

"No, for I show it only to my husband."

"But the Fairy's two great teeth, Belkis; I do not see them between your fresh, fragrant lips?"

"No, they are a superfluity only permissible to old age."

"And this almost deadly feeling of bliss which takes possession of me in your embrace, Belkis? The Fairy never gave me this."

"No, naturally," is the laughing answer; "but 'at night all cats are grey.'"

Henceforward Michel lives a divided life; his days are spent with the wise old Fairy, his nights with the beautiful young Queen of Sheba, until at last he finds the singing mandragora, and, having made his escape from the madhouse, mounts to the Fairy's and Belkis's heaven on the wings of the mandragora's song.

This is madness, no doubt, but it is marvellous madness—madness instinct with soul. Who is this crumb-gathering fairy? Is she wisdom? Is she renunciation and duty? Is she the inexhaustible patience which suddenly reveals itself as genius? Is she fidelity turning into the happiness that is the reward of fidelity? She is probably a little of all of this; and therefore it is that she can transform herself into youth and beauty and bliss. In some such fashion Nodier has thought out, or dreamt his story.

At its maturity his imaginative faculty is more wanton and bold. No longer contented with producing shapeless, unordered material, he presents his material to us with a grotesque, loquacious, satirical explanation. No Frenchman comes so near having what Englishmen and Germans call humour as Nodier. At times he seems to be positively possessed by whimsicality. Then he not only turns the everyday world topsy-turvy in his stories, but plays with his own relation to the story, satirises contemporaries, makes a thousand innuendoes, philosophises over the illusions of life. He takes even the art of the printer into his service to heighten his fantastic effects; or, more correctly speaking, in order to prove the absolute power of his personality over his material, he leaves not a single thing, not even the purely mechanical means of communication, untouched by his mood. In his famous tale, *Le Roi de Bohème et ses sept Châteaux*, he exhausted the resources of the printing establishment. At his command the letters become so long that they stretch from top to bottom of the page; he commands again, and they

dwindle into the tiniest of the tiny; he screams, and they stand up on end in terror; he becomes melancholy, and they hang their heads all along the lines; they are inseparably mixed up with illustrations; Latin and Gothic groups alternate, according to the mood of the moment; sometimes they stand on their heads, so that we have to turn the book upside down to read them; sometimes they follow the narrative so closely that a descent of the stairs is printed thus:

Hereupon
our
hero
went
dejectedly
down
the
stairs.

It is interesting to trace in the account of Nodier's life written by his daughter, the foundations of fact upon which he built his fantastic tales. It rarely happens that, as in *Inès de Las Sierras*, something real (in this case an old castle which Nodier had visited in the course of a tour he made with his family in Spain in 1827) forms the groundwork. Sometimes, as for example in *Trilby*, the point of departure is a legend; and it is significant that this particular legend should have been told to Nodier by Pichot, the French translator of Scott and Byron. The idea of *Smarra* Nodier got from hearing the old porter of his house in Paris, who was too ill to sleep anywhere except sitting in his chair, relate his nightmares and dreams. The model for the Fée aux Miettes was an old woman who served in his father's house when he was a child, and who treated his father, a man of sixty, as if he were a giddy youth. This old Denise maintained that before entering the Nodiers' household she had been in the service of a Monsieur d'Amboise, governor of Château-Thierry. When she held forth on this subject, she mixed up with her own experiences reminiscences of the most extraordinary events and most antiquated customs; and the family, out of curiosity, caused inquiry to be made about this remarkable governor. The archives of the town showed that only one of the name had ever existed, and that he had died in 1557. One can see how the story of the fairy evolved itself out of this curious incident. The very slightest element of fact—a landscape, a legend, a dream, a lie, a mere mote—was enough for Nodier.

The amiable, clever man, whose house was for a number of years the rendezvous of the men of letters who made their *début* about 1830, the place where all the talented young beginners repaired to seek encouragement and, if possible, permission to read a ballad or a little piece of prose before the select company which assembled there on Sunday afternoons, this man in his proper person represents the extreme of Romantic fantasticality in the literature of the period. The fantastic supernaturalism which was the main characteristic of German Romanticism, is only one of the poles of French Romanticism; or, to speak more correctly, it is merely one of its elements—in some of the most notable men of the school a weak and subordinate, in others an important element, but an element always present. In Victor Hugo's case it announces itself at once, in his *Ronde du Sabbat*, and makes itself forcibly felt in the great *Légende des Siècles*, though in this latter the legend is only naïve history; we have a glimpse of it even in the rationalistic Mérimée (half explained away in *La Vénus d'Ille*, more distinct in *La Vision de Charles XI.* and *Les âmes du purgatoire*); it reigns, half-seraphic, half-sanguinarily sensual, in Lamartine's *La chute d'un ange*; it pervades Quinet's pantheistically vague *Ahasvère*; it appears in George Sand's old age in the pretty fairy-tales she writes for her grandchildren; it occupies even the plastic Gautier in the many tales in which he allows himself to be influenced by Hoffmann; and, as Swedenborgian spiritism, it actually, in a romance like *Séraphitus-Séraphita*, completes Balzac's great *Comédie Humaine*. But in no other author has it the naïve originality and the poetic force which distinguish Nodier.

[1] Nodier's youth and first literary efforts are described in *The Emigrant Literature*.

V

RETROSPECT—FOREIGN INFLUENCES

The new literary and artistic movement had both foreign and indigenous sources. The foreign are the more clearly evident.

As has already been observed, the older foreign literature which had hitherto been kept out of France, and the new, which was captivating men's minds by its novelty, were simultaneously seized on and assimilated by the young generation, with an eagerness exactly proportioned to the vehemence with which the works in question repudiated the rules adhered to in earlier French literature. Before the eyes of the young school there was, as it were, a prism, which refracted all rays in a certain uniform manner. The rays which passed through changed their character in the process.

The name of *Shakespeare* early became the great rallying cry of the Romanticists. August Wilhelm Schlegel had prepared the way for Shakespeare; in his famous Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature, which were published in French as well as German, he had been the first to extol and expound him. Mercier, the French "prophet of Romanticism," eagerly took up the cry; Villemain and Guizot followed suit; imitations and translations, the latter more faithful than those

of the previous century, did what in them lay to popularise the name and art of the great Englishman. At the beginning of the Twenties, the progress that had been made was not sufficient to prevent a company of English actors who tried to play Shakespeare in the Porte-St. Martin theatre, being received with a shower of apples and eggs and cries of: "Speak French! Down with Shakespeare! He was one of Wellington's adjutants!"[1] But we have seen that their successors met with a most cordial reception only a few years later. In the interval Beyle had made his determined effort to procure Shakespeare due recognition; the *Globe* (published first three times a week, then daily) had made its appearance as the organ of the younger generation, and its ablest contributors had conducted the campaign of the new cause with remarkable skill.

Beyle who, in spite of his paradoxicalness, is one of the most clear-headed and original writers of his day, expresses profound admiration for Shakespeare without being guilty of any lack of piety towards Racine, whom he represents as the Englishman's antipodes. He shows that the moments of complete illusion which ought to occur during the course of every theatrical performance, occur more frequently during the representation of Shakespeare's than of Racine's plays, and also that the peculiar pleasure imparted by a tragedy depends upon these same seconds of illusion and the emotion which they leave in the spectator's mind. Nothing hinders illusion more than admiration of the beautiful verse of a tragedy. The question we have to answer is: What is the task of the dramatic poet? Is it to present us with a beautifully evolved plot in melodious verse, or is it to give a truthful representation of emotions? In his own answer to this question Beyle goes farther than Romantic tragedy, exemplified by Victor Hugo and Alexandre Dumas, subsequently did; for he unconditionally rejects verse as a vehicle for tragic drama. Granted, he says, that the aim of tragedy is to give a faithful representation of emotions, then its first requirement is distinct expression of thoughts and feelings. Such distinctness is detracted from by verse. He quotes Macbeth's words, spoken when he sees the ghost of Banquo sitting in his place: "The table's full;" and maintains that rhyme and rhythm can add nothing to the beauty of such a cry. It was obviously Vitet, not Hugo, who subsequently came up to Beyle's dramaturgic ideal.

He warns against imitation of Shakespeare. The master should only be followed in his understanding observation of the society in which he lived, and his skill in giving his contemporaries exactly the kind of tragedy which they needed; for to-day too, in 1820, the desire for a certain kind of tragic drama exists, even though the public, intimidated by the fame of Racine, does not venture to demand it of the poet. It is only when an author studies and satisfies his age that he is truly Romantic. For "Romanticism" is the art of providing nations with the literary works which in the existing condition of their ideas and customs are fitted to give them the greatest possible amount of pleasure, whereas "Classicism" offers them the literature which gave their greatgrandfathers the greatest possible amount of pleasure. In his own day Racine was a Romanticist. Shakespeare is a Romanticist, in the first place because he depicted for the Englishmen of 1590 the bloody struggles and the results of their civil wars, and in the second place because he has painted a series of masterly, subtly shaded pictures of the impulses of the human mind and the passions of the human heart. The teaching of Romanticism is, not that men should imitate England or Germany, but that each nation should have its own literature, modelled upon its own character, just as we all wear clothes cut and sewn for ourselves alone.

To Beyle, we observe, Romanticism is almost the exact equivalent of what we call modern art. Characteristic of that inveterate tendency of the Latin race to classicism which has already been alluded to, are his repeated assertions that the author should be "romantic" in all that concerns his subject-matter, this being "the requirement of the age," but that he should remain classic in his manner of presenting it, in vocabulary and style. For language is an established convention and therefore practically unchangeable. Men should try to write like Pascal, Voltaire, and La Bruyère.[2]

With characteristic variations the most eminent contributors to the *Globe* formulate their definitions of Romanticism in very fair harmony with each other and with Beyle. At the time when Hugo was still royalist, Christian, and conservative, the *Globe* was already revolutionary, philosophic, and liberal. The first to publish the programme of Romanticism in the *Globe*was Thiers. He proclaimed its watchwords to be *nature* and *truth*—those almost inevitable war-cries in every artistic and literary revolution. He opposes himself to the academic, the symmetrical in plastic art, and in dramatic poetry demands *historic* truth, which is the same as what was afterwards called local colouring. Duvergier de Hauranne, in an article *On the Romantic*, defines classicism as routine, Romanticism as liberty—that is to say, liberty for the most varied talents (Hugo and Beyle, Manzoni and Nodier) to develop in all their marked individuality. Ampère defines classicism as imitation, Romanticism as originality. But an anonymous writer (in all probability Sismondi) tries to give a more exact definition; he remarks that the word Romanticism has not been coined to designate the literary works in which any society whatever has given itself expression, but only that literature which gives *a faithful picture of modern civilization*. Since this civilisation is, according to his conviction, spiritual in its essence, Romanticism is to be defined as spirituality in literature. The future author of *Les Barricades*, Vitet, at this time a youth of twenty, tries to settle the matter with the impetuosity and audacity of his age. According to him it simply means independence in artistic matters, individual liberty in literary. "Romanticism is," he says, "Protestantism in literature and art;" and in saying so he is obviously thinking merely of emancipation from a kind of papal authority. He adds that it is neither a literary doctrine nor a party cry, but the law of necessity, the law of change and of progress. "Twenty years hence the whole nation will be Romantic; I say the whole nation, for the Jesuits are not the nation."

The reader can see for himself that there is only the merest shade of difference between these definitions and the conclusion arrived at by Victor Hugo: "Romanticism is Liberalism in literature;" and it will not surprise him to learn that the *Globe* greeted the preface to *Cromwell* with the exclamation: "The movement has now reached M. Hugo." Hugo's chief contribution to it was victory.[3]

Next to Shakespeare, *Sir Walter Scott* was the English author who exercised, if not the most profound, certainly the most plainly traceable influence. He found his way across the French, as across every other frontier. Before the days of his popularity in France the great Scotchman had found in Germany, Italy, and Denmark admirers, who, inspired by patriotic and moral aims, adopted the tone of his fiction. The Waverley novels began to appear in 1814; in 1815 they were already imitated by De la Motte Fouqué in the German "Junker" style; in 1825-26 Manzoni's *Promessi Sposi* appeared; and in 1826 Ingemann began to publish his romantic historical tales, which inculcate a childish kind of patriotism and royalism, and are, as it were, haunted by a pale ghost of Sir Walter Scott. The Waverley novels were translated into French almost immediately after their appearance, and at once achieved a great success. Scott became so popular that in the early Twenties the managers of the theatres commissioned authors to dramatise his novels. The unsuccessful play *Emilia*, written by Soumet, the poet of the transition period, was an adaptation of Scott. Victor Hugo himself, using the name of his young brother-in-law, Paul Fouchet, sent in an adaptation of *Kenilworth*, which as a drama was also a failure.

The young Romantic generation, however, was not appealed to by the qualities in the novels which were most highly appreciated in Protestant countries, but by the talent of their picturesque descriptions and their medieval flavour. It was by his wealth of crossbows and buff jerkins, of picturesque costumes and romantic old castles, that Scott found favour in the eyes of Frenchmen. They ignored or disapproved of the common-sense, sober view of life and the Protestant morality which had won him readers in Germany and Scandinavia. Beyle was the first to criticise Scott severely. He prophesies that in spite of his extraordinary popularity his fame will be short-lived; for, according to Beyle, Scott's talent lay more in the describing of men's clothes and the limning of their features than in the representation of their emotional life and their passions. Art, says Beyle, neither can nor ought to imitate nature exactly; it is always a beautiful untruth; but Scott is too untruthful; his passionate characters strike us as being ashamed of themselves; they lack decision and boldness and naturalness. And it was not long before his critics began to make the complaint, so often reiterated by Balzac, that he could not describe woman and her passions, or at any rate dared not describe these passions with their pleasures, pains, and punishments, in a society which attached exaggerated importance to literary modesty.4[4] The novels with plots laid in modern days made no impression; only *Ivanhoe, Quentin Durward, Kenilworth, The Fair Maid of Perth*, and one or two others were popular.

The special merit of this foreign author in the eyes of Frenchmen was, that he had substituted the novel of dramatic dialogue for the two forms of the longer novel hitherto in vogue—the narrative, in which the headings of the chapters were summaries of the contents and the author played a prominent part, and the letter form, which squeezed all the surprises and all the passion in between "Dear Friend" and "Yours sincerely." The most talented of the young French writers are plainly influenced by him. The one whose moral standard most closely approached the English, Alfred de Vigny, wrote *Cinq-Mars*, a novel with a plot laid in the days of Richelieu, an entertaining, but now old-fashioned work, in which the contrast of good and evil overshadows all other contrasts, and which betrays a remarkable want of appreciation of Richelieu's greatness as a statesman. There is almost a total absence of Scott's skill in characterisation; instead of it we have a lyric element, the glorification of youthful, impetuous chivalry—the old French *bravoure*. Prosper Mérimée fell under the great Scotchman's influence at the same time as Alfred de Vigny, and wrote his *Chronique du Règne de Charles IX.*, a work the spirit of which is still less like Scott's. Mérimée singles out the strong and violent passions in history for their own sake, but also with the French Romanticist's subordinate aim of rousing the wrath of the respectable bourgeois by his audacious unreservedness; his delineation of character is, generally speaking, clear and concise; he tells his tale coldly and with utter disregard of all established moral convention.

Every one knows the characteristic manner in which, at a somewhat later period, Alexandre Dumas employed Scott's wealth of colour and historic style in the production of many light and most entertaining novels, of which *The Three Musketeers* may be named as an example. But it is not so generally known that Balzac, the founder of the modern French novel, was as strongly attracted as De Vigny and Mérimée by the foreign master who made an epoch in the history of fiction. He desired to follow in his path without being a mere imitator. He believed himself quite capable of rivalling Scott in the delineative art which Romanticism had restored to honour, and was confident of his power to impart much more life to dialogue. In Scott's books there was only one type of woman; in France the writer of historic novels could contrast the brilliant vices and motley morals of Catholicism with the dark austerity of Calvinism in the wildest period of French history. This ensured him against monotony. Balzac, who was always projecting monumental works and whose mind had an instinctive bias towards the systematically comprehensive, finally conceived the plan of depicting each historic period since that of Charlemagne in one or more novels, all of which should form a connected chain—an idea which Freytag, in his work, *Die Ahnen*, has since tried to carry out as regards Germany. The first novel which Balzac published in his own name, *Les Chouans*, was intended to be a link in this chain. It describes the war in La Vendée at the time of the Revolution, and came out in 1829, the same year as *Cinq-Mars* and *Chronique du Règne de Charles IX*. Two books published much later, *Sur Cathérine de Médicis*

and *Maître Cornélius*, are also fragments of the projected great work. The latter is a novel in which Balzac enters into direct competition with Sir Walter Scott; its hero is Louis XI., whom he considered unfairly treated by Sir Walter. Although these historical romances are good in their way and contain vivid and careful studies of character, they prove that if Balzac had kept to his intention of merely calling the past to life again, his place in the literature of his century would have been an entirely subordinate one; he would only have been known as one of Scott's disciples.

Victor Hugo also was fired by the famous Scotchman with the desire to write a great historical novel. He determined to make it centre round the cathedral church of Notre-Dame in Paris, the whitewashing of which had horrified him; for he had an admiration and love for the grand old historical building which remind us of Goethe's for Strasburg Cathedral and Oehlenschläger's for the Cathedral of Roskilde. According to Hugo's contract with the publisher, this famous novel was to be ready in April 1829; but he was not able to keep his engagement; he first obtained five months' grace, and then a respite until the 1st of December 1830 upon condition of paying 1000 francs weekly after that date if the book was not finished then. By the 27th of July his preparatory studies were made, and that day he began to write the novel; the following day ushered in the Revolution of July; Hugo's house was in danger from the firing, and during the removal to another, all the notes and studies for his book were lost. Under the circumstances the publisher granted three months' grace; Hugo denied himself to every one, locked away his black suit so that he might not be tempted to go out, sent for a bottle of ink, put on his working-jacket, and worked without paying or receiving a single visit until 14th January 1831, when the ink-bottle was empty and the novel written. During all that time he had only allowed himself one distraction, which was to go and see Charles X.'s ministers sentenced. Not to break his resolution, he went dressed in his civic guard's uniform.

In his earliest youth Hugo had been profoundly impressed by Scott. In a review of *Quentin Durward*, which he wrote at the age of twenty-one, he expresses the greatest admiration for Scott's historical sense, moral earnestness, and dramatic style. But even in this early appreciation we come upon a sentence in which he, as it were, indicates the step he himself hopes to take in advance of Scott. He writes: "After Walter Scott's picturesque but prosaic novel there remains to be created another kind of novel, which in our opinion will be more admirable and more perfect. It is the novel which is both drama and epic, which is both picturesque and poetical, both realistic and idealistic, both true and grand, which combines Walter Scott and Homer." We must not let these last words, with which Hugo, true to himself, spoils his effect by exaggeration, prevent our acknowledging the young author's clear perception of what he himself was one day to be capable of doing in the domain of fiction. He seems to have had the premonition that his novels would be great prose poems, picturesque chronicles rather than pictures of reality like Scott's.

Notre-Dame de Paris, which was intended to give a picture of the life and manners of Paris in the fifteenth century, is the creation of a great constructive imagination. This was a fit subject for Hugo, with his leaning to the grand and colossal. He gives a soul to the building, breathes into it the breath of his spirit until it becomes a living being; and as the scientist reconstructs a whole animal from a single vertebra, so Hugo's brain, with the cathedral as starting-point, conjures up the whole of that long-vanished Paris. The faith and the superstition, the manners and the arts, the laws and the human emotions and passions of those old days, are drawn for us with a broad, strong touch—with no great precision, but with a kind of convincing magic. The characters in *Notre-Dame* are the character sketches of a genius, drawn in the epic style, in more than life-size. Scott's honest, plain, human beings are superseded by the creatures of an artist intoxicated with colour; his gentle spirit makes way for grandiloquent passion pointing unresignedly to blind, iron necessity, that ἀνάγχη which is written on the church wall, and which crushes us all—gipsy and priest, beauty and beast, Phœbus and Quasimodo—century after century under its iron heel.

Even more powerful than Scott's influence was *Byron's*. It was the element of wild passion in his poems and its connection with the wildness of his life—it was Childe Harold and still more Lara, the being marked by the finger of fate, who, suffering from a mysterious melancholy, carries his pride and his anguish with him from land to land—it was this type in its Byronic forms, fantastically magnified by the element of myth and legend enveloping the poet's life, which enchanted the young men whom Hugo had awakened or gathered together. Few were the critics who maintained as Beyle did in spite of his great admiration for Byron, that "this author of deadly dull, conventional tragedies" was certainly not the leader of the Romanticists. Immediately after Byron's death the whole horde of French minor poets seized upon the two themes, Greece and Lord Byron, which they continued year after year to sing with so much ardour and so little comprehension of the dead man's character, that Sainte-Beuve was obliged to protest in the *Globe* against the abuse of the words Byron, liberty, elegy, &c. In 1824 both Hugo and Lamartine gave expression to their feelings regarding Byron, the former in a newspaper article, the latter in a poem. In treating of him as a poet, both authors at this period lay most stress upon his spirit of doubt and his gloomy view of life; neither of them seems to have been at all deeply impressed by the works of his mature manhood; the bright and trenchant political and religious satire of *Don Juan* was, in 1824, missed or misunderstood by them as by so many others. But whereas Hugo's chief endeavour is to show the difference between Byron's poetry and that of the eighteenth century ("The difference between Byron's and Voltaire's laughter is this, that Voltaire had not suffered"), to the sentimental and half orthodox Lamartine the English poet is still the fallen angel. Lamartine's *Fifth Canto of Childe Harold*, in which he endeavours to strike the Byronic note, shows in what he believed himself to resemble the English nobleman, namely, in his romantically heroic personality. Masking as Byron he gives expression to the doubts and

rebellious feelings of which we only catch a rare glimpse in his *Meditations*, but to which he was soon to give utterance in his own name. It was probably Byron who lured both him and Hugo to the East; Hugo contented himself with imaginary excursions, but Lamartine made princely preparations and set off on a grand tour. And if Byron's last works made no profound political impression on these two authors, his last actions and his death did.

Byron's influence is, then, unmistakably traceable in the works of most of the young poets of our period; but so marked and powerful was the originality of this generation of authors, that his sentimental despair, which was so infectious, and which led to so much imitation and affectation in many literatures, glanced off them. There was only one of them in whose ears this particular Byronic note rang like a message from a kindred spirit, and he was, curiously enough, the most elegant and aristocratic, the truest Parisian among them all—Alfred de Musset.

Most of the literary notables in question were born in the provinces—Victor Hugo and Nodier at Besançon, George Sand in Berry, Gautier at Tarbes, Lamennais in Brittany, Sainte-Beuve at Boulogne—and each of these brings with him his characteristic fund of provincialism which does not allow itself to be interpenetrated by the Byronic influence, although both George Sand and Gautier were, in curiously different ways, affected by Byron. Mérimée, who was born in Paris, cooled too quickly to feel the influence of Byron's poetic temperament; it was Byron's spirit of negation which influenced him, and that at second hand, through Beyle. But upon no one does Byron make the same direct, deep impression as on that slender, pale son of Paris, who is distinguished by all the weakness and all the exquisite charm which are the heritage of the last representatives of a noble and ancient race. In the earliest stages of his career, Byron, the true Englishman, had been spiritually minded and melancholy; the senses play but a small part in the poetry of his youth; not till he is the mature man and has visited Italy and lived in Latin countries does his poetry, like Goethe's in Venice, become sensual and audaciously outspoken. De Musset, on the contrary, begins in his early youth with the bold and fleshly realism which we find in some of Byron's later works, and gradually becomes more and more spiritual. At his best he is a keener observer than Byron, and his love-poetry is more delicate; it has a Raphaelesque beauty which Byron's neither attains nor aims at. He is the weaker, tenderer, more charming, French Byron, as Heine is the smaller, more wanton, wittier, German Byron, and Paludan-Müller the satirical, orthodox, royalist, Danish Byron. De Musset suffers like a boy, complains like a woman; he is what Auguste Préault, the sculptor, once called him: "Mademoiselle Byron."

Shelley, whose name did not find its way into France till much later, was practically unknown to this generation. As for the so-called Lake Poets, Sainte-Beuve, who acquired the English language in his youth, and had more of the critical gift than any of his contemporaries, was the only one of the Romanticists who appreciated that nature-loving, realistic school at its true worth, assimilated some of its spirit, and endeavoured by means of a few translations to bring it into favour. Brizeux, the poet of Brittany, reminds us of the Lake Poets, though he knew nothing about them.

The influence of Germany was less powerful than that of England, and it is still easier in the case of this country to show the free treatment to which the impressions received were subjected. Germany was seen overshadowed by the old Teutonic oaks; its fountains and rivers were haunted by elves and fairies, who trailed their shadowy white garments across the dewy grass; among its mountains dwelt the gnomes, and in the air above the mountain-peaks witches held their revelries. Germany was a Walpurgis Night dreamland. Only one of Goethe's works was really popular, namely, *Werther*, the high pressure passion of which enchanted all readers. Werther seemed to them a René, because, though he was much older than René, they had made acquaintance with René first, and this circumstance deprived the German hero of his freshness and approximated him to the Childe Harold type. Something of the same kind happened with Faust. That imposing figure, which made such an impression on the whole of Europe, was so completely foreign to the French that they never truly comprehended it. French poetry had never occupied itself with the struggles and sufferings of the questioning spirit. And this German doctor, who is simple enough to see the devil in a poodle dog, sentimental enough to cross Gretchen's threshold with pious emotions in his breast, and yet unscrupulous enough to desert the girl he has betrayed and kill her brother in a dishonourable duel, was too un-French to be understood. We gather from the apologies of the Romanticists the nature of the criticism to which the men of the classic school subjected *Faust*. "How many," writes Duvergier de Hauranne, "are rendered insensible to all the beauties of this masterpiece by the fact that it treats of a compact with the devil! They cannot understand any one allowing such an improbability to pass unchallenged; and yet they themselves from their childhood have, without raising the slightest objection, beheld Agamemnon murdering his daughter in order to obtain a favourable wind." French readers were accustomed to the superstitions of antiquity, but felt themselves repelled by those of the Middle Ages. And there were, moreover, many who, without reading them, denounced Goethe's works as barbaric literature. As late as 1825 that narrow-minded assailant of the Romanticists, Auger, the secretary of the French Academy, in making an attack on "those lovers of the beauties of nature, who would willingly exchange the Apollo Belvedere for a shapeless image of St. Christopher, and with the greatest pleasure give *Phèdre* and *Iphigénie* for *Faust* and *Götz von Berlichingen*," drew smiles from the Academicians by pronouncing these last titles in a burlesque manner, as if they were barbaric names. The admiration of the Romanticists for *Faust* was, however, as has already been observed, barren of result. Though Gérard de Nerval translated the First Part to the entire satisfaction of the aged Goethe, and though Delacroix's painting of Faust and Mephistopheles riding through the air was also much admired by the old poet and art connoisseur, the French literature of the period only rarely (as in the case of Quinet) shows any trace of the influence of the great drama.

One would have imagined that Schiller, with his association with Rousseau and his flowery dramatic rhetoric, would have appealed more forcibly to Frenchmen than Goethe; as a matter of fact he possessed little attraction for the younger generation. Adaptations of all his plays were indeed performed on the French stage, but this happened just before the formation of the Romantic School proper, and the semi-Romantic poets of the transition period, who cut and carved these plays into conventional tragedies to suit the taste of the day, destroyed them in place of teaching the public to appreciate them. Out of the *Jungfrau von Orleans* and *Don Carlos*, Soumet manufactured a *Jeanne d'Arc* and an *Élisabeth de France*; *Fiesco* was adapted and maltreated by Ancelot, *Wallenstein* by Liadières; but neither Classicists nor Romanticists derived any satisfaction from the results, and the verdict of the austere Beyle (who read, or tried to read the originals) is that Schiller paid too much homage to the old French taste to be able to present his countrymen with the tragedy which their manners and customs demanded. He has no appreciation whatever of Schiller's real greatness; he evidently knew too little German to be able to enjoy and understand *Wallenstein*; besides, like many of the younger men, he allowed himself to be carried away to such an extent by his desire to annoy the Classicists, that he actually extols Werner's *Luther* as the modern drama most nearly approaching Shakespeare, and its author as a much greater poet than Schiller.

The only contemporary German author besides Goethe who made any deep impression was E. Th. A. Hoffmann. Hoffmann, in fact, became to Frenchmen the German *par excellence*. Tieck was too vague, Novalis too mystical, to find the public in France which they did, for instance, in Denmark; but Hoffmann united to that wildly capricious fantasticality, which to Frenchmen was a perfectly new poetical element, the sharp decision of outline which appeals to them, and which reminded them of their compatriot Callot. His artistic courage, which dares to carry out capricious conceits to their extremest consequences, won their approbation. He dealt in strong colours and startling effects, and his work, with all its wildness, is as full of clear minute detail as a "Temptation of St. Anthony" by Breughel or Teniers; in contrast to Novalis, he appealed to Frenchmen by his Berlin rationality, which is so closely allied to French rationality; there was method in his madness. Thus it came about that he alone of all the German authors had followers, one may almost say disciples, in France. The influence of his tales is, as has already been observed, strongly felt in Charles Nodier's work; at a later period it is even more perceptible in Gérard de Nerval's, and it is unmistakable in Gautier's short stories. Highly original as this last-mentioned author is, and despite the fact that he hardly knew a word of German, he nevertheless at various periods of his life was under German influence. His youthful *Romans et Contes* remind us of Hoffmann, and much in his *Émaux et Camées* recalls Heinrich Heine. He had an intense admiration for Goethe's *West-Oestlicher Diwan*. What attracted him in Goethe was the artistic infallibility manifested by that great poet during the latter years of his life.

---

[1] Stendhal: *Racine et Shakespeare*, p. 215.

[2] *Racine et Shakespeare*, pp. 115, 117, 218 *note*.

[3] *Cf*. Th. Ziesing: *Le Globe de 1824 à 1830*.

[4] See Beyle: *Racine et Shakespeare*, 294; Balzac's own words in the preface to *La Comédie Humaine*; and the utterances of his alter ego, Daniel d'Arthez, in *Les Illusions perdues*.

VI

RETROSPECT—INDIGENOUS SOURCES

But the renascence of literature in France was not due chiefly to foreign influences. It was upon the soil of their native country that the new men built.

The work accomplished by a great literary school such as the Romantic School in France may be compared to the building of a town, only that the town of literature is invariably built upon land which is protected merely by slight and leaky embankments from the waters of forgetfulness. Water at the foundations is soon discovered; it rises slowly but steadily; at last the lower buildings disappear, and only the loftiest monuments remain towering, eternally visible, above the level of the Lethean stream.

What gives these highest literary monuments their proud position is partly the profundity of the thoughts which support them, partly the exact conformity of the perfect artistic expression to the idea; but, unless the author is really a creative thinker, what is of conclusive importance is that his mind should, consciously or unconsciously, be permeated by the most advanced ideas of his age; for it is the spirit which "maketh alive" and preserves from destruction.

Romanticism in France displays three main tendencies:

1. The endeavour to reproduce faithfully either some real piece of past history or some phase of modern life—the tendency towards the true.

2. The endeavour after perfection of form, whether apprehended as plasticity and picturesqueness of expression, as severe metrical harmony, or as a prose style imperishable from its concise simplicity—the tendency towards the beautiful.

3. Enthusiasm for great religious or social reformatory ideas, an ethic aim in art—the tendency

towards the good.

These three main tendencies define the nature of this vigorous and talented school as the three dimensions define space; and each of them produced works of great and enduring value.

The last two, as resultant from French influences, occupy our attention first.

Although there were to be found in the Romantic School authors who, like Mérimée and Gautier, retained to the last a natural or artificial indifference to the social and political aims of the age, it numbered far more who were strongly appealed to and affected by the endeavours made to organise the future of their country and of the whole human race. Poetry, literature, has two main developments. It is either of the nature of representation based upon psychological observation—in which form it approaches science—or it bears the character of an annunciation, an inspired appeal—in which form it approaches religion. Many writers of the generation of 1830 show that they apprehended it in the latter manner. The critics who have tried to depreciate these men by calling their productions works with a purpose, or problem literature, have done them wrong. For what such critics condemn is nought else but the spirit of the age—its ideas; and these ideas are the life-blood of all true literature. All that we have a right to demand in the interest of art is, that the veins through which this life-blood flows shall only show blue under the skin, not rise black and swollen as they do in the case of a sick or angry man.

During the course of the Thirties reformatory ideas make their way into French Romanticism from all sides. If we try to trace them back to their source, it is not possible to stop before Saint-Simon. In Count Claude Henri de Saint-Simon (born in 1760), the only descendant of the famous Duke de Saint-Simon who wrote the private chronicles of the court of Louis XIV., France, which showed so little interest in the drama of *Faust*, herself produced a nineteenth-century Faust, a genuine Faust in the matter of restless genius and irresistible craving after both theoretical and practical knowledge of everything in the universe. He is less acute and sagacious than the hero of Goethe's famous poem, but his mental horizon is wider, his aim a grander one, and his whole endeavour of a higher nature. He begins where Faust ends. His plans for cutting a canal through the Isthmus of Panama, and for the canalisation of Spain, remind us of the undertakings of the latter years of Faust's life. Saint-Simon was in turn soldier, man of fashion, engineer, company-projector, philosopher, scientist, political economist, and founder of a religion; he was a man who possessed almost every talent. In his youth he spent a large fortune, believing himself to be heir to the dignities of peer of France and grandee of Spain and a capital of 500,000 francs; but his father and the Duke de Saint-Simon quarrelled, and he inherited nothing. He sank into abject poverty, worked as a copyist nine hours a day for a thousand francs a year, and in 1812 was reduced to living on bread and water. In despair, he one day made an attempt at suicide; he shot out one of his eyes, but recovered. The attempt at suicide, too, reminds us of Faust.

Disciples came to his assistance, supported him, were instructed by him, and founded one periodical after another to propagate his ideas.

At the time of Saint-Simon's death, which happened five years before the Revolution of July, these ideas were only known to and adopted by a small circle, but during the reign of Louis Philippe they spread rapidly, undergoing various alterations during the process. A Saint-Simonist sect was founded, a sect with a high-priest and with eminent men of all classes and professions amongst its numbers, such men as Isaac Péreire, the financier, and Félicien David, the musical composer. In the end the Saint-Simonist ideas penetrated the whole of French society; through Michel Chevalier they became elements of political economy; they inspired the most eminent historian of the day, Augustin Thierry; they lay at the foundation of the philosophy of the greatest French thinker of the century, Auguste Comte; with certain modifications they won, in Pierre Leroux and Lamennais, influential philosophic and religious apostles; and at the same time they made their way into poetry. And there was nothing marvellous in all this, for, in spite of his extravagances, Saint-Simon undoubtedly had something of the prophetic instinct of the great poet.

He was in advance of his age; for his philosophy is one of the signs of the great European reaction against the eighteenth century, which he regarded as a purely critical, purely disintegrative period, whilst he denominated the nineteenth an organic, directly productive period. He disagreed as entirely with those who imagined that the happiness of humanity can be produced by a mere change in the forms of government as with those who, like the church party, exalted the past in order to bring it back again. He was not the friend of the past, but the herald of the future; the aims and endeavours of the reaction appeared to him only in so far reasonable and right as they arose from a perception of the truth that mankind cannot be civilised by mere reason, that religion is indispensable to civilisation—the religion desiderated by Saint-Simon being, however, one divested of the conventions and externalities of all the existing religions. Possessed, as he was, not with the spirit of doubt, but with the reformer's enthusiasm, the liberty which consisted in emancipation from restraints seemed to him of little value if it were not complemented and completed by true, perfect liberty, that is to say, by an ever greater, wider capability. The work of the last, the critical, centuries had been the destruction of the medieval power of the priest and the warrior; now the time had come to establish the reign of science and industry. In the new order of society science was destined to take the place of faith, industry of war.

The first thing to be done was to "organise" science and industry.

In Saint-Simon's *Lettres d'un habitant de Genève*, any who are interested in his projects for the organisation of science may read his scheme of starting a subscription at the tomb of Sir Isaac Newton for the purpose of enabling all the greatest scientists and artists to devote themselves to their professions, not only freed from all pecuniary anxieties, but with the certainty of being well

paid for their work—a scheme which Alfred de Vigny, as author of *Chatterton*, must have read with enthusiastic approbation, if he ever did read it. But he would learn with perhaps more surprise than approbation that these geniuses were in return to undertake the supervision of all the spiritual interests of humanity, in accordance with a definite, carefully detailed plan.

Saint-Simon's *Parable* is the document which gives most information about the proposed organisation of industry. As this parable, from the fact that it is written in a laconic style and with glimpses of a wit which the author displays on no other occasion, is probably the only one of his writings which will continue to be read, I reproduce it in a condensed form.

Suppose, says Saint-Simon, that France were to lose from the ranks of its scientists, painters, poets, mechanicians, physicians, surgeons, &c., the fifty best in each class—say its 3000 best scientific men, artists, and mechanicians—what would be the result?

Since these men are the real productive power of the country, the flower of the French nation, at least another whole generation would be required to repair the misfortune. For the human beings whose life-work is unmistakably of use are exceptions, and nature is not prodigal of these exceptions.

Let us suppose another case. Let us suppose that France keeps all her gifted scientists, artists, industrial and mechanical geniuses, but has the misfortune to lose his Royal Highness the King's brother, their Royal Highnesses the Dukes of Berry, Orléans, and Bourbon, the Duchess of Angoulême, the Duchess of Bourbon, and the young Duchess of Condé. She at the same time loses all the great officers of the crown, all the ministers of state, chamberlains, masters of the hunt, marshals, cardinals, archbishops, bishops, deans, and canons, all the prefects and sub-prefects, all the judges, and into the bargain 10,000 of the richest of those landed proprietors who live in great style.

The event would undoubtedly cause grief to the nation, because the French are a good-hearted people, and not capable of regarding with indifference the sudden disappearance of such a number of their fellow-citizens. But this loss of not fewer than 30,000 of the persons who are esteemed the first in the state could occasion sorrow only on purely sentimental grounds; for no serious harm to the state as state would arise from it. It would be very easy to fill the vacant places. There are any number of Frenchmen who could occupy the position of His Majesty the King's brother quite as well as that august prince, any number who could fill the place of prince of the blood royal, &c., &c. The anterooms of the court are crowded with aspirants ready and fit to be invested with the rank of officers of the crown. The army possesses any number of officers who are quite as good generals as our present marshals; and how many commercial travellers are cleverer men than our ministers of state, how many priests quite as devout and capable as our cardinals, archbishops, deans, and canons! As regards the 10,000 landed proprietors, their heirs would scarcely need any apprenticeship to make quite as charming hosts.

The idea underlying this jest, for which, by the way, Saint-Simon had to answer to the authorities, is, of course, that only the productive class of citizens is in reality useful. Before the Revolution the conflict was between the nobility and the bourgeoisie; now that a part of the bourgeoisie is elevated to the same position as the nobility and shares its privileges, the division is between the unproductive and the productive class; the future belongs to industry, labour, the deeds of peace and utility. But whereas contemporary French political economists only went the length of granting the individual the greatest possible amount of liberty to develop his powers, Saint-Simon demanded the interference of the state. It was, according to him, the province of the state to organise labour and production; it alone could ensure that for the future man should utilise nature only, and not his fellow-man. The state ought, while fully acknowledging the natural differences between man and man, to do its utmost to abolish the artificial differences—ought, therefore, to abolish all hereditary privileges, and to annul or modify the law of succession.

In Saint-Simon's writings we find, then, in the first place, the fundamental ideas of modern socialism—distrust of the consequences of free competition and the demand that productive labour shall receive the recompense and the honour which are its due—ideas which prompted his famous dictum, that every member of society ought to hold the place in it to which his abilities entitle him and receive the due reward of his labour (*à chacun selon sa capacité!*). In the second place we find, as a result of this demand, the inculcation, for the first time in the writings of a French author, of the doctrine of the complete equality of woman and man as members of society. And, lastly, we have, in the matter of religion, rejection of all dogma, not with the aim of destroying religion, but for the purpose of rescuing from the grave of orthodoxy the one command: Love one another! This is the Christianity which Saint-Simon expounded in his last important work, *Le nouveau Christianisme*, a Christianity with only one doctrine, which may be expressed as follows: The task of religion is to help society to accomplish that great object, the speediest possible improvement of the condition of the poorest and most numerous class.

There was something in Saint-Simon's personality which could not but be congenial to the more simple-minded among the Romanticists. He had the unbounded self-confidence which inspires others with confidence; the philosopher's inclination to self-examination formed no part of his nature; he was dogmatic; he was a prophet. He was, moreover, possessed by the Romantic desire to experience everything, to feel everything. The lines of conduct which he prescribed as indispensable to progress in philosophy do not differ materially from those which a young Romantic poet would have named as requisite for poetical production. They are: (1) to lead during one's vigorous years as active and independent a life as possible; (2) to make one's self thoroughly acquainted with every variety of theory and every variety of practice; (3) to study all classes of society and to insinuate one's self into the most varied social positions; (4) to sum up

one's observations and draw a conclusion from them.

In Saint-Simon's philosophy there was one outstanding feature that, as a rule, repelled the Romantic authors, namely, his enthusiasm for industrial pursuits, which, as merely useful, were repugnant to most of them. But the philosophy was by no means destitute of poetry. Its revolutionary, its fantastic, and its Utopian elements were certain to appeal to a Romanticist, as also its insistence upon natural inequality, its idolisation of genius, and its leaning to religion. It was poetical, too, in its solicitude for the welfare of woman and its affectionate interest in the most unfortunate classes of society.

And it was not until after 1830 that Saint-Simonism began to be a social power. Saint-Simon himself, like most founders of religions, was both prophet and exemplar; he made of his disciples real apostles; regarding him in sober earnest as the modern Messiah, they went out into the world as his messengers. It was through these men and their intellectual kin that society in general made acquaintance with the doctrines of Saint-Simon during the reign of Louis Philippe, though some of the intellectually vigilant had before this read the master's own writings. There is a memorandum in Victor Hugo's diary for 1830 (*Littérature et Philosophie mêlées I.*) which shows that he, for one, was already acquainted with Saint-Simon.

A year after Saint-Simon's death, his organ, *Le Producteur*, had to be given up; but this very circumstance brought his disciples into more personal and intimate relations with their adherents. And when Enfantin, the St. Paul of the new faith, a man of imposing appearance, a sacerdotal genius of the first rank, with something of a Brigham Young's capacity for rule and leadership, became the real head of the sect, it made proselytes of numbers of clever young men and cultivated, high-spirited women. Large sums were voluntarily contributed towards the support of the Saint-Simonist "family"; in 1831 alone they amounted to 330,000 francs. A new weekly paper, *L'Organisateur* was started, and from 1830 onwards Paul Leroux edited the *Globe*. But the doctrines propagated deviated ever more and more from Saint-Simon's original system. In his scheme of organisation an important rôle was assigned to the capitalists; one of the three Chambers proposed by him was to consist exclusively of capitalists. But now capital was attacked. Saint-Simon had distinctly reprobated every species of communism; now, in the "family," community of goods was the order of the day, and state communism was considered desirable. One particular conclusion deduced from Saint-Simon's doctrines led to the downfall of the system and the break-up of the sect. The master had taught that, since the old Christianity had put enmity between the flesh and the spirit, it was the task of the new to reconcile them. The old Christianity had made self-denial and mortification of the flesh man's aim, the new ought to make it well-being and universal happiness. Employing other words we may express his thought thus:—The Christianity of renunciation has been a sharp and violent remedy for that indulgence in the satisfaction of every desire which was the order of the day under the empire of Rome; but the remedy has shown itself to be quite as dangerous as the disease. We have got rid of the disease, but what can free us from the remedy without exposing us to a relapse? No power except that of the new Christianity.

From this comparatively sensible idea Enfantin deduced doctrines the practical application of which would have resulted in much such a state of matters as prevailed amongst Jan van Leiden's Anabaptists. One of the original doctrines of Saint-Simonism was that now, in the new era, man, the individual, was superseded by the individual, *man-woman*, whose constituent parts possessed equal rights and full liberty to dissolve an unsatisfactory marriage, it being in the double, not the single, being that true humanity is realised. From this doctrine Enfantin drew the conclusion that there are two kinds of marriage, the one the marriage of monogamists, the other the marriage of those who in course of time become polygamists—that is to say, the enduring and the ephemeral marriage; actual, simultaneous polygamy was to be the prerogative only of the priests and priestesses. Although little could be advanced, either in general discussion or in the court of justice, against the Saint-Simonists' argument that the inauguration of this order of things would have no other consequence than the confirming and legalising of relations which at present existed illegally, this particular practical conclusion sufficiently showed the entire incapacity of the young enthusiasts to judge what was possible and what impossible of realisation in the existing, state of society; it proved them to be of the number of those who believe that society can be reformed by a stroke of the pen. Their excuse is to be found in the circumstance that, with the exception of Enfantin and Bazard, all the Saint-Simonists of 1830 (as also all Lamennais' disciples) were about twenty years of age. Ridicule cooled their ardour for the spread of the faith. In the summer of 1832 the heads of the "family" were sentenced, Enfantin to a year's imprisonment, Michel, Chevalier, and Duveyrier to a trifling fine. The young enthusiasts of whom the little sect was composed were scattered; but almost all of them distinguished themselves in later life, either in the domain of science, of industry, or of art. Their exaggerations of the theories of Saint-Simon had, like the Utopian schemes of Fourier which belong to the same period, no influence upon literature. It was influenced only by the original ideas.

The air of the day became impregnated with these ideas; minds were infected by them; they seized upon some soft, impressionable character, and this impressionable character influenced a strong one; they gained possession of a woman through a man, or of a man through a woman, of a poet through a priest, or of a young student through a poet. And after the manner of ideas, they summoned up other ideas—socialistically democratic ideas which had lain dormant since the end of the previous century, like Louis Blanc's; philosophico-historic humanitarian ideas like those of Pierre Leroux's maturer period, which recalled Schelling and were inimical to plutocracy; ideas like Lamennais', which recalled the thoughts and feelings with which, during the peasant revolts of the Middle Ages, the priests who bore the crucifix in front of the rebel armies inspired the

proletariat, making them ready to risk their lives.

If the source of the Romantic School's reformatory desires and endeavours (what we have called its tendency towards the good) is to be found in the doctrines of Saint-Simon, its tendency towards the beautiful is to be traced to the influence of another great Frenchman.

Nothing contributed more to the remarkable artistic advance noticeable in French literature, and especially French lyric poetry, at this period, than the discovery, the recovery, of a French genius of whose existence no one had any idea. As, at the beginning of the modern era, the impulse to Italian humanism was given by the excavation of the first antique sculptures from the soil which had so long concealed them, so now the impulse to a regular revolution in French poetry was given by the discovery and publication, in 1819, of André Chénier's works. Scales fell, as it were, from men's eyes when, twenty-six years after their author's death, these soulful Ionic poems were brought to the light of day; all the literary idols of the Empire, Delille and all the didactic descriptive poets, fell and were broken to pieces. A fresh spring breeze from ancient Hellas, the true, the real Greece, blew over France and fertilised the ground. The Alexandrine, which in the eighteenth century had been so flaccid and feeble, in the seventeenth so stiff and symmetrical, revealed mysterious harmonies, a delicate, flexible force, an audacious, sensuous charm, and (now that the cæsura no longer came inevitably after the sixth foot and the clause no longer ended with the line) a versatility hitherto undreamt of. The ideas and emotions were modern, but the artistic spirit which dictated the expression given them was antique. In this combination lay concealed the motive power that produced a whole literary development of the same species as that to which Ronsard, by adopting a similar standpoint, gave the impulse in the sixteenth century. In this new literature the ancient and the modern spirit met; and their meeting-place was at a great distance from their rendezvous in the days of Louis XIV. The clear radiance of the name of André Chénier extinguished the light of all the names that had hitherto shone brightly. A poet with the light of genius on his brow and the martyr's aureole round his head, had risen from the grave to lead the young generation into the promised land of the new literature.

André Marie Chénier, born in Constantinople (Galata) in 1762, was the son of a beautiful, bright, and intellectual Greek woman, whose maiden name was Santi l'Homaka.[1] His father was the French consul-general for Turkey, an eminent savant. While still a little child, André was taken to France, to a beautiful part of Languedoc. During the years that he passed there he forgot his native language, but when he began to learn it again at school in Paris, he picked it up so fast that at the age of sixteen he had completely mastered it. He devoted himself eagerly to the study of its literature, with which he was as well acquainted as with that of France. At the age of twenty he entered the army as a *cadet gentilhomme*, a kind of second lieutenant, and went into garrison with his regiment at Strasburg. He spent all his spare time in studying languages. But the garrison life, with its utter want of intellectual interests, was very irksome to him; after six months of it he returned to Paris; and as he at this time developed a malady the only cure for which was a regular and quiet life, he threw up his commission. But abstinence and inaction were little to the taste of a young man in whose case the eager passions of youth were combined with the restless artistic and scientific bent of the genius. In company with friends he travelled for two years in Switzerland and Italy, making a long stay in Rome. He fell ill in Naples and was unable to reach Greece, the goal of the journey, the country he longed to see. When he returned to Paris in the beginning of 1785, he mixed with the best society of the day in his parents' house. He made acquaintance with Le Brun, the poet, David, the painter, Lavoisier, the chemist, and numbers of diplomatists and public officials whom the Revolution was to make famous. Besides these he had his own private circle of friends, most of whom were talented young noblemen. Dividing his time pretty equally between study and pleasure, he was also much in the company of the most frivolous and dissipated set of the day, which consisted of fine gentlemen (the Duke of Montmorency, Prince Czartoryski, &c.), ladies of rank (the Duchesse de Mailly, the Princesse de Chalais, &c.), artists and authors (Beaumarchais, Mercier, &c), and beautiful young courtesans (the Rose, Glycère, Amélie of Chénier's poems)—a mixed company whose ways and doings Rétif de la Bretonne has described to us, and the majority of whom fell victims to the guillotine. At this period of his life Chénier made acquaintance with a man who, sharing to the full his love of liberty and hatred of all terrorism, at once became his friend; this was the Italian poet Alfieri, who had just arrived in Paris accompanied by the Duchess of Albany. And almost at the same time he became acquainted with the woman who is extolled and bitterly accused in many of his poems under the name of Camille—Madame de Bonneuil, the love of his youth, to whom he was long and passionately attached. Often in her country home did young André kneel at this lady's feet whilst she played the harp and sang one of the fashionable romances recounting the pains and joys of love.

In 1787 he was appointed attaché to the embassy in London, where he felt miserably lonely and dependent. Electrified by the news of the outbreak of the Revolution, he returned, full of hope, to Paris. Ere this he had become conscious of his poetic gifts; he now began to plan and write poetic works, varying very much in character, but all severely antique in style. Twice before had French literature returned to the antique. The first time was in the days of Ronsard, when men decked antiquity with the gaudy tinsel of the Italian Renaissance; the second was in the days of Louis XIV., when they invested it with court pomp and conventions. André Chénier, who had Greek blood in his veins, who read and wrote his mother's tongue as easily as French, and who perhaps alone among Frenchmen saw ancient Hellas neither through Latin spectacles nor through the dust of seventeenth-century perruques, André Chénier calmly and simply, like a young Apollo, put an end to the existing conception of the antique, and, consequently, of the nature of poetry. He realised that the poets of Greece had spoken and written in the language of the people, and that their perfection of form, the result of self-restraint, was something widely different from

reverence for arbitrary, conventional directions and prohibitions. He represents a reaction against the eighteenth-century poetic style which resembles Thorvaldsen's reaction against eighteenth-century sculpture; like Thorvaldsen, he frequently imitated and made use of the antique; he surpasses the Dane in ardour, sensuous warmth, and pathos.

Before 1789 André Chénier was the elegiac, idyllic, and erotic poet. He developed marvellously both as poet and man after the French Revolution broke out and filled the air with its thunders and lightnings. He had been educated in the philosophic spirit with which Voltaire had imbued the aristocracy of intellect; he had shared in the feelings which led distinguished Frenchmen to support the cause of the free states of North America; now he hailed with the purest enthusiasm the new era of liberty which he had so long desired to see. His idea of liberty was absolute freedom in the domains of thought and religion. Instructed "by the eighteen centuries which theological follies have stained with blood, devoid of respect for the priesthood of any creed whatsoever," because he is convinced that they have one and all "conspired against the happiness and peace of humanity," he desires "to break the yoke of despotism and priestcraft." He was so inexperienced and enthusiastic as to believe it possible that this result could be attained without overstepping the limits of the strictly lawful.

During the first year of the Revolution he still devoted most of his time to poetry. He conceived a short-lived passion for a young and beautiful lady, Madame Gouy d'Arcy, whose praises he has sung in a famous poem. But politics soon drove all other occupations and passions into the background. In 1792, with a prevision of the approaching Reign of Terror, André made a violent attack on the Jacobins in a newspaper article. When his younger brother, the famous revolutionary poet, Marie-Joseph Chénier, who was an active member of the Jacobin Club, felt obliged to defend his fellow-members, André proudly and recklessly took up the gauntlet thrown down. Mutual friends of the brothers managed to bring the painful controversy to a speedy close, but the strained relations lasted for some time. Before this the brothers had been warmly attached. But it was with André as with the ancient Romans; the ties of blood had to give way to the political idea. In the early days of the Revolution he had allowed his brother's tragedy, *Brutus and Cassius*, to be dedicated to him, and in acknowledging this dedication had, with the naïveté of the day, declared his conviction that the great Brutus had expressed himself exactly as he was made to do in the drama. He called the heroes of the play "noble murderers, great tyrannicides, whom the phrase-makers of our day are incapable of understanding"—in short, expressed his approval of regicide when necessary. But the trial of Louis XVI. roused his unbounded wrath; he solicited permission to assist in the King's defence; he wrote a series of articles in his favour; and when the sentence of death had been passed, it was André Chénier who composed the beautiful and dignified letter in which the King demanded the permission of the National Assembly to appeal to the nation. It is (as Becq de Fouquières has remarked) significant that three of Europe's best poets, André Chénier, Schiller, and Alfieri, who were all equally antagonistic to the old autocratic government, and had all hailed the Revolution with joy, should all in 1792 desire to defend King Louis.

Marie-Joseph Chénier was a less gifted and less seriously minded man than his brother; he followed with the stream and rejoiced in the popularity which a talent exactly suited to the requirements of the time procured him. André had the courage which on occasion manifests itself in proud defiance; he was of the stuff of which martyrs are made. Obvious danger only made him bolder in his attacks upon the men who, in his opinion, were disgracing France. He published in his own name his extremely sarcastic ode on the occasion of the fête given by the Jacobins to the amnestied soldiers of the Chateauvieux regiment, who had with perfect justice been sentenced to the galleys for ordinary, mean crimes. And after Marat's assassination, when 44,000 altars were erected to "the friend of the people," André Chénier was the one French poet who felt constrained to sing the praises of Charlotte Corday—a much more daring deed at that time than afterwards. He exclaims:

"La Grèce, ô fille illustre, admirant ton courage,
Épuiserait Paros pour placer ton image
Auprès d'Harmodius, auprès de son ami;
Et des chœurs sur ta tombe, en une sainte ivresse,
Chanterait Némésis, la tardive déesse,
Qui frappe le méchant sur son trône endormi.

Mais la France à la hache abandonne ta tête.
C'est au monstre égorgé qu'on prépare une fête
Parmi ses compagnons, tous dignes de son sort
Oh! quel noble dédain fît sourire ta bouche,
Quand un brigand, vengeur de ce brigand farouche,
Crut te faire pâlir aux menaces de mort."

After the death of the King it was impossible for André to remain in Paris. His brother found a refuge for him in a small house in a retired part of Versailles. Here he lived for some time in quiet and solitude. He worked at his long poem *Hermès*, of which he had as yet only produced fragments, though it had occupied his thoughts more or less for the last ten years, and wrote to Fanny (Madame Laurent Lecoulteux), a lady who lived in the same neighbourhood, his last love poems, which are distinguished by an emotion new in André Chénier's writings—the melancholy of a purely spiritual love. The nobility and charm of a peculiarly beautiful feminine character communicated themselves to these sad, chaste verses.

But this peaceful life at Versailles was only the lull before the storm. Andre's efforts to prevent an

arrest (of a lady) for which orders had been given by the Committee of Public Safety, led to his own imprisonment. He spent his time in Saint-Lazare in revising his manuscripts and writing some of his grandest and most beautiful poems, among others the two famous ones to the Duchesse de Fleury, née Coigny (*La jeune Captive*, and the lines incorrectly entitled *Mademoiselle de Coigny*), and the beautiful fragment which begins "Comme un dernier rayon." He was denounced before the tribunal of the Revolution as an enemy of the people, and was condemned to death for having "written against liberty and in defence of tyranny." The day before this happened he had written the lines:

"Comme un dernier rayon, comme un dernier zéphyre
Anime la fin d'un beau jour,
Au pied de l'échafaud j'essaye encor ma lyre.
Peut-être est-ce bientôt mon tour.
Peut-être avant que l'heure en cercle promenée
Ait posé sur l'émail brillant,
Dans les soixante pas où sa route est bornée.
Son pied sonore et vigilant,
Le sommeil du tombeau pressera ma paupière.
Avant que de ses deux moitiés
Ce vers que je commence ait atteint la dernière,
Peut-être en ces murs effrayés
Le messager de mort, noir recruteur des ombres
Escorté d'infâmes soldats,
Remplira de mon nom ces longs corridors sombres."

On the evening of the 7th Thermidor 1794, the eve of Robespierre's fall, which, if it had happened a day earlier, would have saved him, André Chénier mounted the scaffold. As they were being driven to the place of execution, he said despondently to Roucher, the painter, who was guillotined along with him: "Alas! I have done nothing for posterity." Tradition tells that on the scaffold he struck his forehead, exclaiming: "Yet I had something there!"

Although André Chénier's prose articles had aroused much attention, even abroad—Wieland sent him greetings, the King of Poland sent him a medal—he won no fame as a poet during his lifetime. He had published only two of his poems, the Ode to David on the occasion of the scene in the Tennis Court, and the ironic Ode to the Chateauvieux Regiment; and from that July day in 1794 when his head was severed from his body, his name was forgotten; the memory of him vanished.

Then one fine day in 1819 a firm of Paris publishers who were bringing out a new edition of Marie-Joseph Chénier's (now perfectly antiquated) dramatic works, were offered some poems by "an unknown brother of Chénier's" to fill up the last volume with. They requested a well-known writer of that day, Henri de Latouche, to look through these poems. Struck by their beauty, this man began to make inquiry after the rest of Andre's manuscripts. He brought one old packet, one little yellow book after another to light, made a careful, tasteful selection, and by its publication produced a revolution in the poetic doctrines of his country. The name of André Chénier was soon known throughout the land, and the youth of the provinces as well as the youth of Paris received the new poetic revelation with enthusiasm. (See the description of this enthusiasm in Balzac's *Les deux Poètes*, the introduction to *Les Illusions perdues*.)

This poet, who had now been so long dead, not only made all the lyric poetry that had been written in the last generation seem antiquated and impossible, but actually threw Lamartine's first *Meditations Poétiques*, which were published about this time, completely into the shade. For the scene of Chénier's poetry is not the clouds or the region above the clouds, but the earth; his is poetry that is pure without being pious, soulful without being sentimental; it has nothing to do with the infinite and the abstract, is not mystic and not irreligious.

The pagan youth of André Chénier's earlier works, who believed in Apollo and Artemis, but, above all, in Aphrodite, was brought face to face with the founder of the Seraphic school; the Epicurean (in the antique sense of the word) with the spiritualist. The first women whose praises Chénier sang were not intellectual, consumptive Elviras like Lamartine's, but warm-blooded, truly loving women, or young and beautiful courtesans of the days of Louis XVI.—only that his sensuousness never degenerated into the voluptuousness, still less into the wantonness of that period. The wild orgy, when he described it (see, for example, the 28th Elegy), produced the effect of a bas-relief of the noblest Greek period. The young woman with the flowing locks is described with a chasteness of style which makes of her a dancing Greek mænad, and the sober serenity of its representation transforms the drinking scene into an Athenian Bacchanalian feast, executed in Parian marble. All this life bore the imprint of pure beauty and perfect simplicity. The element of ugliness which Hugo was to introduce into lyric poetry, and to the attraction of which Lamartine at a future period succumbed, was as entirely absent as devoutness or mysticism.

But the man, too, who loomed through the works and fragments of André Chénier's maturer years, formed a suggestive temperamental antithesis to those lyric outpourings which aroused enthusiasm in 1819. The women whom he celebrated in unforgettable poems were heroines or victims of the Revolution. There was a manly pathos in his iambics which recalled the old Greek iambic poets, and the fragments of his long poem, *Hermès*, revealed a philosophy of life, the antique sincerity and scientific sobriety of which formed the strongest possible contrast to the romantic emotionalism of Lamartine. To André the stars are not the flowers in the fields of heaven, but simply worlds revolving in floods of ether; he writes of their weight, their shapes, their distances, and their law of gravitation, which he feels influencing his own soul. Providence

does not send its voice down from them to men, prayers do not ascend from men to them; the result of reflection is a profound impression of the unity of nature and its subjection to law.

But André Chénier's poetry, which in so many ways anticipates that of the nineteenth century—it is distinctly lyrical, and in France the eighteenth century produced no other real lyric poet—is also marked by the influence of the two leading spirits of his own age, Rousseau and Voltaire. The idyllic element in it is due to Rousseau; the pastoral scenes may owe much to Theocritus, but Chénier drew from this source only because Rousseau had led the way back to natural conditions. To Voltaire is due that passion for inquiry into what lies at the root of everything, which led André to study and borrow from Newton and to compete with Lucretius in a didactic poem on Nature.

It was, however, especially by his purely artistic, nay, in a manner his purely technical, merits that André Chénier produced such an emancipating, reviving effect upon the poetry of the second generation after his own. The Alexandrine of his poetry is no longer Racine's; by pruning or adding to this last at will he made it a far suppler, freer, more varied measure; the result of the still more astonishing new application of the cæsura in his dithyrambic poetry was a hitherto unknown lyric passion and vigour. Most of these metrical reforms had indeed been attempted by Lamartine, but, as it were, unconsciously, and without that decision or precision which the young men admired so much in Chénier. All who were capable of appreciating plasticity and vigour in style swore by his name. They involuntarily divided the writers of the day into two great groups, one descending from Madame de Staël, the voluble, prolific improvisatrice, who poured forth a whirlwind of words and ideas without troubling herself much about shaping them into a whole, and the other the school now in process of formation, which, taking André Chénier as its model, made the strictest artistic conscientiousness its guiding principle.

Along with the metrical improvements in André Chénier's poetry we have great progress in colouring. Until now poets had preferred the idealistic, sentimental, transcendental expression to the realistically descriptive word. They had written of "The heavens in their wrath;" André wrote, "A black and cloudy sky;" they wrote of "delicate fingers;" André Chénier preferred to say "long, white fingers." And this realistic exactness in certain kinds of description does not exclude another novelty, a sort of chiaroscuro of words and expressions which by their mysterious or enigmatic or fantastic quality suddenly open out wide, unexpected vistas.

When we regard this beautiful poetry more from the human than the artistic standpoint, what we miss in it is the expression of personal grief. In spite of its fire and its Frenchness it is too measured, too Attic. The ugly is too systematically excluded; and among ugly and unclean things, the poet has, in genuine Greek fashion, reckoned his own melancholy, his private sufferings and calamities. It is only from some prose memoranda and a few letters that we learn, for instance, how much he suffered from his dependent position in London. He does not give this suffering expression in his poetry. Occasionally at an earlier period he alluded in a roundabout fashion to the irksome restraints imposed on him by his poverty—in such a poem, for instance, as *La Liberté*, an idyll in the style of Theocritus, in which the shepherd breaks his flute and shuns the dance and song of the young maidens, rejecting all consolation because he is a slave.[2]

As a fine specimen of André Chénier's writing take *Le Malade*, a poem which, like most of his, is made out of almost nothing, yet which produces an unextinguishable impression. In its composition it reminds one of the third scene in the first act of Racine's *Phèdre*, which seems to have been its far-away model. The mother prays:

"Apollon, Dieu sauveur, dieux des savants mystères,
Dieu de la vie, et dieu des plantes solitaires,
Dieu vainqueur de Python, dieu jeune et triomphant,
Prends pitié de mon fils, de mon unique enfant!
Prends pitié de sa mère aux larmes condamnée,
Qui ne vit que pour lui, qui meurt abandonnée,
Qui n'a pas dû rester pour voir mourir son fils;
Dieu jeune, viens aider sa jeunesse. Assoupis,
Assoupis dans son sein cette fièvre brûlante
Qui dévore la fleur de sa vie innocente.
Apollon, si jamais, échappé du tombeau,
Il retourne au Ménale avoir soin du troupeau,
Ces mains, ces vieilles mains orneront ta statue
De ma coupe d'onyx à tes pieds suspendue;
Et, chaque été nouveau, d'un jeune taureau blanc
La hache à ton autel fera couler le sang.

Et bien, mon fils, es-tu toujours impitoyable?
Ton funeste silence est-il inexorable?
Enfant, tu veux mourir? Tu veux, dans ses vieux ans,
Laisser ta mère seule avec ses cheveux blancs?
Tu veux que ce soit moi qui ferme ta paupière?
Que j'unisse ta cendre à celle de ton père?
C'est toi qui me devais ces soins religieux,
Et ma tombe attendait tes pleurs et tes adieux.
Parle, parle, mon fils, quel chagrin te consume?
Les maux qu'on dissimule en ont plus d'amertume.
Ne lèveras-tu point ces yeux appesantis?

—-Ma mère, adieu; je meurs, et tu n'as plus de fils.
Non, tu n'as plus de fils, ma mère bien-aimée.
Je te perds. Une plaie ardente, envenimée,
Me ronge; avec effort je respire, et je crois
Chaque fois respirer pour la dernière fois.
Je ne parlerai pas. Adieu; ce lit me blesse;
Ce tapis qui me couvre accable ma faiblesse,
Tout me pèse et me lasse. Aide-moi, je me meurs,
Tourne-moi sur le flanc. Ah! j'expire! ô douleurs!"

In vain she gives him a healing draught brewed with magic arts by a Thessalian woman. But he speaks again:

"——O coteaux d'Érymanthe! ô vallons! ô bocage!
O vent sonore et frais qui troublais le feuillage,
Et faisais frémir l'onde, et sur leur jeune sein
Agitais les replis de leur robe de lin!
De légères beautés troupe agile et dansante....
Tu sais, tu sais, ma mère? aux bords de l'Érymanthe....
Là, ni loups ravisseurs, ni serpents, ni poisons....
O visage divin! ô fêtes! ô chansons!
Des pas entrelacés, des fleurs, une onde pure,
Aucun lieu n'est si beau dans toute la nature.
Dieux! ces bras et ces flancs, ces cheveux, ces pieds nus,
Si blancs, si délicats.... Je ne te verrai plus!"

When the mother learns that it is of hopeless love her son is dying, she says:

"Mais mon fils, mais dis-moi, quelle belle dansante,
Quelle vierge as-tu vu au bord de l'Érymanthe?
N'est-tu pas riche et beau? du moins quand la douleur
N'avait point de ta joue éteint la jeune fleur?
Parie. Est-ce cette Églé, fille du roi des ondes,
Ou cette jeune Irène aux longues tresses blondes?
Ou ne sera-ce point cette fière beauté
Dont j'entends le beau nom chaque jour répété,
Dont j'apprends que partout les belles sont jalouses?
Qu'aux temples, aux festins, les mères, les épouses,
Ne sauraient voir, dit-on, sans peine et sans effroi?
Cette belle Daphné?...—Dieux! ma mère, tais-toi,
Tais-toi. Dieux! Qu'as-tu dit? Elle est fière, inflexible;
Comme les immortels elle est belle et terrible!
Mille amants l'ont aimée; ils l'ont aimée en vain.
Comme eux j'aurais trouvé quelque refus hautain.
Non, garde que jamais elle soit informée ...
Mais, ô mort! ô tourment! ô mère bien-aimée!
Tu vois dans quels ennuis dépérissent mes jours.
Ma mère bien-aimée, ah! viens à mon secours:
Je meurs; va la trouver: que tes traits, que ton âge,
De sa mère à ses yeux offrent la sainte image.
Tiens, prends cette corbeille et nos fruits les plus beaux,
Prends notre Amour d'ivoire, honneur de ces hameaux;
Prends la coupe d'onyx à Corinthe ravie,
Prends mes jeunes chevreaux, prends mon cœur, prends ma vie,
Jette tout à ses pieds; apprends-lui qui je suis;
Dis-lui que je me meurs, que tu n'as plus de fils.
Tombe aux pieds du vieillard, gémis, implore, presse;
Adjure cieux et mers, dieu, temple, autel, déesse;
Pars, et si tu reviens sans les avoir fléchis
Adieu, ma mère, adieu, tu n'auras plus de fils.
—J'aurai toujours un fils; va, la belle espérance
Me dit ... Elle s'incline, et, dans un doux silence,
Elle couvre ce front, terni par les douleurs,
De baisers maternels entremêlés de pleurs.
Puis elle sort en hâte, inquiète et tremblante,
Sa démarche est de crainte et d'âge chancelante.
Elle arrive; et bientôt revenant sur ses pas,
Haletante, de loin: 'Mon cher fils, tu vivras,
Tu vivras.' Elle vient s'asseoir près de la couche:
Le vieillard la suivait, le sourire à la bouche.
La jeune belle aussi, rouge et le front baissé,
Vient, jette sur le lit un coup d'œil. L'insensé
Tremble; sous ses tapis il veut cacher la tête.
'Ami, depuis trois jours tu n'es d'aucune fête,
Dit-elle; que fais-tu? pourquoi veux-tu mourir?
Tu souffres. On me dit que je peux te guérir.

Vis, et formons ensemble une seule famille;
Que mon père ait un fils, et ta mère un fille.'"

One cannot imagine more simplicity, less attempt at effect, in the solution of such a situation.

It was a foundation of this kind which the new Romantic School found to build upon—noble simplicity of language, correct drawing, a Grecian rhythm in all the transitions, the beautiful lines of the bas-relief, pure colour, and austere form.

---

[1] Thiers was the grandson of this lady's sister.

[2] Sainte-Beuve is evidently in error, when, in his comparison of André Chénier with Mathurin Régnier (in his book on French poetry in the sixteenth century), he attributes the poem *La Liberté* to a period subsequent to Chénier's residence in London. Becq de Fouquières has proved the improbability of Andre's having been in London before 1790.

VII

DE VIGNY'S POETRY AND HUGO'S "ORIENTALES"

The first author to show the influence of Chénier was one of the most artistically audacious of the school, one of its original leaders—Alfred de Vigny—who as lyric poet was at times very faulty, at times an immaculate master. Chaste, lucid, pure, and austere, there is a quality in his best verse which has led all the critics who have attempted to describe it to employ such figures as the sheen of ivory, the whiteness of ermine, the sailing of the swan. It has the artistic severity, the sober colouring, the conciseness and the fastidiousness which also characterise Chénier's. And De Vigny was evidently afraid that these qualities would be attributed to Chénier's influence. For although no collection of his poetry was published before 1819, he took the trouble in later editions to furnish a number of the poems which seem to bear the clearest marks of this influence, with earlier dates, going even as far back as 1815. But even leaving out of consideration the fact that single poems of Chénier's had been given to the public (in Chateaubriand's *Génie du Christianisme* and as a supplement to Millevoye's poetical works) still earlier than this, it is hardly possible to avoid the conclusion that, in spite of the absolute uprightness which as a rule distinguished him, Alfred de Vigny has antedated his poems to give himself an undeserved appearance of complete originality. For the single poems which he published before the first collection in question are far inferior to those contained in it which bear a much earlier date—so inferior that he excluded them from the complete edition of his works. André Chénier's influence upon De Vigny is thus indisputable. The latter assimilated many of the characteristics of the rediscovered master, though he emancipated himself from the old-fashioned Hellenism of style which hampered Chénier's flight. The poem *La Dryade*, to which he gives the additional title of "Idyll in the manner of Theocritus," is in reality an idyll in the manner of André Chénier. What distinguishes De Vigny most markedly from Chénier as a lyric poet is his cult of pure intellect and his proud, stoic feeling of solitude. He has painted his own ideal portrait in such poems as *Moïse, La colère de Samson*, and *La mort du loup*. He is very present in Moses' sad cry:

"O Seigneur, j'ai vécu puissant et solitaire,
Laissez-moi m'endormir du sommeil de la terre!"

I seem to hear the plaint of his strong, sorely wounded self-esteem in Samson's outburst of wrath over Delilah's treachery (his Delilah being the great actress, Marie Dorval). Thrice already has he forgiven her, but she has been more ashamed than surprised at finding herself discovered and forgiven:

"Car la bonté de l'Homme est forte et sa douceur
Écrase, en l'absolvant, l'être faible et menteur."

And I feel his stoicism, and at the same time read an apology for his unproductiveness, in those words in the poem on the wolf which dies without uttering a sound:

"À voir ce que l'on fut sur terre et ce que l'on laisse,
Seul le silence est grand, tout le reste est faiblesse."

Granted that there is a little affected rigidity in this attitude of his, still it is his pride, his spiritual nobility, his desire to perpetuate in his poetry the purity and austerity of his spirit, which impel him to assume it.

The poet who undertook the further development of Chénier's lyrical style was a man of different intellectual stamp from both him and De Vigny—a man intoxicated with self-confidence. Victor Hugo was three-and-twenty, "the bright dawn illumining his spring." In one of his poems ("À Mademoiselle J.," in *Chants du Crépuscule*) he has himself described the certainty of victory with which he made his début as a lyric poet:

"Alors je disais aux étoiles:
O mon astre, en vain tu te voiles.
Je sais que tu brilles là-haut!
Alors je disais à la rive:
Vous êtes la gloire, et j'arrive.

Chacun de mes jours est un flot!

Je disais au bois: forêt sombre,
J'ai comme toi des bruits sans nombre.
À l'aigle: contemple mon front!
Je disais aux coupes vidées:
Je suis plein d'ardentes idées
Dont les âmes s'enivreront!

Alors, du fond de vingt calices,
Rosée, amour, parfum, délices,
Se répandaient sur mon sommeil;
J'avais des fleurs plein mes corbeilles;
Et comme un vif essaim d'abeilles
Mes pensées volaient au soleil!

La terre me disait: Poète!
Le ciel me répétait: Prophète!
Marche! parle! enseigne! bénis!
Penche l'urne des chants sublimes!
Verse aux vallons noirs comme aux cimes,
Dans les aires et dans les nids!"

Victor Hugo took the verse which André Chénier had created, that pellucid medium of pure beauty, and when he had breathed upon it, it gleamed with all the colours of the rainbow. Strangely enough it was again from Greece that the inspiration came; but this time from modern Greece. Under the impression produced by the Greek War of Liberation Hugo set to work to write his *Orientales*. But what a different use of language! The words painted; the words shone, "gilded by a sunbeam" like the beautiful Jewess of the poems; they sang, as if to a secret accompaniment of Turkish music.

First had come Oehlenschläger's East. This was the East of the child, of the fairy-tale book, of the *Thousand and One Nights*—half Persia, half Copenhagen. It was dreams of genii in lamps and rings, of diamonds and sapphires by the bushel, the illimitable splendours of imagination all grouped round a few imperishable poetic types.

Then came Byron's East, a great decorative background for passion in its recklessness and melancholy.

The third in order was Goethe's, the East of the *West-östlicher Divan*, the refuge of the old man. He took the reposeful, the contemplative element of Oriental philosophy and wove German Lieder into it. Rückert, the great word-artist, followed in his steps.

But Hugo's East was different from all of these; it was the brightly variegated, outward, barbaric East, the land of light and colour. Sultans and muftis, dervishes and caliphs, hetmans, pirates, Klephts—delicious sounds in his ears, delightful pictures before his eyes. Time is a matter of indifference—far back antiquity, Middle Ages, or to-day; race is a matter of indifference—Hebrew, Moor, or Turk; place is a matter of indifference—Sodom and Gomorrah, Granada, Navarino; creed is a matter of indifference. "No one," he tells us in his preface, "has a right to ask the poet whether he believes in God or in gods, in Pluto, in Satan, or in nothing." His province is to paint. He is possessed by a genius which leaves him no peace until the East, as he feels it, is before him upon paper.

A careful study of the *Orientales* shows us how they came into being. They were not written in the order in which they stand in the book. The first poem in order of production is No. 23, "La ville prise," written in 1824; next come poems written in 1826 and 1827 upon incidents in the War of Liberation, and not until 1828 is the poet's imagination thoroughly fired. The horizon widens; all the elements which tend, by reason of a close or distant connection of ideas, to crystallise round the Turkish war, group themselves round that nucleus.

If we examine the little poem, "La ville prise," which is an outcome of the powerful emotion produced in the poet by the martyrdom of Greece, we are struck by the identity of its standpoint with the standpoint of the French Romantic school of painting. In 1824 Eugène Delacroix exhibits his famous picture of the "Massacre of Scio," a bold and masterly delineation, glowing with flaming colour and intense feeling, of a horrible incident, destitute of the slightest element of conventional poetic justice. Very soon after this Hugo writes his little poem. It purports to be the intelligence brought by a humble slave. Standing with his hands crossed on his breast, he says:

"La flamme par ton ordre, ô Roi, luit et dévore.
De ton peuple en grondant elle étouffe les cris;
Et, rougissant les toits comme une sombre aurore,
Semble en son vol joyeux danser sur leurs débris.

Le meurtre aux mille bras comme un géant se lève;
Les palais embrasés se changent en tombeaux;
Pères, femmes, époux, tout tombe sous le glaive;
Autour de la cité s'appellent les corbeaux.

Les mères ont frémi! les vierges palpitantes,

O calife! ont pleuré leurs jeunes ans flétris;
Et les coursiers fougueux ont traîné hors des tentes
Leurs corps vivans, de coups et de baisers meurtris!

Les tout petits enfans, écrasés sous les dalles,
Ont vécu: de leur sang le fer s'abreuve encor...—
Ton peuple baise, ô Roi, la poudre des sandales
Qu'à ton pied glorieux attache un cercle d'or!"

This is the first chord which Hugo strikes in these poems; it rings sharp and shrill; but the poem is not quite good, because it is not quite true. It was not thus the slave spoke; we are sensible of the poet's own indignation in the narrative. The next poems, "Les têtes du Sérail," "Enthousiasme," and "Navarin," bear additional evidence to the modern Greek influence to which we originally owe *Les Orientales*. But then the poet makes a great artistic advance; he transports himself to the standpoint of the Turks, writes himself into their frame of mind.

"La douleur du Pacha" is the first, half-ironic attempt. Dervishes and bombardiers, odalisques and slaves, one after the other, each from his or her own point of view, try to imagine what can be the reason of the Pacha's sitting musing in his tent with his eyes full of tears. But none of the reasons that occur to them is the true one. It is not that his favourite concubine has been unfaithful, nor yet that there has been a head too few in the fellah's sack. No, he is grieving over the death of his favourite Nubian tiger.

But this is still only an attempt. The poet has not yet entirely got rid of himself, got outside of himself; we are conscious of him in one weak spot, which disturbs and dissolves the mental picture. But now comes the "Marche turque," and we are in the East.

Though the refrain of this masterly poem is a very barbarous one, its general tone is not savage; it is serious, full of a piety which is not the less heartfelt, and of ideas of honour which are not the less sincere because they are different from ours:

"Ma dague d'un sang noir à mon côté ruisselle,
Et ma hache est pendue à l'arçon de ma selle.

J'aime le vrai soldat, effroi de Bélial;
Son turban évasé rend son front plus sévère;
Il baise avec respect la barbe de son père,
Il voue à son vieux sabre un amour filial,
Et porte un doliman percé dans les mêlées
De plus de coups que n'a de taches étoilées
La peau du tigre impérial.

Ma dague d'un sang noir à mon côté ruisselle,
Et ma hache est pendue à l'arçon de ma selle.
. . . . . .
Celui qui d'une femme aime les entretiens;
Celui qui ne sait pas dire dans une orgie
Quelle est d'un beau cheval la généalogie;
Qui cherche ailleurs qu'en soi force, amis et soutiens,
Sur de soyeux divans se couche avec mollesse,
Craint le soleil, sait lire, et par scrupule laisse
Tout le vin de Chypre aux chrétiens;

Ma dague d'un sang noir à mon côté ruisselle,
Et ma hache est pendue à l'arçon de ma selle.

Celui-là, c'est un lâche, et non pas un guerrier.
Ce n'est pas lui qu'on voit dans la bataille ardente
Pousser un fier cheval, à la housse pendante,
La sabre en main, debout sur le large étrier;
Il n'est bon qu'à presser des talons une mule,
En murmurant tout bas quelque vaine formule,
Comme un prêtre qui va prier!

Ma dague d'un sang noir à mon côté ruisselle,
Et ma hache est pendue à l'arçon de ma selle."

There is nothing Greek in this, nor yet any European satire of Turkish barbarity; the poet has become the dramatist within the Turkish intellectual and emotional pale; in this local colouring there is the genuine brutality which no northern poet has ever attained in handling such themes. This is true masculine savagery.

These are not sentimental, but robust major chords; and the major key predominates in all the poems, even where woman and love entwine their rhythms among the harsh, masculine ones. There are cruel, heartless women, like the Jewish sultana who demands the heads of her rivals; and there are refined, musical daughters of Eve, like the captive who longs for her own country and yet loves the sight of Smyrna's fairy palaces, and rejoices in breathing the soft air of the East in winter and in summer, by day and at night when the full moon shines upon the sea. There is the charming woman depicted in "Les adieux de l'hôtesse Arabe." The love which finds

expression in this last-named poem is sad in its feeling of unrequitedness, repressed and chaste; it is a mixture of sisterly care, childlike superstition, and submissive worship, which reveals itself with plastic grace in a noble, proud character.

From the moment when the poet deserts the Greek camp for that of the enemy, his imagination allows itself free play. From pictures of Turkish cruelty it passes to the delineation of Turkish superstition. "Les Djinns" is a metrical marvel in which the approach of the wild hunt to the house, its thundering over the heads of the terror-stricken inmates, and its gradual dying away into the distance, are represented by the gradual rise from two-syllabic to ten-syllabic lines and gradual fall back to the two-syllabic. From the life of the Turkish seraglio it wings its flight to the tents of the Bedouins in the desert; from the desert as it is to-day to the desert as it was in the days when Buonaberdi overshadowed it with the wings of his eagles.

Enormous stretches of sand and water, the ordering and manœuvres of masses of troops, the architecture of towns, the sieges and storming of these towns, are seen with the poet's eye; and at a certain moment a natural association of ideas summons up the picture of great scenes of destruction read of in Bible history. In these last Hugo found his most gorgeous material. And it was also the material nearest akin to his own personality. His imagination was always at its best in dealing with the monstrous. The original Pegasus was, in the literal sense of the word, a superb monster, and that is just what Hugo's Pegasus is, in the figurative.

He writes "Le Feu du Ciel," the first poem in the book, the last in chronological order. We see the awful black cloud sailing across the sky. Whence has it come? Whither is it bound? No one knows. Hovering above the sea, it asks the Lord if it shall dry up the waters with its fires. No! answers the Lord, and onward it hurries, driven by His breath. Over the beautiful bays of the Mediterranean, over the fair corn lands of Egypt it passes, but the Lord still gives no signal to stop. Over the desert it flies, over the ruins of ancient Babel. It asks: Is it here? But still onward it must go. In the night time it reaches the magnificent sister cities—Sodom and Gomorrah—whose inhabitants have fallen asleep after their wild, voluptuous revels. Now the Lord gives the signal. The cloud opens, and from its flaming gorge pours a torrent of fire and sulphur and brimstone upon the doomed cities, until agate and porphyry and idols and marble colossi melt like wax, and the dazzling flames envelop and destroy everything living in the houses and the streets. Towards morning the ruin of old Babel is seen to lift its head above the mountain-ridge to see and enjoy the end of the play. It knows all about it; it also in its day has had experience of the love that chasteneth.

This is, as already remarked, not poetry in a minor key; some critics actually accused it of coldness; but if ever there was an unwarrantable accusation this was one. We feel as if the poet had actually seen it all, and had painted it with a brush like that pine which Heine would fain have torn from the Norwegian cliffs and dipped in the fire of Etna, to write with it the name of his beloved across the expanse of heaven. These *Orientales* became the model for Romantic lyric poetry. In them the poet dared to lay hold of the painful, the ugly, the terrible (τό δεινόν as the Greeks said), and incorporate it in his verse, assured of his power to penetrate it all with poetry, to impart transparency to all these shadows and immerge all the blackness in a poetic sea of light. What he once wrote of the earth may be applied to his own lyric poetry. He describes the poor, stony, niggardly soil, which unwillingly yields man his daily bread; burning deserts here, polar ice there; cities from which mercy and hope have departed wringing their hands. He paints death, an eyeless spectre which generally seizes the best first; tells of seas where ships are wrecked in the night, and of continents where howling war swings its torches and races fall furiously one upon the other. And, he concludes, of all this is composed a star in the firmament of heaven.

VIII

HUGO AND DE MUSSET

Scarcely had Victor Hugo completed *Les Orientales* before he set to work upon a series of poems of a completely different character. *Feuilles d'Automne* conquered a new territory for French lyric poetry, a domain in which the personal element was as conspicuously present as it had been absent in *Les Orientales*.

Hugo had married at the age of twenty on the strength of a trifling pension granted him by Louis XVIII. The dowry of his beloved bride, Adèle Foucher, was 2000 francs. The young couple lived for a number of years in straitened circumstances; but after the *Hernani* battle was won, Hugo's writings began to bring him in thousands, which rose to hundreds of thousands, and finally to millions. Still, the poor home was a happy one, and when, at the age of twenty-five, Hugo appeared before the public as a literary revolutionist, he was the father of a family.

In *Feuilles d'Automne* the poet presents his readers with pictures and thoughts of his own home. They are memories of his childhood and his beloved dead, remembrances of his mother's tenderness, of his father's soldierly figure and mien, of Napoleon, whom, standing by his father's side as a child, he had once seen. He unburdens his heart to intimate friends, confesses to them the sadness and the doubts induced in him by the hard battle of life. There are love poems too, matchless ones. He finds his first love-letters and reads them with a heart full of sadness and of longing for the vanished first freshness of youth. He gives us the poetry of his home. This was a

side of life which almost all the great poets of the world had left untouched. Shakespeare had no home, and his conjugal relations were not such as to deserve writing about. Schiller and Goethe wrote few poems to their wives, and none about their family life. What Byron had thought fit to communicate to the world of such matters was the reverse of edifying. Oehlenschläger, whose personal circumstances and literary position in many respects resemble Hugo's, did not marry his Christiane till her youth was past. When he writes of his wife his tone is more dutiful than chivalrous; she is rather his Morgiana than his Gulnare; and in his poems about his children there is a touch of parental vanity; he writes of them in the style in which royal personages sometimes allude to theirs on public occasions; we feel that he regards them as beings whose welfare must be of importance to every one. Hugo avoided these pitfalls.

Not that Adèle Foucher remained the central female figure in Hugo's life during all the years when he was singing of his home. *Feuilles d'Automne* is the last collection of his poems in which he could truthfully write of the happiness he found there. In 1833, during the rehearsals of his *Lucrèce Borgia*, he became intimate with the young and beautiful, though talentless, actress, Juliette Drouet (her real name was Julienne Gauvain), whom he had chosen to play the very small part of the Princess Negroni. This lady's contemporaries write with enthusiasm of her beauty, which is said to have combined the purity of outline of the Greek statue with the poetic expression which we attribute to Shakespeare's heroines. In Hugo's tragedy she had only two words to say, merely walked across the stage; yet Théophile Gautier, after describing her lovely dress, writes thus of her performance: "She resembled a lizard that had erected itself on its tail, so wavy, supple, and serpentlike was her carriage. And with all her charm, how skilfully she managed to insinuate something poisonous into her words! With what mocking and perturbing agility did she avoid the attentions of the handsome Venetian noblemen!"

Juliette Drouet's profile was antique, and she had a profusion of beautiful hair. Pradier, the sculptor, has immortalised her in the statue of the city of Lille in the Place de la Concorde in Paris.

When Hugo made her acquaintance he was thirty-one and she twenty-seven; and their connection lasted until her death, that is, for nearly fifty years. After 1833 she accompanied him on his travels, and both during and after his exile "Madame Juliette Drouet" lived in his house.

His wife, between whom and Sainte-Beuve there was soon a liaison which the latter's literary indiscretions made unnecessarily public, seems as long as she lived to have borne patiently with Hugo's inconstancy; and Hugo's letters show that he, in his turn, showed both dignity and great delicacy of feeling in the way in which he received Sainte-Beuve's intimation of his passion for Madame Hugo.

In his poetry, at least, Hugo remained united by the tenderest of ties to his home.

It is in the *Chants du Crépuscule* which were published in 1835, consequently long after he and Juliette Drouet had become closely connected, that (in the poem "Date lilia!") he writes of his wife as the being to whom he says: *Toujours!* and who answers: *Partout!*

And it is in this same poem that we have the perfectly charming picture of the young mother followed by her four children, the youngest of whom still walks with tottering steps:

"Oh! si vous rencontrez quelque part sous les cieux
Une femme au front pur, au pas grave, aux doux yeux,
Que suivent quatre enfants dont le dernier chancelle,
Les surveillant bien tous, et, s'il passe auprès d'elle
Quelque aveugle indigent que l'âge appesantit,
Mettant une humble aumône aux mains du plus petit;
Si, quand la diatribe autour d'un nom s'élance,
Vous voyez une femme écouter en silence,
Et douter, puis vous dire: Attendons pour juger.
Quel est celui de nous qu'on ne pourrait charger?
On est prompt à ternir les choses les plus belles.
La louange est sans pieds et le blâme a des ailes.
. . . . . .
Si, loin des feux, des voix, des bruits et des splendeurs,
Dans un repli perdu parmi les profondeurs,
Sur quatre jeunes fronts groupés près du mur sombre,
Vous voyez se pencher un regard voilé d'ombre
Où se mêle, plus doux encor que solennel,
Le rayon virginal au rayon maternel;

Oh! qui que vous soyez, bénissez-la. C'est elle!
La sœur, visible aux yeux, de mon âme immortelle!
Mon orgueuil, mon espoir, mon abri, mon recours!
Toit de mes jeunes ans qu'espèrent mes vieux jours!"

And through all these poems there is a twitter and a hum, a sound as of the play of little children and their bird-like cries. The child rushes into the room, and the darkest brow, nay, even the guilty countenance, brightens; it interrupts the most serious converse with its questions, and the talk ends in a smile; it opens its young soul to every impression, and offers a kiss to strangers and to friends.

"Let the children stay! do not drive them from the poet's study; let them laugh and sing and

mingle their childish clamour with the chorus of spirit voices whilst he writes and dreams at his desk. Their breath will not disperse the gay bubbles of his dream. Do you think that I fear, when these bright heads pass before my eyes in the midst of my visions of blood and fire, that my verses will take flight like a flock of birds startled by playing children? No, indeed! No image is destroyed by them. The painted, chased flowers of the gay *Orientale* expand more freely when they are near, the ballad grows more spirited, the winged lines of the ode mount with more ardent aspiration towards heaven."

A sad event which happened in 1843 carried the poet in riper years back to these youthful days and that happy family circle. In February 1843 his eldest daughter married; in September she was accidentally drowned, from a sailing-boat on the Seine. Her husband, Charles Vacquerie, jumped into the water after her, and when his and all attempts to save her proved fruitless, he drowned himself. The series of poems in *Les Contemplations* beginning with the verses, "Oh! je fus comme fou dans le premier moment!" ought to be read along with *Feuilles d'Automne*.

In this series we come upon simple scenes exquisitely reproduced and full of sincere feeling:

"Elle avait pris ce pli dans son âge enfantin
De venir dans ma chambre un peu chaque matin;
Je l'attendais ainsi qu'un rayon qu'on espère;
Elle entrait et disait: 'Bonjour, mon petit père;'
Prenait ma plume, ouvrait mes livres, s'asseyait
Sur mon lit, dérangeait mes papiers et riait,
Puis soudain s'en allait comme un oiseau qui passe.
Alors je reprenais, la tête un peu moins lasse,
Mon œuvre interrompue, et, tout en écrivant,
Parmi mes manuscrits je rencontrais souvent
Quelque arabesque folle et qu'elle avait tracée,
Et mainte page blanche entre ses mains froissée
Où, je ne sais comment, venaient mes plus doux vers.
Elle aimait Dieu, les fleurs, les astres, les prés verts,
Et c'était un esprit avant d'être une femme.
Son regard reflétait la clarté de son âme.
Elle me consultait sur tout à tous moments.
Oh! que de soirs d'hiver radieux et charmants
Passés à raisonner langue, histoire et grammaire,
Mes quatre enfants groupés sur mes genoux, leur mère
Tout près, quelques amis causant au coin du feu!
J'appelais cette vie être content de peu!"

Almost more beautiful is the following poem:—

"O souvenirs! printemps! aurore!
Doux rayon triste et réchauffant!
—Lorsqu'elle était petite encore,
Que sa sœur était tout enfant....—

Connaissez-vous sur la colline
Qui joint Montlignon à Saint-Leu
Une terrasse qui s'incline
Entre un bois sombre et le ciel bleu?

C'est là que nous vivions.—Pénètre,
Mon cœur, dans ce passé charmant!—
Je l'entendais sous ma fenêtre
Jouer le matin doucement.

Elle courait dans la rosée,
Sans bruit, de peur de m'éveiller;
Moi, je n'ouvrais pas ma croisée,
De peur de la faire envoler.

Ses frères riaient ... Aube pure!
Tout chantait sous ces frais berceaux,
Ma famille avec la nature,
Mes enfants avec les oiseaux!—

Je toussais, on devenait brave;
Elle montait à petits pas,
Et me disait d'un air très-grave:
'J'ai laissé les enfants en bas.'

Nous jouions toute la journée.
O jeux charmants! chers entretiens!
Le soir, comme elle était l'aînée,
Elle me disait: Père, viens!

'Nous allons t'apporter ta chaise,
Conte nous une histoire, dis!'—
Et je voyais rayonner d'aise
Tous ces regards de paradis.

Alors, prodiguant les carnages,
J'inventais un conte profond
Dont je trouvais les personnages
Parmi les ombres du plafond.

Toujours, ces quatre douces têtes
Riaient, comme à cet âge on rit,
De voir d'affreux géants très bêtes
Vaincus par des nains pleins d'esprit.

J'étais l'Arioste et l'Homère
D'un poëme éclos d'un seul jet;
Pendant que je parlais, leur mère
Les regardait rire, et songeait.

Leur aïeul, qui lisait dans l'ombre,
Sur eux parfois levait les yeux,
Et moi, par la fenêtre sombre
J'entrevoyais un coin des cieux!"

In the child's evening prayer, the famous "Prière pour tous," not only for father and mother, but for the poor, the forsaken, the bad—the idea of the family broadens into the idea of the whole great human family. Humanity finds its expression in *Feuilles d'Automne*, as did inhumanity in *Les Orientales*.

When the poet sits dreaming alone, he thinks first of those he loves; he sees his friends one after the other; then his acquaintances, intimate and slight; then all the multitude of those unknown to him—the whole of humanity, living and dead; he gazes, until his vision fails, upon the double ocean of time and space, the endless and the bottomless, the endless that is eternally falling into the bottomless. That sense of the infinite which Hugo's great forerunner, André Chénier, despised, that religious feeling which was non-existent in the child of the eighteenth century, reappears in Hugo, purified from the superstition of the reactionary period.

From a height near the shore the poet hears two voices, one from the sea and one from the land. Every wave has its murmur, every human being his distinct utterance, his sigh, his shriek; and the wave voices and the human voices form two great, pathetic choruses—the song of nature and the cry of humanity.

The infinity of these poems is no longer the monstrous thing of which we now and then catch a glimpse in *Les Orientales*; it is the ocean in which it is natural and, to employ Leopardi's expression, sweet for thought to suffer shipwreck.

In *Chants du Crépuscule* Hugo quits the domain of private life. The poems composing this volume are chiefly political. They constitute a kind of diary of the events of the few years preceding their publication. Hugo was a supporter of the constitutional monarchy; he was even made a peer of France by Louis Philippe, and he accepted the King's assistance when in 1845 it was proposed to eject him from the Chamber of Peers because of a notorious love-affair (with Madame Biard). He may be best described at this period as a royalist with a tendency to opposition.

His poems celebrate the days of July and their martyrs, and express indignation at the refusal of the Chamber of Deputies to allow the body of Napoleon to be brought back to France, a project to which the royal family offered no objection, and which was afterwards carried into execution by the Prince de Joinville. The poem directed against Deutz, who gave up the Duchess of Berry to Louis Philippe's government for money ("A l'homme qui a livré une femme "), strikes indirectly not only at Thiers, but at the King himself.

This is, however, an opposition based not upon political, but upon social sympathies. The disappointment of the proletariat at the insignificance of the result of the Revolution of July as far as they were concerned, and the sullen hatred of the well-to-do which was fermenting in the masses, find expression in such poems as "Sur le bal de l'hôtel de ville," with its masterly picture of the women of the people, who, gaudily decked out, beautiful and half-naked, like the ladies who are driving to the ball, stand "with flowers in their hair, dirt on their shoes, and hatred in their hearts," watching the carriages arrive. Vague anxiety and restlessness, warnings to the crowned heads of Europe to make for themselves friends betimes amongst their people, show that the poet has his hand on the pulse of his age.

Nothing could be a better proof of the close relation between Victor Hugo's writings and the spirit of the day than the circumstance that Louis Philippe's government prohibited the performance of his dramas quite as strictly as the Legitimist government had done. *Hernani* had, indeed, been played in the preceding reign, Charles X. cleverly replying to those who would have had him prohibit it, that, as far as the theatre was concerned, his place was amongst the audience. But, in spite of his personal partiality for Hugo, he had forbidden the performance of *Marion Delorme* because it was suggested to him that its representation of Louis XIII.'s attitude towards Richelieu, would be interpreted as satire of his own submissiveness to the clergy. This

prohibition had long since been repealed, but now the government of Louis Philippe quite illegally forbade the representation of *Le Roi s'amuse*. During the lawsuit which ensued, Hugo made the following caustic remarks:

"Napoleon also was a despot, but his behaviour was very different. He employed none of the precautionary measures by means of which our liberties are now being juggled away, one after the other. He put out his hand and took everything at once. The lion does not behave like the fox. Things were done in the grand style then, gentlemen. Napoleon said: 'On such and such a day I will make my entry into such and such a capital,' and he made his entry on the day and at the very hour he had named. A proclamation in the *Moniteur* dethroned a dynasty. Kings had to sit crowded together waiting in the anterooms. If a column was desired, the Emperor of Austria was obliged to provide the bronze for it. The affairs of the Théâtre Français were certainly regulated in a somewhat arbitrary manner, but the regulations were dated from Moscow. That was the day of great things, this is the day of small."

These words convey a good general idea of Hugo's poetico-political attitude at the beginning of the Thirties.

Round about him his younger friends were working their way to fame. Almost all the frequenters of his house in time revealed themselves to be poets. Hugo would occasionally request Sainte-Beuve to recite, and after much pressing the latter, begging little Léopoldine and little Chariot to make plenty of noise the while, would repeat to the assembled company one or two of his charming, mannered poems. Alfred de Musset, a youth of seventeen, was brought to the house by Paul Foucher, Hugo's brother-in-law. One morning De Musset went up to Sainte-Beuve's garret, wakened him, and said with a shamefaced smile: "I too write verses."

The verses he wrote have attained world-wide fame.

If, amongst French laymen, one were to ask a man of the people—say an artisan, and amongst authors, either a Romanticist or a Parnassian: Who is the greatest modern French poet? the answer would undoubtedly be: Victor Hugo. But if the question were put to a member of the upper middle class—a public official, a savant, a man of the world, or amongst authors, to a member of the naturalistic school, or if one were to appeal to the ladies, in all probability the answer would be: Alfred de Musset. Whence this difference of opinion and what does it denote?

Alfred de Musset made his literary début in 1830, at the age of nineteen, with *Contes d'Espagne et d'Italie*, a series of tales in verse abounding in situations which it would be scarcely permissible to describe. In the longer ones (*Don Paez, Portia*, &c.) treachery runs riot; we have the wife who deceives her husband, the mistress who deceives her lover, the countess who knows nothing about hers except that he has killed her old husband; we have brutal pleasure, to obtain which men hack and hew at each other, youthful sensuality which knows neither ruth nor shame, senile depravity which employs love potions and listens to the death-rattle with voluptuous pleasure; and, scattered about amongst all this, songs, fiery sparks of passion, savagery, and arrogance. Shakespeare's earliest works are not more wanton than these, and these are, moreover, not naïvely, but refinedly wanton. There is also a constant parade of unbelief, with odd interruptions in the shape of unconscious confessions of weakness and spasmodic longings for the comforts of religion.

Some were scandalised by the book, more praised it enthusiastically. The young men of the literary circles were much struck by it. This was Romanticism of an entirely new kind, much less doctrinaire than Victor Hugo's. Here was a still more direct defiance of the classic rules of metre and style; but this defiance was frolicsome and witty, not martial like Hugo's. These attacks were enlivened by the presence of an element entirely wanting in Hugo's books, and that an essentially national element, what the French themselves call *esprit*. This jesting, jeering Romanticism was refreshing after Hugo's pompous, serious Romanticism. Here too the scenes were laid in Spain and Italy; here too were medieval backgrounds, sword-thrusts, and serenades; but it all gave twice as much pleasure with this addition of jollity, of subtle satire, of doubt which scarcely believed what it said itself. Take, for example, the notorious, offensively indecent ballad of the moon, which aggravated the Classicists by its metre and the Romanticists by its disrespectful attitude to its subject, their chief favourite. It was a ballad which parodied its own style; its writer seemed to be walking on his hands, kissing his toes to his readers.

Hugo's heroic bearing and giant's stride had compelled reverence; his imposing rhetoric roused respectful admiration; but this miraculous jaunty grace, this genius for shameless drollery, had both an emancipatory and a fascinating effect. There was a diabolical irresistibility about it, a quality which women as a rule are, and in this case were, the first to appreciate. De Musset wrote of women, always of women, and not, like Hugo, with precocious maturity, with chivalrous tenderness, with romantic gallantry—no, with a passion, a hatred, a bitterness, a fury, which showed that he despised and adored them, that they could make him writhe and scream in agony, and that he took his revenge in clamorous accusation and fiery scorn.

There is here no ripeness, wholesomeness, or moral beauty, but a youthful, seething, incredible intensity of life, any description of which would be no more successful than the description of scarlet given to the blind man, which drew forth the remark: "Then it is like the sound of a trumpet." And in this poetry there is, verily, a quality which suggests scarlet and the flourish of trumpets. That beauty in art is immortal is true; but there is something still more certainly immortal, namely, life. These first poems of De Musset lived. They were followed by his mature, beautiful works; and all men's eyes were opened to his merits. In the poem "Après une lecture" he has himself described his art:

"Celui qui ne sait pas, quand la brise étouffée
Soupire au fond des bois son tendre et long chagrin,
Sortir seul au hazard, chantant quelque refrain,
Plus fou qu'Ophélia de romarin coiffée,
Plus étourdi qu'un page amoureux d'une fée
Sur son chapeau cassé jouant du tambourin;
. . . . . .
Celui qui n'a pas l'âme à tout jamais aimante,
Qui n'a pas pour tout bien, pour unique bonheur,
De venir lentement poser son front rêveur
Sur un front jeune et frais, à la tresse odorante,
Et de sentir ainsi d'une tête charmante
La vie et la beauté descendre dans son cœur;

Celui qui ne sait pas, durant les nuits brûlantes
Qui font pâlir d'amour l'étoile de Vénus,
Se lever en sursaut, sans raison, les pieds nus,
Marcher, prier, pleurer des larmes ruisselantes,
Et devant l'infini joindre des mains tremblantes,
Le cœur plein de pitié pour les maux inconnus;

Que celui-là rature et barbouille à son aise;
Il peut, tant qu'il voudra, rimer à tour de bras,
Ravauder l'oripeau qu'on appelle antithèse,
Et s'en aller ainsi jusqu'au Père-Lachaise,
Traînant à ses talons tous les sots d'ici-bas;
Grand homme, si l'on veut; mais poëte, non pas."

In the allusion to those who trick themselves out with the tinsel of antithesis we have a hit at Victor Hugo and his school, and the almost unconscious expression of the genuine lyric poet's feeling of superiority to the gifted rhetorician. The overpowering enthusiasm for poetry and the poetic self-consciousness remind us of Goethe's "Wanderers Sturmlied."

And as De Musset developed and approached the years of discretion, he continued to reveal qualities which outshone Victor Hugo's. He won the hearts of the reading public by his essential humanness. He confessed his weakness and faults; Victor Hugo felt it incumbent on him to be unerring. He was not the marvellous artificer of verse, could not, like Hugo, hammer the metal of language into fashion and put word gems into a setting of gold. He wrote carelessly, rhymed anyhow, even in more slipshod fashion than Heine; but he was never the rhetorician, always the human being. In his joy and his grief there seemed to be an immortal truth. One of his poems flung upon a pile of poems by other poets acted like aquafortis; everything else composing the pile burned up or evaporated, as being mere paper and words; it alone remained, and burned and rang in its piercing truth like a cry from a human breast.

How was it, then, that not he but Hugo became the leader of the young Romantic School?

This question may be answered by reversing the position of the words in the last line of the poem just quoted, and saying: "Poëte si l'on veut; mais grand homme non pas."

In spite of the extraordinary variety of the standpoints adopted by Hugo during the course of his long life, a certain unbroken line of progression is plainly evident in his political and religious development, and, what is almost of more importance, he acts with unfailing dignity. Victor Hugo was a hard worker, Alfred de Musset was exceedingly indolent; Hugo was an excellent economist, who made the most of his great gifts, and did not squander his talents, but carefully preserved both his physical and mental powers; De Musset was reckless in the extreme, neglectful of his health, addicted to narcotics even in his youth. Hugo had the faculty of making his personality a centre, of collecting other men round him and binding them to him, the faculty of the chief and leader; De Musset, the man of the world, was an excellent companion, but De Musset, the artist, was quite incapable of pulling in the traces with others. Hugo had the unbounded belief in himself which made others believe in him.

De Musset begins with an affectation of superiority, with a display of the extremist scepticism in religion and the extremest indifference in politics. But beneath this scepticism and this indifference we soon catch glimpses of an unmanly weakness, which in course of time reveals itself plainly.

Read his masked self-revelation in *Confession d'un Enfant du Siècle*. He tells how he was born at an unlucky moment. Everything was dead. Napoleon's day was past, and, as if there could be no glory except the glory of the Empire, we are told that the days of glory were at an end. Faith was dead. There was no longer even such a thing as two little pieces of black wood in the form of a cross before which one could devoutly fold one's hands; and therefore, as if there could be neither heart nor soul in those who are not attached to Catholic symbolism, we are told that soul was dead. Some who comprehended that the day of glory was past, proclaimed from the rostrum that liberty was a finer thing even than glory, and at these words the hearts of the youthful audience began to beat, as with a distant, terrible remembrance. "But on their way home these youths met a procession carrying three baskets to Clamart, and in the baskets they saw the corpses of three young men who had been too loud in their praises of liberty;" and, as if callous despair were the only mental attitude which the death of martyrs can produce, we are told that their lips curled with a strange smile, and that they forthwith plunged headlong into the maddest

dissipation.

Such is the basis, the underlying idea, of a whole series of the cleverest masculine characters drawn by De Musset, that remarkable creation Lorenzaccio among the number. In his youth it produced Rolla, the most famous of his typical characters.

In none of De Musset's works does the unstable, vacillating, feminine quality in his philosophy display itself more markedly than in *Rolla*.

The introduction opens with the well-known wail of longing for the Greece of old with its freshness and beauty, and for the Christendom of old, with its pure aspiration and fervent faith, for the days when the cathedrals of Cologne and Strasburg, of Notre-Dame and St. Peter, knelt devoutly in their mantles of stone and the great organ of the nations pealed forth the hosanna of the centuries.

Upon this follows the still more famous passage:

"O Christ! je ne suis pas de ceux que la prière
Dans tes temples muets amène à pas tremblants;
Je ne suis pas de ceux qui vont à ton Calvaire,
En se frappant le cœur, baiser tes pieds sanglants;
Et je reste debout sous tes sacrés portiques,
Quand ton peuple fidèle, autour des noirs arceaux,
Se courbe en murmurant sous le vent des cantiques,
Comme au souffle du nord un peuple de roseaux.
Je ne crois pas, ô Christ! à ta parole sainte:
Je suis venu trop tard dans un monde trop vieux.
D'un siècle sans espoir naît un siècle sans crainte.
. . . . . .
Les clous du Golgotha te soutiennent à peine;
Sous ton divin tombeau le sol s'est dérobé:
Ta gloire est morte, ô Christ! et sur nos croix d'ébène
Ton cadavre céleste en poussière est tombée!
Eh bien! qu'il soit permis d'en baiser la poussière
Au moins crédule enfant de ce siècle sans foi,
Et de pleurer, ô Christ! sur cette froide terre
Qui vivait de ta mort, et qui mourra sans toi!'

Then comes the story.—Jacques Rolla is the most dissipated youth in the dissipated city of Paris. He sneers at everything and every one. "No son of Adam ever had a more supreme contempt for people and for king." His means are small, but his love of luxury and voluptuousness is great. Custom, which constitutes half the life of other men, is utterly obnoxious to him. Therefore he divides the small fortune left him by his father into three parts, three purses of money, each to last a year. He spends them in the company of bad women upon all manner of foolishness, making no secret of his intention to shoot himself at the end of the third year.

And De Musset, aged 22, calls Rolla great, intrepid, honourable, and proud. His love of liberty—and by liberty is understood freedom from every kind of activity, from every calling, every duty—ennobles him in the poet's eyes.

We have the description of the night of Rolla's suicide in the house of ill-fame, of the preparations for the orgy, of the girl of sixteen who is brought by her own mother; and then the poet begins his affecting lament over the terrible depravity of society—the mother who sells her child, the poverty which drives her to the trade of procuress, the cheap chastity and hypocritical virtue of fortunately situated women.

And now comes the most famous passage of the poem, the apostrophe to Voltaire:

"Dors-tu content, Voltaire, et ton hideux sourire
Voltige-t-il encore sur tes os décharnés?
Ton siècle était, dit-on, trop jeune pour te lire;
Le nôtre doit te plaire, et tes hommes sont nés.
Il est tombé sur nous, cet édifice immense
Que de tes larges mains tu sapais nuit et jour.
La Mort devait t'attendre avec impatience.
Pendant quatre-vingts ans que tu lui fis ta cour.
. . . . . .
Vois-tu, vieil Arouet? cet homme plein de vie
Qui de baisers ardents couvre ce sein si beau,
Sera couché demain dans un étroit tombeau.
Jetterais-tu sur lui quelques regards d'envie?
Sois tranquille, il fa lu. Rien ne peut lui donner
Ni consolation, ni lueur d'espérance."

What had Voltaire to do with the death of this contemptible spendthrift. Is the great worker to be held responsible for the suicide of the idle voluptuary? Is this world of fantastic fools and women without wills, the world of which Voltaire dreamed? Voltaire, who was reason incarnate, whose hands, if they were black, were blackened only with gunpowder, whose life was a determined struggle for light? Is all this misery his fault? And if so, why?

Because he had no dogmatic faith.

The want of dogmatic faith is Rolla's excuse for living like an animal and dying like a boy. See what has become in the course of a few years of the bold defiance with which the poet began his career. The defiance has turned into faint-hearted doubt, the atheism into hopeless despair.

How healthy, how determined and calm is Hugo's attitude compared with this! Is it not easy now to understand how, in spite of everything, he continued to hold the central place in French literature?

IX

DE MUSSET AND GEORGE SAND

Ere the Thirties were half over, the literary revolution inaugurated by Hugo and his friends was victorious. This assertion may be made with truth, though the victory was as yet only a spiritual one. A very small minority of the most cultivated men and most intelligent women of France recognised that the battle was decided, that classic tragedy was dead, that the Aristotelian rules were mistakes, that the men of the transition period had had their day, that Casimir Delavigne's vein was exhausted, and that the only literary aspirants who knew their own minds were the generation of 1830. The fact that a movement of exactly the same kind had begun in painting, sculpture, and music showed more plainly than anything else how deep-seated and irresistible the change was.

But those who apprehended this were, as already observed, a small minority. The stiff, formal literature of the days of the Empire had on its side custom, the fear of novelty, stupidity, envy; it was supported by the whole official class, the press (with the solitary exception of one daily newspaper, the *Journal des Débats*), and the government; all government appointments and pensions were bestowed exclusively on men of the old school, a fact which acted as a powerful temptation to the rising generation. And there was, moreover, a certain amount of weariness and discouragement in the new camp after the first great intellectual effort. The combatants were young; they had fancied that one mighty onslaught would be sufficient to capture the defences of prejudice; and it was with a feeling of disappointment that they found themselves after the attack still only at the foot of the redoubt, with their numbers greatly reduced. They lost patience and ardour for the fight. They had been quite prepared for an obstinate struggle, entailing losses, wounds, and scars, but upon the condition of its leading to a comparatively speedy victory, to a conspicuous triumph, with applause and flourish of trumpets. But this seemingly endless strife, the constant ridicule poured on them, the enemy's undisturbed occupation of all influential positions in the domains of literature and art, the continued indifference of the public to the new, and its enthusiasm for the superannuated school—all this aroused misgivings in the minds of the youthful forces. Some among them asked themselves if they had not gone too far in their youthful ardour, if His Majesty the public were not perhaps right, or at least partly right, after all; and they began to make excuses for their talent, and to try to win the forgiveness of the public for it by concessions and apostasy. Some deserted their friends, in order to gain admission to this, that, or the other distinguished circle of society. Others, with the Academy in view, began to regulate their behaviour so as not to spoil their chance of becoming members of it while still comparatively young men.

A nobler feeling too, the individual author's feeling of independence, contributed to break up the group. The ties by which it was at first attempted to hold it together were of too cramping a nature. The leaders had not been contented with indicating a general direction, announcing a guiding artistic principle; they had evolved a regular code of doctrines. And these inventors of artistic dogmas were not far-sighted, unbiassed thinkers, but poets, as one-sided as they were gifted. Sociable as men of the Latin race undoubtedly are in comparison with others, a literary association of this kind was nevertheless an impossibility in France. Men of science may agree upon a common line of action, but one of the requirements of art is the complete, absolute independence of the individual; only when the creative artist is completely himself, not when he gives up any part whatsoever of his valuable individuality for the sake of combination, does he produce the best which he is capable of giving to the world. Absolute individualism is, of course, impossible in art; consciously or unconsciously, voluntarily or involuntarily, groups are formed; and, certain as it is that the individual must be permitted to express himself freely, it is just as certain that only in artistic continuity, only with the support and inspiration of artistic tradition, or of kindred spirits—great predecessors or contemporaries, can he attain to the highest. Isolated, overstrained geniuses droop and decay. But where a school has a single acknowledged leader, that leader must have the capacity of imparting freedom. He must make allowance for everything except want of character and style. A man of Hugo's stamp could not impart freedom, and the more fanatical among his adherents interpreted the doctrines of the school in a much narrower fashion than he did. In the course of a few years the characteristics of the most distinguished young members of the school developed in a more marked manner than could have been foreseen while they were still in the germ, and the revolt of these notable personages was of advantage to the old Classic party.

Yet another circumstance aided the process of disintegration. The Revolution of July transferred a number of the youthful standard-bearers and champions of the literary camp to the political. It is significant that in 1830 the *Globe* ceased to be a literary organ and passed into the hands of the Saint-Simonists. Its founders and most important contributors, men like Guizot, Thiers,

Villemain, and Vitet, became members of Parliament, public officials, or ministers of state. And since in our days the pursuit of politics leads much more quickly to fame than that of literature, even poets were tempted to mount the political platforms. Men like Hugo and Lamartine engaged actively in politics during the reign of Louis Philippe. The authors who continued to confine their attention to literature felt themselves distanced by those who combined politics with it, and could not help being at times irritated by the more noisy fame attained by these latter, and by seeing literature, their own all in all, regarded as an alternative good enough to have recourse to in time of need.

It was a severe blow to the Romantic School when Sainte-Beuve, its valiant, enthusiastic herald, withdrew from his post as one of Hugo's staff. He seems, with that curious mixture of humility and independence which distinguished his character, to have been long annoyed with himself for the attitude of submission to Hugo which he had assumed in his poetry, and to have nevertheless gone on unwillingly swinging his censer before the head of the school. The habit Hugo had got into of expecting or demanding huge doses of incense was obnoxious to him, and yet he was too weak to withhold his tribute. It was, however, undoubtedly less admiration for Hugo than for Hugo's young wife which kept Sainte-Beuve within the magic circle. The private rupture between him and Hugo in 1836 was the signal for a complete change in his literary attitude towards the poet of the *Orientales*. Sainte-Beuve's temperament led him to regard schools, systems, associations, parties, merely in the light of hotels in which he lodged for a time, never completely unpacking his trunk; he was always inclined to depreciate and satirise the one he had just left; hence he now began to write severe and for the most part depreciatory criticism of Hugo's works.

Alfred de Musset had at a still earlier date entertained himself by publishing abroad his defection. A man of such masterly and refined intellect could not be blind to the narrowness and imperfections of the doctrines of the school, still less to the childishness with which they were pushed to extremes by certain Hotspurs among its adherents. When he read aloud his poems for the first time in Hugo's house to an assembly of young Romanticists, only two passages were applauded. The one was the sentence in *Don Paez*: "Frères, cria de loin un dragon jaune et bleu qui dormait dans du foin." The "yellow and blue" enraptured them; it was what they called colour in style. The other passage was in the description of the huntsmen in "Le lever": a Et sur leur manches vertes les pieds noirs des faucons."

This elementary colour seemed of more value to the youthful audience than all the emotion, passion, and wit of the poems. For it was delineation such as this which distinguished them from the men of the old school, to whom it was only of importance that their readers should learn what happened, not what things were like. To these young men the all-important matter was that for De Musset the visible world existed; but it could not be the most important matter to De Musset himself, whose forte lay in a perfectly different direction, and who felt no desire to compete with Hugo or Théophile Gautier.

De Musset was, moreover, above everything else a young aristocrat, the fashionable man of the world who amused himself with literature in his leisure moments. He had no inclination for the companionship of long-haired poets in Calabrian headgear.

His earliest relations with the public had been of a somewhat uncertain description. He had tried to astonish and provoke it. Now it met him in the most cordial manner, ready, if he would only adopt another attitude towards it, to forgive him everything, even the ballad to the moon. And De Musset, eager to prove his independence, indifferent to parties, averse to dogma, in reality (as his spiritual kinship with Mathurin Régnier and Marivaux shows) classically inclined, yielded to a certain extent to the vague pressure. He captivated the reading world by the air of whimsical superciliousness with which he now wrote of his own and his late comrades' warlike deeds. In his poem, "Les secrètes Pensées de Rafaël, Gentilhomme français," he declares himself weary of the strife; he has, he says, fought on both sides; hundreds of scars have given him a venerable appearance, and he now—at the age of twenty-one—sits like a worn veteran upon his torn drum. Racine and Shakespeare meet upon his table and fall asleep there beside Boileau, who has forgiven them both. In another poem he writes:

"Aujourd'hui l'art n'est plus—personne n'y veut croire.
Notre littérature a cent mille raisons
Pour parler de noyés, de morts, et de guenilles.
Elle-même est un mort que nous galvanisons.
Elle entend son affaire en nous peignant des filles,
. . . . . .
Elle-même en est une et la plus délabrée
Qui de fard et d'onguents se soit jamais plâtrée."

This attack upon the fantastic immorality of the ultra-Romantic literary productions was so youthfully, recklessly sweeping that it seemed to be made upon the whole of contemporary literature. And it was possibly not purely an accident that it was written the same year in which *Marion Delorme* was published, that drama which with all its faults is most chaste and spiritual in conception, but which undeniably has a courtesan for its heroine. De Musset at the same time showed plainly that he was becoming ever more and more indifferent to youthful ideals. Almost all the poets of the young school, headed by Hugo, sided with struggling Greece; Alfred de Musset wrote admiringly of his Mardoche that "he had a greater regard for the Porte and Sultan Mahmoud than for the worthy Hellenic nation now staining the white marble of Paros with its blood."

What was the cause of this indifference and supercilious world-weariness?

Blood that was much too hot; a too passionate heart too early disappointed. In his first youth De Musset's faith in his fellow-men had been irreparably shaken, and distrust engendered bitterness and scorn. It is useless to seek the origin of his dark view of life in any single event, though he himself believed that it was to be accounted for by the fact, to which he constantly alludes, that he was betrayed in his early youth by a mistress and a friend. It was no doubt a severe blow to a youth of his honourable, truthful character to find himself thus deceived; but it is also certain that, whilst the wound was still fresh, he examined it through the poetic magnifying glass and made literary capital of it. It was the fashion to have love woes and to succeed in consoling one's self. But De Musset suffered more than many who read his wanton youthful effusions are apt to imagine. To conceal his sensitiveness, to evade the satire of cynics, he for a time affected extreme coldness and hardness. Such affected cynicism makes as unpleasant an impression as any other affectation. Taine wrote a famous essay on De Musset, the admiration in which is as blind as it is touching; it culminates in the exclamation: This man at least never lied! Unless we consider assumed superciliousness and cold-heartedness truthful, we can scarcely endorse the assertion.

But a turning-point in the spoilt, arrogant young man's life was at hand.

On the 15th of August 1833 *Rolla* appeared in what was then a new periodical, the *Revue des deux Mondes*. A few days afterwards its editor, Buloz, a Swiss, invited his collaborators to a dinner at the famous Palais-Royal restaurant, *Les trois frères provençaux*. The guests were numerous; among them was one lady. The host, introducing Alfred de Musset to Madame George Sand, requested him to take her in to dinner.

They were a handsome couple. He was slender and refined-looking, fair, with dark eyes, and a sharp, horse-like profile; she was dark, with luxuriant, wavy, black hair, a beautifully smooth, olive skin, faintly tinged with red in the cheeks, large, striking dark eyes, and perfectly shaped arms and hands. One felt that there was a whole world behind that forehead, and yet the lady was young and charming and as silent as if she had no pretensions to intellect. Her dress was simple, though somewhat fantastic; she wore a gold-embroidered Turkish jacket over her bodice and a dagger at her waist.

In Paris in 1870 I heard one of the few surviving guests at this dinner say that it was a piece of peasant cunning, a regular speculation on the part of Buloz, this bringing together of De Musset and George Sand. Buloz had said beforehand to one of his acquaintances: "He shall take her in to dinner. All women fall in love with him; all men consider it their duty to fall in love with her; they will certainly fall in love with each other—what manuscripts I shall get then!" And he rubbed his hands at the thought.

They were two extremely dissimilar beings who sat side by side at this table. Probably the only point of resemblance between them was that they were both authors.

Hers was a fertile, a maternal nature. Her mind was healthy, healthy even in its revolutionary outbursts, richly endowed and well-balanced. Her body was healthy too; she could stand the most fatiguing kind of life, could work most of the night, and content herself with a long morning sleep, which she commanded at will, and from which she awoke refreshed. Every great passion, every revolutionary idea which had moved the nineteenth century, had been housed by this woman in her soul, and yet she had retained her freshness, her tranquillity of mind, and her self-control. She could write calmly and carefully for six hours at a stretch. She had a gift of mental concentration which enabled her to take her pen and transfer her dreams to paper amidst the talking and laughing of a large company as if she were sitting in perfect solitude. And after doing it she would take part in what was going on, smiling, rather taciturn, hearing everything, understanding everything, absorbing everything that was said as a sponge absorbs water.

And he! His was in a far higher degree the artistic temperament. His work was a fever, his sleep was restless, his impulses and passions were uncontrollable. When he conceived an idea he did not sit brooding over it silent and sphinx-like as she did; he was overpowered and trembled, "plus étourdi qu'un page amoureux d'une fée," to quote an expression of his own. And when he seated himself at his desk to work out his idea he was constantly tempted to throw away his pen in despair. The process was so slow; the thoughts came crowding, demanding instant expression; violent palpitation of the heart was the result; and if the smallest temptation presented itself—an invitation to sup with friends and beautiful women, or a proposal to make a country excursion—he fled from his work as men flee from an enemy.

She "knitted" her novels; he wrote his works in a brief, burning, blissful ecstasy which gave place on the following day to disgust with what he had written. He thought it bad, and yet was incapable of re-writing it, for he hated his pen as the galley-slave hates his oar. In spite of all his youthful arrogance he writhed and moaned as if in constant anguish, and the reason was that within his slender, pliant frame dwelt a giant of an artist, who felt more deeply and strongly and lived harder and faster than the man in whom he was incorporate could bear, and who conceived greater ideas than the brain which was his organ could bring into the world without the most distressful birth-throes. When the poet flung himself into every kind of dissipation, it was chiefly from the need of deadening the suffering that his genius caused him.

He, the youth of two-and-twenty, the spoiled son of aristocratic parents, living at home, protected by a brother's vigilant affection, and with no real experience except of a few love affairs, had the knowledge of life, the suspiciousness, the bitterness, the misanthropy of a man of forty; and where his knowledge was insufficient, he eked it out with assumed indifference and cynicism.

She, the woman of twenty-eight, with Bohemian and royal blood in her veins (she was a great-

granddaughter of Maurice of Saxony), with the gravest experiences of life behind her, now without family, fortune, home, or the support of any male relative, separated from her little children, reduced to elective affinities, leading the life of the literary Bohemian, bearing a man's name, wearing male attire, and living like a man among men, was, nevertheless, in the depths of her soul, naïve, passionless, enthusiastic, tender-hearted, and as eagerly receptive of everything new as if she had had no experiences to speak of, and had never been disillusioned.

He, so original in his art, so irregular in his life, was, nevertheless, in many ways narrow-minded. We men easily become so, especially those of us who, like De Musset, are born in a good position and learn early to reverence custom and to dread ridicule.

She, in whose technique there is nothing revolutionary, who follows the beaten track as far as the literary presentment of her theme is concerned, was in her mental attitude almost a prodigy. There was not a trace of narrow-mindedness in her. She had no prejudices. Women whose fate has brought them into direct contact with the cancerous sores of society, and who have faced the verdict of society without flinching, sometimes become more open-minded than men, for the reason that they have paid more for their openmindedness. George Sand examined things for herself, weighed them well, and in most cases estimated them at their proper value.

He was her superior in culture. With the artist's genius he combined an incorruptible masculine critical faculty; keen and flexible as a Damascene blade, it clove every hollow phrase it lighted on, transfixed and burst every bubble of thought or language.

She often yielded to the inclination of her sex to let the heart speak first and loudest. Any noble enthusiasm, any beautiful Utopian theory carried her away; she had the woman's instinctive desire to serve; in her youth she was always on the look-out for a banner borne by men with great and valiant hearts, that she might fight under it. It was not her ambition to charm the fashionable world as the famous concert-player; her desire was to beat the drum as the daughter of the regiment. Her want of cultivated reasoning power, however, led her to follow and worship vague dreamers as the men of the future, chief amongst them the foolish though sincere Pierre Leroux, a philosopher and socialist to whom for many years she looked up as a daughter to a father. De Musset's aristocratic intellect rejected the claims of these prophets who could not write twenty readable pages of prose; George Sand allowed herself to be infected with their tendency to emphatic and unctuous diction.

To conclude, then, she was his inferior as an artist, though as a human being she was greater and far stronger. She had not the masculine direct artistic intuition, the faculty by virtue of which a man says, giving no reason: "Thus it must be." When they looked at a painting together, he, who made no pretension to be a connoisseur, at once perceived the merits of the picture and the characteristic qualities of the artist, and described them in a few words. She arrived in some peculiar, slow, roundabout way at an understanding of the picture, and the expression of her feeling on the subject was often either vague or paradoxical. His intelligence was acute and nervous, hers diffuse, universally sympathetic. When they listened to an opera together, what affected him were the outbursts of heartfelt personal passion—the individual element. She, on the contrary, was affected by the choruses, the expression of the emotions of common humanity. It seemed as if a concourse of minds were required to set hers in motion.

Her writings lacked conciseness. Whilst every sentence that came from his pen was like a gold coin stamped on both sides and chiselled on the edge, hers were wordy to prolixity. The first thing De Musset involuntarily did when a copy of *Indiana* came into his hands, was to score out some twenty or thirty superfluous adjectives in the first few pages. George Sand saw the book afterwards, and she was, it is said, more annoyed than grateful.

Six months before they met, she had felt some uneasiness at the idea of making De Musset's acquaintance. She first requested Sainte-Beuve to bring him to see her, and then wrote in the postscript of a letter, dated March 1833: "On further reflection I have decided that I do not wish you to bring Alfred de Musset here; he is too much of the dandy; we should not suit one another. It was more curiosity than real interest which made me wish to see him. But it is not prudent to satisfy every feeling of curiosity." One perceives a touch of anxiety or foreboding in these words.

Alfred de Musset for his part had, like all authors, a certain dread of authoresses. It was undoubtedly a male member of the profession who nicknamed these ladies bluestockings. Nevertheless, there is no denying the great attraction which a remarkable feminine mind possesses for the masculine mind. The ecstatic feeling which accompanies a perfect intellectual understanding was in this case intensified a hundredfold by a suddenly conceived, violent mutual passion.

Looking at the liaison between these two remarkable people from the historic point of view, we are struck by the strong impress it bears of the spirit of the age, of that artistic intoxication recalling the carnival mood of the Renaissance, which took possession of men's minds while Romanticism prevailed in France. The born artist, whose first duty it always is to break with traditional convention within the domain of his art, feels himself in every age tempted to defy the conventions of society also; but the generation of 1830 was more youthfully naïve in its rebellion against conventionality than any preceding generation had been in France for centuries, or than any of its successors has been. In all artists there is something of the Bohemian or of the child; the artists of that day allowed the Bohemian and the child in them free play. It is characteristic that the first fancy which seizes these two chosen spirits after they have found each other, and the first breathless, burning ecstasy of bliss is past, is to dress themselves up and play tricks upon their acquaintances. The first time Paul de Musset is invited to spend an evening with the young couple, he finds Alfred in the garb of an eighteenth-century marquis, and George Sand in

hoops and panniers. When George Sand gives her first dinner-party after she and De Musset become friends, he waits at table, unrecognised by the guests, in the dress of a young Norman servant girl; and as a suitable *vis-à-vis* for the guest of the evening, Monsieur Lerminier, a well-known professor of philosophy, she has invited Debureau, the famous Pierrot of the Funambules Theatre, whom no one present has seen except on the stage, and whom she introduces as an eminent member of the English House of Commons charged with secret despatches to the Austrian government. To give both him and Lerminier an opportunity to display their accomplishments, the conversation is turned upon politics. But Sir Robert Peel, Lord Stanley, and other such personages are mentioned in vain; the foreign diplomat either maintains an obstinate silence or answers in monosyllables. At last some one employs the expression, "the European balance of power." Then the Englishman speaks. "Would you like to know," he says, "what my idea of the European balance of power at this serious conjuncture in English and continental politics is?—This!" And the diplomat throws up his plate so that it spins round in the air, then cleverly catches it on the point of his knife and balances it as it whirls there. The astonishment of the other guests may be imagined. Does not a little anecdote like this show us the connection between De Musset and George Sand in a curious light of youthfulness and childishness? It is like a reflected gleam from the days of the Renaissance; we know at once that we are in the romantic France of the Thirties.

The connection has its commonplace, sordid side, of which enough has been made, and on which I shall not dwell. Every one knows that De Musset and George Sand travelled in Italy together, and that he tormented her with his jealousy, she him with a surveillance of his actions and habits to which he was totally unaccustomed; that their life together was not happy; that he was very ill in Venice (with *delirium tremens*, we are led to understand); and that during his illness she had a love affair with the Italian doctor, Pagello by name, who attended him, the consequence of which was that De Musset left her and went home in a state of extreme depression.

But there is yet another and more attractive aspect of the connection—namely, the psychological or aesthetic. The history of literature tells of many such intimacies between remarkable men and women; but in this one there is something unusual and new. A masculine genius of the highest rank, one stage of whose artistic career is already run, but who is still quite young—a feminine genius, great and complete in herself, in appraising whom it may safely be affirmed that no woman before her ever displayed such exuberant creative power—these two influence each other during the exaltation of a passionate attachment.

The science of psychology is still in such a backward condition that the difference between a man's imagination and a woman's has scarcely been determined; still less has it been clearly ascertained how they act upon each other. Here for the first time in modern civilisation the masculine literary creative mind and the feminine come into contact—the highest, finest development of each. The experiment (which was ere long to be repeated in England, on approximative lines, in the case of Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning) had never been made on so grand a scale. These are the Adam and Eve of Art. They meet and share the fruit of the tree of knowledge. The curse, that is to say the quarrel, follows; he goes his way, she hers. But they are no longer the same. The works they now produce are of a different stamp from those which they produced before they met.

He leaves her, his feelings lacerated, disappointed, despairing, with a new and heavy complaint against her sex, convinced that: Treachery! thy name is woman!

She leaves him, her soul torn with conflicting emotions, first half-consoled, then distracted with grief, but soon feeling the relief of being past a crisis which was pain to her calm, productive nature; she has a new feeling of woman's superiority to man, and is more strongly convinced than before that: Weakness! thy name is man!

He leaves her with his aversion for all enthusiasms, Utopias, and philanthropic projects strengthened, feeling more than ever convinced that for the artist art is everything. Nevertheless, the contact with the great feminine intellect has not been fruitless. The very suffering makes him truthful. He throws off his affected egotism; we no longer see him making a display of assumed hardness and coldness. The influence of her open-mindedness and charitableness and of her enthusiasm for ideals is plainly perceptible in the works which he now writes—in Lorenzaccio's enthusiastic republicanism, in Andrea del Sarto's whole character—possibly even in the vehement personal protest against Thiers' press laws.

She leaves him, more convinced than ever that the male sex is by nature narrow-minded and egotistical, more prone than ever to yield to the fascination of general ideas. In *Horace* she devotes her talent to the service of Saint-Simonism; she writes *Le Compagnon du Tour de France* in the interests of socialism; in 1848 she composes the bulletins for the Provisional Government. Nevertheless, it was contact with De Musset's virile, classic genius which finally moulded her pure and classic style. She learned to love form, to seek the beautiful for its own sake. Dumas, the younger, has said of a sentence of hers that "it is drawn by Leonardo and sung by Mozart"; he should have added that her hand was guided and her ear trained by Alfred de Musset.

After the separation, both artists are fully matured. Henceforward he is the poet with the burning heart, she the sybil with the eloquently prophetic tongue.

Into the gulf which opened between them she cast her immaturity, her tirades, her faults of taste, her man's clothes, and thenceforward was altogether feminine, altogether natural.

Into the same gulf he cast his Don Juan costume, his bravado, his admiration for Rolla, his boyish insolence, and thenceforward was the man, the emancipated intellectual force.

X

ALFRED DE MUSSET

Alfred de Musset lived to be forty-seven, but all his works, except three charming little plays and a few poems, were written before he was thirty.

The whole series of remarkable and admirable productions was given to the world during the six years following on his rupture with George Sand. Although she had deceived him, his inclination to dwell upon deceit and treachery becomes ever slighter; and along with it he loses his affectation of world-weariness. In his works, even in his choice of subjects, we can trace the author's personal struggle to throw off his mask of vice and to free himself from the attraction vice has for him.

The first important work De Musset produced after his return from Italy was the drama *Lorenzaccio,* the idea of which he had conceived in Florence. Lorenzo de Medici is cousin to Alexander de Medici, the bestially cruel and sensual Duke of Florence. By nature Lorenzo is a pure, high-strung, energetic character. He early determines, taking Brutus as his model, to rid the world of a tyrant. To attain his aim he plays the part of a heartless libertine, becomes Alexander's follower, tool, counsellor, and pander. As Hamlet assumed madness, Lorenzo assumes the mask of a weak, cowardly sensualism, in order to allay suspicion and secure his victim. But the disguise under which he conceals his real nature adheres to him like a Nessus garment; he gradually becomes nearly everything that he only desired to appear; against his will he inhales and absorbs the corruption with which he himself has assisted to impregnate the atmosphere of the court and capital; when he reflects on his life he loathes himself. And yet he is misunderstood; for through all the wickedness and the feigned, sickly cowardice, he is pursuing his plan of murdering Alexander at the right moment and re-establishing the Republic.

He is consumed by misanthropical scorn. He despises the Duke as a satyr and a bloodhound; the people, because they allow such a man to reign over them, and because they permit him, Lorenzaccio, to walk unassailed, unpunished along the streets of Florence; the Republicans, because they have no energy and no comprehension of the political situation. His dream is to purge himself of all the impurity of his life by a single, great, decisive deed, the assassination of the Duke; and the poet allows him thus to purify himself. Lorenzo throws off his assumed character and judges and punishes like an avenging angel. De Musset's political pessimism shows itself in what follows. Lorenzaccio falls by the hands of an assassin, who is tempted by the price set upon his head, and the Florentine republican leaders are too indifferent and unpractical, the mass of the citizens too degenerate, to profit by the death of the Duke; they sit still and allow themselves to be surprised and overpowered by another tyrant. The imperfectly concealed contempt of the author for the Republicans is undoubtedly due to impressions received in 1830. De Musset had himself seen a revolution which promised a Republic end in a Monarchy. In his play, however, the Republicans are represented in a more unfavourable light than they deserve. The evening before the assassination Lorenzaccio undoubtedly informs them at what hour he will kill the Duke, yet we can hardly blame them for not making their preparations. Is not the man who shouts this startling intelligence into their houses from the street, the Duke's inseparable comrade, his companion in guilt, his court-fool? What wonder that they shrug their shoulders and do nothing! In De Musset's injustice to them we are conscious of a personal feeling which has no connection with his literary subject. Of chief importance to him, however, has been the representation of Lorenzo's character, with its nobility under a repulsive mask. In Lorenzo's soul there is an ideal element, of which he is not ashamed; he aspires; he believes in the expiating power of deeds. What purifies him in the hour of his death is not an accident, like Rolla's pure kiss, but an action of which he has dreamed ever since he grew up.

In *Le Chandelier* we are still in very depraved company; but the principal character, the young clerk, Fortunio, stands out against the dark background, a figure of light, with his intense, boundless devotion to Jacqueline. He is badly used by her and her lover, who employ him as a screen, a blind, in their low intrigue. He finds them out, but goes on loving as before, and is ready to encounter certain death to hide the disgraceful amour of the woman he loves. This young page has the determination and courage of a hero, and the power of his pure devotion is so great that it moves and overcomes Jacqueline and wins her from Clavaroche. He is an ideal youthful lover.

Octave in *Les Caprices de Marianne* is a frivolous and in many ways depraved young man, who neither will nor can love any woman seriously. He declares that he disdains to spend more time on the conquest of a woman than it takes him to break the seal on his bottle of Grecian wine. But in one relation, that of friendship, he is as simple-hearted and trusting as a boy. He loves his friend, young Cœlio, with such ardour that he is ready to die for him or to revenge his death, with such fidelity that he scornfully rejects the favour of the lady whom Cœlio vainly worships. He is an ideal friend. A striking contrast to him is Cœlio, a character in whom De Musset, who in this drama divided his own personality, represented the other half of his nature. Cœlio is the youthful lover, whose love is a longing adoration, a passion so melancholy in its ardour that it will kill him if it remain unsatisfied. A halo of Shakespearean romance surrounds his head, his words are music, his hopes poetry. He describes himself in the words: "Il me manque le repos, la douce insouciance qui fait de la vie un miroir où tous les objets se peignent un instant et sur lequel tout glisse. Une dette pour moi est un remords. L'amour, dont vous autres vous faites un passe-temps,

trouble ma vie entière."

We feel in these male characters how De Musset is maturing as an author. His desire is no longer only to delineate the seething instincts of youth, or the wild play of the passions with its accompaniment of deceit, treachery, and violence; he dwells long and with predilection on the innocent and deep feeling which is only made guilty by outward circumstances, on the love which in reality is pure, and which appears criminal only because it is an infraction of social laws, on the friendship which in its essence is heroic devotion, even when it assumes the degrading form of eloquent panderage—in short upon friendship and love in their purity, on those forces in human life which we are wont to call ideal.

Nor is it only De Musset's male characters who become purer and purer; his women undergo the same gradual transformation. In his early works they are either Delilahs or Eves. But his ever-increasing inclination to represent the spiritually beautiful and morally pure, leads him to idealise them also more and more. It is noteworthy that the first female character which he creates after his final breach with George Sand in 1835, namely, Madame Pierson in *La Confession d'un Enfant du Siècle*, is to a great extent a highly idealised portrait of that lady. His prose tales, of which at least three, *Emmeline, Frédéric et Bernerette*, and *Le Fils du Titien*, are among the best love-stories our century has produced, bear witness to their author's increasing tendency to ennoble and glorify love and, consequently, his female characters. He takes, for example, the outward semblance of some little grisette or other he has known, some sweet-tempered, frivolous, loose-living, gay young creature, and this figure he invests with a virginal charm which it has long lost, and makes of it a Mimi Pinson; or he paints for us a young girl as soulful, as naïve in all her mistakes and false steps, as beautiful and delicate in her manner of expressing herself, and as touchingly simple in the hour of her death as that Bernerette, whose last letter few have read without tears. To him, the love-poet, love is so autocratic a power that he subordinates even art to it. To be the lover and the beloved seems to him at last such a much greater thing than to be the artist, that his final conception of ideal art is: art consecrated and exclusively devoted to one person, the only beloved. In *Le Fils du Titien* the hero, a gifted young artist, is arrested in a dissolute career by a noble woman's love. He shows his gratitude by determining to paint one single picture, the portrait of his mistress. On it he concentrates all his powers, and by it alone he is to be known to posterity. In its honour he writes a sonnet, in which he praises the beauty and the pure soul of his beloved, tells why it is he has determined that his brush shall never be used in the service of another, and declares that, beautiful as the picture may be, it is as nothing compared with a kiss from its model.

But of all De Musset's stories, *Emmeline* is certainly the most charming. It was inspired by the author's own first worthy attachment after his quarrel with George Sand—a short but happy one, which in its main features resembled that of the story. A young man falls violently in love with a young married lady, whose charms are painted in the most delicate colours, but colours chosen with an accurately observing eye. There is nothing in recent literature which can be compared with this art except Turgenev's most delicate delineations of female character; but Turgenev's women are more spiritual, less real, are beheld with the lover's less critical eye and represented with less artistic boldness. After long admiring the lady without any hope of awakening her interest in him, the young man wins her love and she gives herself to him. Then they abruptly part for ever, because she is too truthful to deceive her husband, and her lover has too much delicacy of feeling to remain in her neighbourhood under such circumstances.

A poem in this story, which the young lover asks his lady to read, seems to me to be the most beautiful of the love poems of De Musset's second period. It speaks the language of ideal feeling. It is the well-known "Si je vous disais pourtant que je vous aime." One verse runs:

"J'aime, et je sais répondre avec indifférence;
J'aime, et rien ne le dit; j'aime et seul je le sais;
Et mon secret est cher, et chère ma souffrance;
Et j'ai fait le serment d'aimer sans espérance,
Mais non pas sans bonheur;—je vous vois, c'est assez."

Whilst he was bringing out these charming stories, which are as delicate as if they had been written upon flower petals, De Musset also wrote a few short plays, in which love appears as the terrible force with which man cannot trifle, as the fire with which he cannot play, as the electric flash which kills; and one or two others in which the wit of the aristocratic man of the world sparkles in the tissue of the soulful, highly emotional style.[1] Of these little plays, *Un Caprice* is the most finished and has the most sparkling dialogue. Not without reason is it included among the works the names of which are carved upon De Musset's tombstone in Père-Lachaise. In this play the erotic caprice, the momentary infatuation, is made to yield to the discipline of marriage. The man in this case is frivolous and untrustworthy; the women, who join forces, have their hearts in the right place, and one of them has, besides, all the charm of high-bred cleverness. Madame de Léry is a *Parisienne*. And no one drew the *Parisienne* of that day with such genius as De Musset. He stood on the same plane with her. She is the genuine fine lady, but also the genuine woman. The beautiful thing about this character is that in it we see unadulterated, genuine, fresh nature piercing through the extremest refinement of fashionable life—nature, in spite of all the sparkling and tinselly cleverness and all the premature experience and the ennui resulting therefrom; nature even in dissimulation, nature even in the little comedy which Madame de Léry is woman and actress enough to play. "Oh! how true it is," exclaims Goethe in one of his letters, "that nothing is wonderful except the natural, nothing great except the natural, nothing beautiful except the natural, nothing &c., &c.!" In the gay, supercilious, society art of this creation of De Musset's, nature is preserved. The idea underlying *Un Caprice* is a moral idea.

But whereas many writers represent and conceive of love as something so firm and solid that it can be taken hold of and deposited here or there as if it were a piece of granite rock, to De Musset, even when he is most moral, it is always only the most delicately powerful, and consequently most volatile essence of life. At its full strength it can kill, but it can also evaporate.

In his last plays De Musset exalted the feminine fidelity and purity in which he believed, though it had not fallen to his lot to find them. In *Barberine* the idea of which he took from an old legend, he had already depicted an ideally faithful wife of the type of Shakespeare's *Imogen*. But the play was an uninteresting one. The heroines of the last two he writes are wonderfully beautiful creations. In the little masterpiece, *Bettine*, he has, apparently with the greatest ease, accomplished one of the most difficult tasks for a delineator of character. Bettine enters, and she has not spoken three or four times before we feel that we are in the presence of a strong, brave, tender-hearted, noble-minded woman; and we are conscious of more than this, for we feel certain that she is a woman of parts, an artist, accustomed to triumph, accustomed to feel herself intellectually superior to her surroundings; and to pay little heed to petty conventionalities. It is her wedding morning. She comes singing on to the stage, where the notary is waiting, goes straight up to him, and to his astonishment addresses him as *thou*: "Ah! te voilà, notaire, ô cher notaire, mon cher ami! As-tu tes paperasses?" His official dignity has so little existence for her that she has no hesitation in letting him see her delight because it is her wedding-day. The kindly happiness of her nature overflows on every occasion. She is not brilliant like the aristocratic woman of the world, but frank, large-minded, confident, like the true artist; and her healthy human nature affects us the more pleasantly from being seen against the background of that moral corruption which is represented by her cold and exacting bridegroom.

The beautiful little drama, *Carmosine* the idea of which is taken from a tale of Boccaccio, is intended to show how a strong, ardent, worshipful love, which outward circumstances separate from its object, can be cured by magnanimous kindness and tenderness. Carmosine, a young girl of the middle class, loves King Pedro of Arragon with a hopeless, consuming passion; this feeling makes it impossible for her to give her hand to her faithful and sorrowing adorer, Perillo. She determines to suffer silently and die. But the playfellow of her childhood, Minuccio the singer, is led by his compassion for her to tell the King and Queen of her love. Far from being indignant, the Queen goes to her in disguise and gradually alleviates her suffering with sisterly and queenly words. She tells her that a love so deep and great is too beautiful a thing to be torn out of the heart, and that the Queen herself wishes her to be made one of her ladies-in-waiting, so that she may see the King every day—because such a love, born of the soul's aspiration after the highest, ennobles:

> "C'est moi, Carmosine, qui veut vous apprendre que l'on peut aimer sans souffrir, lorsque l'on aime sans rougir, qu'il n'y a que la honte ou le remords qui doivent donner de la tristesse, car elle est faite pour le coupable, et, à coup sûr, votre pensée ne l'est pas."

And the King comes, under pretext of wishing to see her father, and in the Queen's presence says to her:

> "C'est donc vous, gentille demoiselle, qui êtes souffrante et en danger, dit-on? Vous n'avez pas le visage à cela.... Vous tremblez, je crois. Vous défiez-vous de moi?"
>
> "Non, Sire."
>
> "Eh bien, donc, donnez-moi la main. Que veut dire ceci, la belle fille? Vous qui êtes jeune et qui êtes faite pour réjouir le cœur des autres, vous vous laissez avoir du chagrin? Nous vous prions, pour l'amour de nous, qu'il vous plaise de prendre courage, et que vous soyez bientôt guérie."
>
> "Sire, c'est mon trop peu de force à supporter une trop grande peine qui est la cause de ma souffrance. Puisque vous avez pu m'en plaindre, j'espère que Dieu m'en délivrera."
>
> "Belle Carmosine, je parlerai en roi et en ami. Le grand amour que vous nous avez porté vous a, près de nous, mise en grand honneur; et celui qu'en retour nous voulons vous rendre, c'est de vous donner de notre main, en vous priant de l'accepter, l'époux que nous vous avons choisi. Après quoi nous voulons toujours nous appeler votre chevalier, et porter dans nos passes d'armes votre devise et vos couleurs, sans demander autre chose de vous, pour cette promesse, qu'un seul baiser."
>
> The Queen, to Carmosine: "Donne-le mon enfant, je ne suis pas jalouse."
>
> "Sire, la reine a répondu pour moi."

In what world does this happen? In what world do we breathe so pure an air? Where does such equity flourish? where is love at one and the same time so humble, so ardent, and so noble? and where are such chivalry, such fidelity, such freedom from jealousy, and such benignity to be found? Where such a king? Where such a queen?

The answer must undoubtedly be: In the land of the ideal; nowhere else. It is upon its coast that the wanton, cynical De Musset, in his capacity of author, lands at last. De Musset, the man, suffered shipwreck on other shores. He fell a victim to the abuse of narcotics. His undisciplined, ill-regulated character was his bane. In his writings he became ever more spiritual, ever more moral; in his life he sank ever deeper into mechanical sensual indulgence. He early lost control over himself; for a time he rose by the aid of his art above the ruin of his life; but in the end even

the wings of art became powerless.

He had hoped much from the Constitutional Monarchy. He had expected from it, or under it, an art-loving court, a liberal policy, a revival of national glory, and a blossoming time in literature. We can imagine his disappointment. It is not impossible that a court with a keen appreciation of literature and art might have exercised a saving influence upon Alfred de Musset, have drawn him into its circle, compelled him to preserve his self-respect, and made his pleasures, and even his excesses, more refined. But Louis Philippe, that polished and well-educated peace-lover, had no real love of literature and no literary taste. He was even less capable of attaching Alfred de Musset than Victor Hugo to himself. De Musset wrote a sonnet on the occasion of Meunier's attempt to assassinate the King, in 1836. It was not printed, but the Duke of Orleans, who had been a school-fellow of De Musset's, saw it, thought it excellent, and read it to His Majesty. The King never knew who had written it; as soon as he heard that the author presumed to address him in the second person singular, he became so indignant that he would hear no more. To make amends for this slight, the Duke procured De Musset an invitation to the court balls. When the poet was presented to Louis Philippe, he was astonished by the reception he met with. The King came up to him with a smile of pleasant surprise and said: "You have just come from Joinville; I am very glad to see you." De Musset had too much *savoir-vivre* to betray any surprise. He made a low bow and tried to think what the King's words could mean. At last he remembered that a distant relation of his was inspector of forests on the crown property of Joinville. The King, who did not burden his memory with the names of authors, had a perfect acquaintance with all the names of the officials in charge of the crown lands. Every winter for eleven years in succession he saw the face of his supposed forest-inspector with the same pleasure, and favoured him with such gracious nods and smiles that many a courtier turned pale with envy. The honour was supposed to be shown to literature; but this much is certain, that Louis Philippe never knew that there lived in France during his reign a great poet who bore the same name as his inspector of forests.

Such a lack-lustre rule as Louis Philippe's could not but be abhorrent to De Musset. His haughty, wildly defiant answer to Becker's *Rheinlied*, points to lyric possibilities in him which might have developed under other political conditions. As things were, he felt himself restricted to being the poet of youth and love; and when youth was past he was incapable of reviving his powers. His virtues were as fatal to him as his vices. Proud and distinguished, he had not a trace of the ambition which leads a man to husband his intellectual resources, not an atom of the desire of gain which compels to industry, or of the egotism which makes the writer attribute supreme importance to his own work. He lived his life with such greedy haste that at forty he was as exhausted as a man of seventy, without having attained to either composure or wisdom. His premature physical exhaustion brought intellectual exhaustion in its train. He was destitute of that higher instinct which compels the author to live altogether for his art, and he had not a trace of the social or political instinct which bends the productive mind to the yoke of duty to others. He was so incapable of self-control that the slightest temptation proved irresistible. His life became as absolutely aimless as his art was; there was no cause he desired to advance, nothing that he was determined at any cost to say; and his character was too uncontrollable, too little reflective, for self-development, as Goethe understood it, to be the aim which rendered all others superfluous. When Alfred de Musset died in 1857, his creative capacity had been extinct for several years.

---

[1] His tour in Italy with George Sand lasted from December 1833 to April 1834. In 1834 he wrote *On ne badine pas avec l'Amour* and *Lorenzaccio*; in 1835 *Barberine* (his most insignificant play), *Le Chandelier, Confession d'un Enfant du Siècle*, and *La Nuit de Mai*; in 1836 *Emmeline* and *Il ne faut jurer de rien*; in 1837 *Un Caprice, Les deux Maîtresses*, and *Frédéric et Bernerette*; in 1838 *Le Fils du Titien. Il faut qu'une Porte soit ouverte ou fermée* was written in 1845, *Bettine* in 1851, *Carmosine* in 1852.

XI

GEORGE SAND

"I believe," writes George Sand in the introduction to *La Mare au Diable*, "that the mission of art is a mission of sentiment and love, and that the novel of our day ought to supply the place of the parable and fable of the childish days of old. The aim of the artist should be to awaken love for the objects he represents; and I, for my part, should not reproach him if he beautified them a little. Art is not an examination of the given reality, but a pursuit of the ideal truth." What the mature woman here proclaims as her aesthetic creed is what she had felt all her life. She had never regarded the calling of the author in any other light than that of an aspiration after the highest of which humanity is capable; or, to put it more correctly, she had considered it to be the author's calling to elevate the mind above the imperfection of the existing conditions of society, with the aim of giving it a wide horizon, and thereby imparting to it the power, when it descended to earth again, to combat in its own fashion the prejudices, the conventions, the coarseness of mind and hardness of heart to which that imperfection was due.

In the introduction to *Le Compagnon du Tour de France* she says: "Since when has it been obligatory for the novel to be a transcription of what is, of the hard and cold reality of

contemporary men and things? It may be this, I know; and Balzac, a master to whose talent I have always done homage, has written the *Comédie humaine*. But, although I was united by the ties of friendship to that illustrious man, I saw human affairs under quite a different aspect. I remember saying to him: 'You are writing the Human Comedy, The title is a modest one. You might quite as well call it the Human Drama, the Human Tragedy.' 'Yes,' said he, 'and you, you are writing the Human Epic.' 'The title in this case,' I replied, 'would be too imposing. What I should like to write is the human pastoral, the human ballad, the human romance. To put it plainly, you have the desire and the ability to paint the human being as you see him. Good! I, on the other hand, feel impelled to paint him as I wish him to be, as I believe he ought to be.' And, as we were not competing with each other, we each recognised that the other was right."

GEORGE SAND

The passage is part of a protest made by George Sand against the charge that it was her desire to flatter the lower classes by producing idealised representations of them—this explains how she came to give such pointed, dogmatic expression to the idealism of her nature. Most undoubtedly she was the idealist, all her life long; but it was not really the desire to delineate human beings as "they ought to be" which inspired her to write, but the desire to show what they could be if society did not hamper their spiritual growth, corrupt them, and destroy their happiness; hence, in her delineations of the representatives of "society" no leniency was shown. What George Sand originally meant to give was a picture of life as it is, of reality as she had experienced and observed it; what she gave was the feminine enthusiast's view of reality. The section she saw was a patch of earth with the brightness of heaven over it. Her clear-sightedness was the clear-sightedness of the poet.

The period was the period of enormous productivity. Victor Hugo, Balzac, Alexandre Dumas, wrote ceaselessly, piling work upon work. Dumas at last regularly manufactured books; he published four or five novels at a time, and with the help of numerous collaborators produced a good-sized shelf of volumes in a year. George Sand's productivity was almost as remarkable. Her works fill 110 closely printed volumes. I can make no attempt here to criticise them all. It is only of consequence that I should indicate the main features of the most important works, the ideas which permeate them, the results which remain even when the details of the books are forgotten.

The real life story lying behind the first group of George Sand's novels is familiar to every one. She was born in 1804; lost her father at an early age; had a foolish, passionate mother, and a wise, distinguished grandmother; grew up on the family property of Nohant in Berry, a regular country child, romping out of doors, loving nature and freedom, and mixing on equal terms with the children of the peasantry. Her tastes were the tastes of the people, but she was not the less romantic for that. As Chateaubriand in his early youth evolved for himself the image of an ideally charming woman, of whom he constantly dreamed, so George Sand's young imagination created a hero, to whom she built an altar of stone and moss in a corner of her garden, and whom she credited with all the wonderful deeds suggested by her fertile invention. At the age of thirteen she was sent to a convent school in Paris. At first she sadly missed the free country life; then she became for a time ardently religious; but even before she returned to Nohant this enthusiasm had been superseded by a lively interest in the stage and in political literature. In her country

surroundings, the grown-up girl reads Rousseau for the first time, and is fascinated, as we all are, when our own nature is revealed to us. Henceforward, to her life's end, she is Rousseau's faithful disciple. His understanding and worship of nature, his faith in God, his belief in and love of equality, his defiant attitude towards so-called civilised society, appealed to all her instincts and, as it were, forestalled feelings that were slumbering in her soul. Shakespeare, Byron, and Chateaubriand also enrapture her; they cause her to feel solitary in her surroundings, and communicate to her that first, vague melancholy which in young, passionate, enthusiastic souls generally precedes the melancholy of real disappointment. In 1822 this girl, who, with her powerful intellect, her rich imagination, and her inability to live her life independently, would never have been satisfied with the companionship of one man, however noble his character and great his gifts, was married to a Monsieur Dudevant, a perfectly ordinary country gentleman, neither better nor worse than most of his kind. He was uncultivated and passionate, and quite incapable of understanding his wife; but it is evident that, even if he had been a much better husband, the ultimate consequences of the marriage would have been the same. Only the first three years were spent in peace and amity. By 1825, George Sand was beginning to look down upon her husband, and, with her natural craving for sympathetic understanding, to form friendships with other men, as a relief from what to her were the insulting and cruelly degrading conditions of her home life. Monsieur Dudevant, who was enough of the husband to be exasperated by intellectual independence in his wife, though he was far too insignificant a personage to be able to profit by that want of intellectual self-sufficiency which impelled her to seek a leader and guide, regarded even her most innocent interchange of sympathies with other men as a transgression of duty. Incessant conjugal friction and disputes at last put an end to all community of feeling. Even the two children who were the fruit of the marriage could not keep their parents together. In 1831 George Sand went to live in Paris alone.

The documents connected with the ensuing separation suit, as also George Sand's own letters, give us an adequate understanding of what her married life was. I have read in the *Gazette des Tribunaux* (30th July and 1st and 19th August 1836, and 28th June and 12th July 1837) the pleas advanced on both sides. They were horrible, disgraceful accusations which this great woman was obliged to hear from the lips of her husband's counsel. With her beautiful dark hair falling over a black velvet jacket, or else dressed, in the fashion of the day, in white, with a flowered shawl round her shoulders, George Sand sat and listened without a trace of emotion. Her husband accused her of having conceived and yielded to a criminal passion for another man within three years of her marriage. "Monsieur Dudevant soon discovered that he was being deceived by the woman he worshipped (!), but was magnanimous enough to forgive." The lawyer read a long letter from Madame Dudevant to her husband, in which she confessed, and reproached herself for, various faults, and attributed the misunderstanding between them to an incompatibility in their characters which by no means implied an absence of generosity and amiability on his part. This letter, Monsieur Dudevant's counsel most illogically argued, was equivalent to a confession of unfaithfulness on the lady's part. He went on to show how the couple had lived from 1825 to 1828 in voluntary separation, and how Madame Dudevant, even after she left her husband in 1831 to lead "the life of an artist," had carried on an amicable correspondence with him and accepted 300 francs (!) a year. (He did not mention that she had brought her husband a dowry of 500,000.) At the beginning of the year 1835 the couple had come to a private agreement each to take a child, to divide the fortune, and to allow each other full liberty of action; but before this agreement came into force George Sand had drawn back and sued for a judicial separation. (In the course of a dispute about their son, Monsieur Dudevant had tried to strike her, had even in the presence of witnesses taken up his gun to fire at her.) In spite of exaggerated accusations her application, the lawyer reminded the court, had been refused. Now it was Monsieur Dudevant's turn to complain. He denied all the charges brought against him, and brought others, of the gravest character, against his wife; he maintained that any woman who had written such immoral books as hers was unfit to educate her children; he accused her of intimacy with the secrets of "all the most shameful licentiousness." It was on account of these accusations, accusations which he, Monsieur Dudevant's counsel, asserted to be fully justified, that George Sand was once more suing for a separation. His eloquence reached its climax in the outburst: "It is, then, your opinion, Madame, that a woman has the right, if she chooses, to squander the half of a fortune, to embitter her husband's life, and to adopt, when she feels inclined to indulge still more freely in the most unbridled excesses, the convenient and simple plan of bringing against him in the court of justice a purely fictitious accusation of revolting conduct!"

It must have been hard for the proud woman to sit, the observed of all observers, listening to this besmirching of her name and fame. It cannot have afforded her much consolation that her counsel and friend, Michel de Bourges, immediately afterwards extolled her as a genius, and produced a profound impression by reading remarkably beautiful passages from her letters and recounting all the insulting words and brutal actions of which her husband had been guilty towards her. She was accustomed to see her novels reviled in the newspapers as so many shameless defences of immorality, but to hear her private life maligned in this style was a new experience. These public proceedings which terminated her married life, give us, however, as it were, a retrospective view of that life, and explain the indignation which finds its first expression in *Indiana, Valentine, Lélia*, and *Jacques*.

They are books, these, which possess little literary interest for the reader of to-day: the characters are vague idealisations; the plots are improbable, as in *Indiana*, or unreal, as in *Lélia* and *Jacques*_ the harmonious sonority of her style does not save the author from the reproach of frequent lapses into magniloquence; in the letters and monologues she is often the poetical sermoniser. And yet there is a fire in these works of George Sand's youth which gives light and

warmth to this day; they struck a note which will go on sounding for ages. They emit both a wail and a war-cry, and where they penetrate they carry with them germs of feelings and thoughts, the growth of which this age has succeeded in checking, but which in the future will unfold and spread with a luxuriant vigour of which we can only form a faint conception.

Indiana is the young, full heart's first outburst of bitterness and woe. The youthful heroine is the embodiment of refined intellectality and noble-mindedness; her husband, Colonel Delmare, is a rather better-tempered Monsieur Dudevant; Indiana's affectionate, enthusiastic heart turns, wounded, from husband to lover. The originality of the book lies in its delineation of the latter's character. For to him even the husband is infinitely preferable. Raymon is the average young Frenchman under the restored Legitimist monarchy; he is what the society of the period has made him, emotional and calculating, love-sick and egotistical, influenced by public opinion and the verdict of society to such an extent that his hard-heartedness develops into heartlessness, his unreliability into worthlessness; his thorough mediocrity is at last plainly discernible through its glittering husk of brilliant qualities and talents. In this first work George Sand at once introduces us to several distinct types of male character. There is the man with the coarse nature, whom the power which society puts into his hands has made brutal, and the man with the weak nature, whom congenital irresolution and acquired submissiveness to the dictation of society have made unreliable and cowardly. Woman-like, she starts with a spirited exposure of man's egotism. But in this her first book she also at once presents us with her ideal man, in the person of the reserve lover, the apparently phlegmatic but really ardent Ralph, who, taciturn as George Sand herself, appears (like her) to the superficial observer stiff and cold, but is in reality the embodiment of self-sacrificing, noble, faithful love. This was a character she rang changes on for years. We find him in *Lélia*_in the noble and hardly tried Trenmor, the galley-slave who passes judgment on society with stoic calm; in *Jacques* he is the hero who with almost superhuman magnanimity commits suicide, that he may not stand in the way of his young wife's alliance with another; in *Léone Léoni* he is the quiet, manly Don Aleo, to the very last prepared to marry that unfortunate Juliette whom an almost magic fascination binds to the incredibly rascally Leone, a species of male Manon Lescaut. In *Le Secrétaire Intime* he is the modest German, Max, whose distinguishing qualities are naïve kind-heartedness and poetical enthusiasm, and who is secretly married to the princess whom every one worships; in *Elle et Lui* he is Palmer, the Englishman, the foil to the gifted and dissipated Parisian, Laurent; in *Le Dernier Amour*, he is called Sylvestre and is a weaker Jacques. All these figures have a fault which is not uncommon in ideals; they are bloodless. But the men of the Raymon type, the men who represent the world, the selfishness, the vanity, and the weaknesses of society, are much more successful creations. Raymon himself is much more real than the other characters in *Indiana*; the local colouring in his case is stronger, more definite. The authoress (in chapter x.) attributes his unmanliness to "the conciliatory and yielding tendency" of the age, which she calls the age "of mental reservations"; she shows how Raymon, who is the advocate of political moderation, imagines that because he is devoid of political passions he is also devoid of political self-interest, and therefore stands on a higher level than that of any party—the fact of the matter being, that the existing condition of society is too advantageous to him for him to wish it changed. He is "not so ungrateful to Providence as to reproach it with the misfortunes of others." The numerous successors of this character in George Sand's novels all bear witness to a penetrating and delicate observation of human nature, from Sténio, the poet in *Lélia*, and Octave, the lover in *Jacques*, slightly sketched, weak characters, mere playthings of passion, to the carefully drawn, distinctly characterised figures like the dissolute young Italian singer, Anzoleto, in *Consuelo*, the ultra-refined, morbidly nervous and self-centred Prince Karol (Chopin) in *Lucrezia Floriani*, and the extravagantly capricious young painter, Laurent (Alfred de Musset), in *Elle et Lui*.

In the end Indiana goes the length of discovering the ruthless egotism of the male sex in all the outward developments of society, even in the religion taught by men. They have made of God a man in their own image. She writes to her hypocritical lover: "I do not serve the same God as you, but I serve mine better and more purely. Yours is the man's God, a man, a king, the founder and the patron of your race; mine is the God of the universe, the creator, the preserver, and the hope of every living being. Yours has made everything for you alone; mine has made all his creatures for each other." Two things are noticeable in these words—a naïve protest against that order of society which is founded upon the subordination of woman to man, and the optimism of an innocent, youthfully trustful faith in God. This attitude George Sand did not long maintain. Only a few years later she brings *Lélia* to a conclusion with an outburst of despairing pessimism. Shortly before her death the heroine says: "Alas! despair reigns, and moans of suffering emanate from every pore of the created world. The wave casts itself writhing and moaning on the beach, the wind weeps and wails in the forest. All those trees which bend and only rise to fall again under the lash of the storm, suffer frightful torture. There exists one miserable, cursed being, terrible, immense—the world which we inhabit cannot contain him. This invisible being is in everything, and his voice fills space with one eternal sob. Imprisoned in the universe he writhes, strives, struggles, beats his head and his shoulders against the confines of heaven and earth. He cannot pass beyond them; everything crushes him, everything curses him, everything torments him, everything hates him. What is this being and whence does he come?... Some have called him Prometheus, others Satan; I call him desire; I, the hopeless sibyl, the spirit of departed ages.... I, the broken lyre, the dumb instrument whose sounds would not be understood by those who inhabit the earth to-day, but in whose breast the eternal harmonies lie murmuring; I, the priestess of death, who feel that I once was Pythia, that I wept then, that I spoke then, but who cannot remember the healing word! ... O truth, truth! to find thee I descended into abysses the very sight of which would make the bravest giddy with fear. But truth! thou hast not revealed thyself; I have sought thee for ten thousand years and have not found thee! For ten thousand

years the only answer to my cries, the only consolation of my agony, has been the sound, audible throughout this whole accursed world, of that despairing sob of impotent desire! For ten thousand years I have shouted into infinity: Truth! Truth! For ten thousand years infinity has answered: Desire! desire! O miserable Sibyl! O dumb Pythia! dash thy head against the rocks of thy cave and mingle thy blood, which is foaming with rage, with the foam of the sea!"

In such an outburst as this, the soulful melancholy of those youthful years reaches its climax. Condensed as I have given it here—it is six times as long in the original—it is a beautiful, poetical expression of George Sand's fully developed youthful self-consciousness. At the time she wrote *Indiana*, neither her feeling of her own superiority nor her pessimism had reached this stage. That unpretending tale she composed as the sympathising spokeswoman of the victims of existing social conditions. In it she did not consciously attack any social institution—not even marriage, as the opponent of which she was at once stigmatised. She is evidently speaking the truth when (in the preface of 1842) she declares that long after writing the original preface to *Indiana* under the influence of a remnant of respect for existing social institutions, she continued her attempt to solve the insoluble problem, to find a means of securing the happiness and dignity of the individuals oppressed by society which should be consonant with the existence of society. And she is also perfectly truthful when, in a letter to Nisard (the last in *Lettres d'un Voyageur*), she maintains that she has only attacked husbands, and not marriage as a social institution. It was in the rôle of the psychologist and story-teller, not in that of the reformer, that she at first appeared before the public. In *Indiana*, as in *Valentine*, the fervour, the poetical impulses, the enthusiastic passions and stormy protests of youth, are the proper contents of the book; there is much psychological and little personal history. Nevertheless there was in the nature of the feelings described (feelings free from any trace of viciousness, yet at variance with the decrees of society), and still more in the reflections interspersed throughout the tale, something which actually struck at the foundations of society. Therefore it was not pure stupidity which found expression in the clumsy and violent attacks made upon these books and their author by the partisans of the existing order of things. Men had a foreboding that such feelings and thoughts would sooner or later remould the laws governing society. They have begun to do so, and their influence will increase day by day.

Their very idealism and enthusiasm makes these books essentially revolutionary. For, as only the inner world exists for the authoress, she allows it to develop freely without taking any thought of the possibility of its development destroying the outer world; and, depicting as she does, chiefly strong feelings, or rather only one, infinitely varied feeling—love, she shows how its laws and the laws of society perpetually come into conflict. Although she casts no doubt upon the necessity and indispensability of marriage in our days, she undermines the belief in its eternal continuance. She certainly at first only attacks husbands, but an examination of her demand for an ideal husband shows that it is a demand which cannot be satisfied under existing conditions. In much the same manner, at a somewhat later period, Kierkegaard undermines Christianity by making an extravagantly ideal demand of the individual Christian.

The French Naturalistic School of forty years later, which has often suffered from more or less groundless accusations of immorality, has, in revenge, re-directed the accusation against these enthusiastic early works of George Sand's. When Émile Zola made one of his periodical protests against the idealistic novel, he never omitted to point out the dangers for the family and for society which lie in this constant aspiring beyond the bounds which restrain the individual, this continual representation of a craving for greater intellectual and emotional liberty. He prided himself on never representing unlawful love in a beautiful or inviting light, but always bedraggled with mire. He might have added that he and his successors in the school of Balzac have never felt the need of a higher morality than that in common vogue, and never hold out the prospect of social conditions different from the present. They have imposed a crushing restriction on themselves by limiting themselves to the representation of the outward realities visible to their own eyes, and resolutely refusing to draw any conclusions from their observations. Hence it is that their boldness in representing social relations and situations which literature hitherto had been chary of approaching, is equalled by their weakness, nay insignificance, as thinkers and moralists. They are constantly reduced to seek support from the indubitable harmony of their morality with the universally accepted moral code; they plume themselves on calling vice what other people call vice, and on inspiring horror of that vice. They are not as that sinner George Sand. But it is time to observe that it is just in this "morality" of theirs that their literary weakness lies; and that the strength of George Sand's works, with their far more idealistic and chaste delineations, lies in their "immorality." In the apparently extremely audacious works of the Realistic School, there is not an utterance to compare in real audacity with that which George Sand has put into the mouth of one of the chief characters in *Horace*, and which gives admirably condensed expression to her ideas of morality in the matter of love: "I believe that that love should be defined as a noble passion, which elevates and strengthens us by beautiful feelings and thoughts, and that love as an evil passion, which makes us selfish and cowardly and gives us over to all the meannesses of blind instinct. Every passion, therefore, is lawful or criminal according to its production of one or the other of these results—it being a matter of no consequence that official society, which is not the supreme court of justice of humanity, sometimes legalises the evil, and condemns the beneficent passion."[1]

In *Lélia* and *Jacques* (1833 and 1834) their authoress's Byronic "Weltschmerz" and declamatory tendency reach high-water mark. In *Lélia* she represented her ideal great, unsensual, profoundly feeling woman, and provided her with an opposite in her sister, Pulchérie, a luxurious courtesan. Taking her own character and separating the two sides of it, she formed Lélia after the Minerva-image, Pulchérie after the Venus-image in her own soul; the result being, not unnaturally, rather

two symbolic personages than two human beings of flesh and blood. In *Jacques* she approached the problem of marriage from a new side. In *Indiana* she had portrayed a brutal, in *Valentine* a refined, cold husband; but now she equipped the husband with the qualities which in her eyes were the highest, and wrecked his happiness upon the rock of his own elevated character, which his insignificant young wife is not capable of understanding and continuing to love. The authoress has endeavoured to impart additional force to her own opinions by putting them into the mouth of the wronged husband. He himself excuses his wife: "No human being can control love; and no one is guilty because he loves or ceases to loves. What degrades the woman is the lie; what constitutes the adultery is not the hour she grants her lover, but the night she spends in her husband's arms afterwards." Jacques feels it his duty to make way for his rival: "Borel, in my place, would calmly have beaten his wife, and would probably not have blushed to embrace that same night the woman degraded alike by his blows and his kisses. There are men who, in the Oriental fashion, calmly kill their faithless wives, because they regard them as their lawful property. Others challenge their rival, kill him or put him out of the way, and then beg the woman whom they declare they love, for kisses and caresses, which she either refuses or gives in despair. These are perfectly ordinary proceedings in conjugal love. It seems to me that the love of swine is less vile and coarse than such love." These truths, already regarded as elementary by people of the highest culture, were in 1830 the most atrocious heresy. They are the salt which has kept this youthful work from becoming stale in spite of its antiquated plot and the diffuseness of the tedious letter-style. The extravagance of Romanticism is most noticeable in the final catastrophe. Jacques can think of no better means of liberating Fernande than a suicide committed in a manner which to her will give it the appearance of an accident. This transports us at once into the region of unreality. But the unreality in this novel is, generally speaking, more apparent than actual. It is easy for modern criticism to point out the absence of any indications of locality, of real occupations, &c., &c.; the personages in George Sand's early novels have no occupation and no aim but to love. The reality of these books is a spiritual reality, the reality of feeling. Even this, however, has been disputed in our day. It is the fashion to regard emotions such as those here described—this wild despair caused by social conditions, this passionate, erotic tenderness, this pure, ardent friendship between man and woman—as unnatural and unreal.[2] But we must remember that George Sand's characters are not supposed to be average men and women. She describes unusually gifted beings. Indeed, in these early works she has done little else than delineate and explain her own emotional life. She places her own character in every variety of outward circumstance, and then, with a marvellous power of self-observation and unerring skill, draws the natural psychological conclusions. It is interesting to observe how the constant craving to find a masculine mind which is the equal of her own, leads her to a kind of self-duplication in two sexes. Ardently as she exalts love, strongly as she allows it to influence the life of the great woman and of the great man, nevertheless both of these, Jacques as well as Lélia, are inspired by a still stronger, still more ideal feeling, that of friendship for a noble member of the opposite sex, by whom they are understood. In comparison with this profound mutual understanding, Lélia's love for Sténio, Jacques' for Fernande, seem merely the weaknesses of these two great souls. Lélia has an understanding friend and equal in Trenmor, Jacques in Sylvia. Jacques would love Sylvia if she were not his half-sister, or rather if he were not compelled to suspect that she is; but there is a beauty in their mutual relationship, such as it is, to which merely erotic relations could hardly attain. I remember distinctly what a powerful impression this friendship between Jacques and Sylvia made upon me when I read the book (probably in 1867) for the first time. I saw plainly enough that Jacques is to a certain extent an unreal character—and Sylvia also; for she is nothing more than Jacques' understanding confidante; but the ideal current between them is real, and it electrified me. Sylvia has her origin in the distressful cry of the genius for its equal and mate; she is undoubtedly nothing more than the expression of the urgent craving and demand of the great, lonely heart—but what is poetry else than this? Imperfect as the novel otherwise may be, the friendship between Jacques and Sylvia lends it an atmosphere of real poetry; we feel, while reading of it, as if, above the low-lying world of the passions, we caught a glimpse of a higher one, where purer, yet still quite earthly beings, love and understand each other.

Characters such as these illustrate the strong instinct of friendship which George Sand possessed, and which was quite in the spirit of the youthful Romanticism of the period. Her *Lettres d'un Voyageur*, which follow the first group of novels, and begin immediately after the separation from Alfred de Musset in Venice, give us an insight into her friendships. These letters belong to the works in which she has most directly revealed her own personal feelings, although they are written with a reserve concerning actual events which makes them obscure to the uninitiated. In them we follow her from the days of her life with the handsome, stupid Italian, Dr. Pagello, for whom she gave up De Musset, to the period of her devotion to Everard (Michel de Bourges), her counsel in the divorce suit, who inspired her with the idea of the pretty tale, *Simon*. Between these two extremes lie all the good, cordial friendships, with François Rollinat, Jules Néraud, &c.—frank, clever men, with whom she felt a constant desire to exchange ideas and letters, with whom she studied, from whom she learned much, and whom, in the Romantic spirit of good fellowship, she addressed with the familiar "thou"; as also all the genuine artistic comradeships with Franz Liszt, the Comtesse d'Agoult, Meyerbeer, and many others—the men and women of genius of the day.

In no other of her works is she so eloquent, in none of the later ones do her periods flow in such long, lyrically rhetorical waves. Nowhere better than here can we study her personal style, as distinguished from the dialogue of her novels. Sonority is its most marked feature. It rolls onward in long, full rhythms, regular in its fall and rise, melodious in joy, harmonious even in despair.

The perfect balance of George Sand's nature is mirrored in the perfect balance of her sentences—never a shriek, a start, or a jar; a sweeping, broad-winged flight—never a leap, nor a blow, nor a fall. The style is deficient in melody, but abounds in rich harmonies; it lacks colour, but has all the beauty that play of line can impart. She never produces her effect by an unusual and audacious combination of words, seldom or never by a fantastic simile. And there is just as little strong or glaring colour in her pictures as there is jarring sound in her language. She is romantic in her enthusiasms, in the way in which she yields unresistingly to feelings which defy rules and regulations; but she is severely classical in the regularity of her periods, in the inherent beauty of her form, and the sobriety of her colouring.[3]

The letters from Venice, and still more those written after her return to France, tell the understanding reader how humiliated George Sand felt by the loss of De Musset's friendship, how sadly she missed it, and what a fictitious account of the whole episode it was which she gave to the public some twenty years later in *Elle et Lui*. There is little doubt that there were times when she felt utterly overwhelmed with longing, shame, and grief. In a letter to Rollinat written in January 1835, there is a significant and, as far as I know, hitherto unnoticed passage, which, beautiful in itself, also contains a confession:

"Listen to a tale and weep! There was once an excellent artist, by name Watelet, who etched better than any other man of his day. He loved Marguerite Le Conte, and taught her to etch as well as himself. She left her husband, her home, and everything she possessed, to live with Watelet. The world condemned them, but, as they were poor and modest, it forgot them. Forty years later an idle wanderer in the neighbourhood of Paris found, in a little house called Moulin-Joli, an old man who etched and an old woman whom he called his 'meunière,' and who etched too, seated at the same table. The idler who made the wonderful discovery told others, and the fashionable world flocked to see this marvellous phenomenon—a love which had lasted for forty years; an occupation which had been pursued all that time with the same industry and the same devotion; two admirable twin talents. The thing made a great sensation. Fortunately the couple died of old age a few days later; the prying crowd would have spoilt everything. The last thing they etched was a drawing of Moulin-Joli, Marguerite's house.... It hangs in my room, above the portrait of a person whom no one here has ever seen. For a whole year he who left me this portrait sat working with me every night at a little table.... At daybreak each examined the other's work and criticised it, and we supped at the same little table, talking of art, of thoughts and feelings, and of the future. The future has broken its promise to us. Pray for me, O Marguerite Le Conte!"

This is perhaps the only occasion on which George Sand writes as if she owed anything to Alfred de Musset in her capacity as authoress.[4] I have already indicated the nature of his influence upon her. It was purely critical; it sharpened her aesthetic sense. His artistic method was powerless to affect her. To any direct influence upon her style George Sand was completely unreceptive. Madame Girardin's witty hit at her: "It is especially when the works of women authors are in question that we may say with Buffon, 'Le style, c'est l'homme,'" is as incorrect as it is amusing. For though it is, almost without exception, the case that each of George Sand's most important novels bears marks of the influence of a different man, yet the influence never extends to the style. Again and again she makes herself the organ of another's ideas, but never does she imitate another's style. Her talent was too independent for this, and she was moreover too little of the artist. She who was so silent, and, when she did speak, so laconic, was the improvisatrice when she wrote. She let her pen run over the paper without making preparatory studies, without thought of models, without conscious artistic aim; she never treated a given theme, or elaborated and completed a stylistic suggestion thrown out by another;—in short, she submitted to none of the conditions upon which purely technical progress in any art depends. In this she forms a marked contrast to De Musset. He was, at first, inspired by a spirit of revolt against conventions and rules in art, which was always incomprehensible to her. He intentionally spoiled the rhymes in his first poems, to make sure of annoying the Classicists. (In the first sketch of *L'Andalouse*, the Marchioness was called Amaémoni, which in French rhymes correctly with "bruni," but in the final version she received the name of Amaégui, which hardly rhymes.) When his creative capacity was on the wane, he calmly employed seven pages of Carmontelle's Proverbe, *Le Distrait*, in the manufacture of his weak little comedy, *On ne saurait penser à tout*. In his best period he was a master of the art of delicate plagiarism. I may mention, as an example, that I have found in the Prince de Ligne's works his stylistic model for the beautiful poem, "Après une lecture," quoted in a previous chapter.[5] A similar discovery in connection with George Sand would be an impossibility. She is incapable of polishing the rough diamonds of others into brilliants for the adornment of her own muse; she presents us that muse clad in simple white, with a wild flower in her hair.

Nowhere is the peculiar beauty of George Sand's style more fascinating than in the above quoted letter to Rollinat. The profound understanding of nature acquired in her youth by this revolutionary woman of genius, blends in marvellous unison with her restless, endless longing; and through both the longing for nature and the longing for happiness runs the undertone of a loving heart's lamentation over the disappointments it has caused and the disappointments it has suffered. And in this letter and the following one to Everard, we see how George Sand's political, republican, faith springs from the ruins of her youthful, erotic, castles-in-the-air. At first she is weak in the faith, too much engrossed with herself. The poor poetess undoubtedly "feels ill at ease under the umbrella of the monarchy," but all the same her thoughts are more occupied with the forms of violet and jasmine petals than with the institutions of society or forms of government. Yet one sees the spark of enthusiasm gradually beginning to glow in her breast. She

envies her men friends their faith and the energy it begets, she, "who is only a poet, only *une femmelette!*" They, in the event of a revolution, would go forth to fight with the steadfast hope of winning liberty for their fellow-men; she could do nothing but let herself be killed in the hope of being useful for once, were it only by raising a barricade the height of her dead body. But she concludes thus: "Can any of you find a use for my present and future life? So long as I am employed in the service of an idea, and not of a passion, I consent to be bound by your laws. But, alas! I warn you that all I am fit for is to execute an order bravely and faithfully. I can act, but not plan; for I know nothing and am sure of nothing. I can only obey when I shut my eyes and stop my ears so as to see nothing and hear nothing which may make me doubtful; I can march with my friends like the dog who, seeing his master sailing away, jumps into the water and swims after the ship until he dies of fatigue. The ocean is wide, my friends, and I am weak. I am fit for nothing but to be a soldier—and I am not five feet high!

"But what of that! Dwarf as I am, I am yours. I am yours because I love you and esteem you. Truth dwells not among men; the kingdom of God is not of this world. But as much as man can steal from divinity of the ray of light which illumines the world, you, ye sons of Prometheus, ye lovers of naked truth and inflexible justice, have stolen. Forward, then! no matter what the shade of your banner, so long as your troops are marching in the direction of the republican future! Forward, in the name of Jesus, who has only one true apostle left on earth (Lamennais); in the name of Washington and of Franklin, who were unable to accomplish enough, and have left us their task to finish; in the name of Saint-Simon, whose sons—God be with them!—are attempting to solve the great and terrible social problem! Forward, so long as good is done, and those who believe prove that they do so! I am only a poor daughter of the regiment—take me with you!"

There are few such pure and heartfelt feminine outbursts of enthusiasm in literature. German literature presents something in the nature of a counterpart to it in Bettina's Goethes *Correspondence with a Child* (published the same year), which is the outcome of an equally exuberant enthusiasm; but in Bettina's case we do not receive the same impression of sincerity, and the feeling expressed is in itself narrower—it is purely aesthetic, the cult of one great genius. Bettina is a clever woman; her style is brilliant, with polished, and here and there pointed facets; but even in the feminine weakness of George Sand's enthusiasm there is greatness.

It was some years before the feelings, the birth of which we have witnessed, display themselves in her works. To these later works we shall come presently. We must first consider for a moment the more tranquil, purely poetic tales of the second period of her literary career.

Regarding these from the artistic standpoint, the little tale entitled *La Marquise* is, in my estimation, undoubtedly the best; indeed, taking nothing but art into consideration, it is possibly her most perfect work. I fancy it must have been inspired by the memory of her kind-hearted, dignified grandmother. It fascinates by its combination of the spirit and customs of the eighteenth century with the timid, more spiritually enthusiastic amatory passion of the nineteenth. It is a simple story of a high-born lady of the *ancien régime*, who has married as they married in those days, and has accepted a lover as they accepted lovers then, but whose lover bores her to death because he was not the choice of her heart, but simply the man whom the whole of good society conspired to force upon her. Young, inexperienced, beautiful, and innocent in so far that she does not know what love is, she falls in love with a poor, half-starving, dissipated actor, who on the stage appears to her an incarnation of manliness and poetry. She sees him, when he is not aware of her presence, off the stage, and is dismayed by the difference in his appearance. He has become aware of her interest in him, and now plays to her alone, and dreams of her alone. They hold their first and last rendezvous late one evening after the play. The Marquise, having been cupped in the morning, is fatigued. The actor has not had time to take off the costume of his part; the ideality of the stage still clings to him, and he is inspired, beautified, ennobled by his love, which raises him high above the ordinary conditions of his life. She is modest, he reverential; she is in love, enraptured by a poetical illusion; he loves her as she is, loves her longingly, passionately, but chivalrously; and, after a tempest of passionate words, they part, without any caress but the kiss she imprints on his brow as he kneels at her feet.

The old Marquise, who tells the story, is silent for a moment after concluding it, and then says: "Well, will you believe now in the virtue of the eighteenth century?" "Madame," replies the person addressed, "I have not the slightest desire to doubt it; nevertheless, if I were not so touched by your story, I might allow myself to observe that it was very wise of you to have yourself cupped that day." "You wretched men!" said the Marquise, "you are quite incapable of understanding the story of the heart."

George Sand has written nothing more graceful. The sly sarcasm in this conclusion, a quality which also distinguishes the equally charming and equally suggestive little tale, *Teverino*, but which is not frequently met with in her writings, is quite in the spirit of the eighteenth century; and the style has that conciseness which is, as a rule, an indispensable quality in a work destined to descend to future generations. *La Marquise* has a rightful claim to a place in every anthology of French masterpieces.

Amongst the works which George Sand now proceeds to write is a whole series in which she represents her conception of woman's nature when it is uncorrupted. The women she draws are chaste and proud and energetic, susceptible to the passion of love, but remaining on the plane above it, or retaining their purity even when they yield to it. She inclines to attribute to woman a moral superiority over man. But the natures of her heroes, too, are essentially fine, though in the ruling classes tainted by the inherited tendency to tyrannise over woman and the lower classes. Rousseau's conviction of the original goodness of nature and of the depravity of society lies at the foundation of all these works. Women like Fiamma in *Simon*, Edmée in *Mauprat*, Consuelo in the

novel of the same name (of whom Madame Viardot was to a certain extent the original), are fine specimens of George Sand's typical young girl. Her rôle is to inspire, to heal, or to discipline the man. She knows not vacillation; resolution is the essence of her character; she is the priestess of patriotism, of liberty, of art, or of civilisation. Of the novels named, *Consuelo* is the longest and most famous; it begins in masterly fashion, but, like many of Balzac's, not to speak of Dumas', longer works, degenerates into romantic fantasticalness. The artistic theories of the day led in the direction of exaggeration and extravagance. It was not Victor Hugo alone who was apt to relapse into the formless.

Side by side with the books which have the high-minded young girl as heroine, we find one or two in which the mature woman is the central figure—in which George Sand has given a more direct representation of her own character. Such are *Le Secrétaire intime*, a comparatively weak story, and *Lucrezia Floriani*, one of the most remarkable productions of her pen. Of this latter book, it may with truth be said that it is not food for every one (*Non hic piscis omnium*). To most readers it will seem a forbidding or revolting literary paradox; for it aims at proving the modesty, nay, the chastity of an unmarried woman (an Italian actress and play-writer) who has four children by three fathers. But it is a book in which the authoress has successfully performed the difficult task she set herself, that of giving us an understanding of a woman's nature which is so rich and so healthy that it must always love, so noble that it cannot be degraded, so much that of the artist that it cannot rest content with a single feeling, and has the power to recover from repeated disappointments.

George Sand was successful because she simply presented her readers with the key to her own nature. Many who have heard of the authoress's irregular life, of her liaisons with Jules Sandeau, Alfred de Musset, Michel de Bourges, Chopin, Manceau, and half-a-dozen others, must have asked themselves how books that, with all their passion, are so pure and noble as hers, could be the outcome of such a disorderly and, according to accepted ideas, degraded life. And many have felt that the inherent curiosity of the artist nature (which she defined by saying that when the conversation turned upon cannibalism her first thought was: "I wonder what human flesh tastes like;") was not a sufficient explanation of her conduct. In *Lucrezia Floriani* she has given us an exhaustive study of her own character at the age of thirty. I shall endeavour to make the character intelligible with the help of passages culled from different parts of the book.

"Lucrezia Floriani by nature was—who would have believed it?—as chaste as is the soul of a little child. It certainly seems strange to hear this of a woman who had loved so much and so many.... It is probable that the sensual part of her organisation was especially powerfully developed; although to men who did not please her she seemed frigid.... In the rare intervals when her heart had been tranquil, her brain had been at rest; and if she could have been prevented from ever seeing the other sex, she would have made an excellent nun, calm and vigorous. This is as much as to say that nothing could be purer than her thoughts when she was alone, and that when she loved, all that was not her lover was to her, as far as the senses were concerned, solitude, emptiness, nonentity." Lucrezia says of love: "I know that it is said to be a sensual impulse; but this is not true in the case of clever women. With them it follows a regular course; it takes possession of the brain first, knocking at the door of the imagination. Without the golden key to that door it cannot enter. When it has established its mastery there, it descends into the lower regions; it insinuates itself into all our faculties; and then we love the man who rules us, as god, brother, husband, everything that a woman can love." The authoress explains how it was possible for Lucrezia's soul to be continually possessed afresh by the erotic illusion, and in particular how her last, ardently passionate attachment for Prince Karol (Chopin) came into being. "To these rich, strong natures the last love seems always the first; and certain it is, that if affection is to be measured by enthusiasm, Lucrezia had never loved so much. The enthusiasm she had felt for other men had been of short duration. They had been incapable of maintaining it or renewing it. Love had survived disillusionment for a certain time; then came the stage of generosity, solicitude, compassion, devotion, of the motherly feeling, to put it in a word. It was a marvel that passions so foolishly conceived should have lasted so long; although the world, judging only by appearances, was astonished and scandalised to see her breaking the ties so soon and so completely. In all these attachments she had been hardly a week happy and blind—and was not the absolute devotion of one, sometimes two, years, which followed on a love that she recognised to have been foolish and ill-bestowed, a supreme effort of heroism, greater than the sacrifice of a whole life for a being felt to be worthy of it?"

We can understand how it was that weak men had an attraction for Lucrezia. Her independent character in combination with her motherly instincts drew her to the weak. The idea of being protected was intolerable to her; and on occasions when she had felt the desire to lean upon those who were stronger than herself, she had too often been repelled by their coldness. She was therefore inclined to believe that love and energy were to be found in combination only in hearts which had suffered as much as her own.

Finally, we see how her relation to her children—and Lucrezia, like George Sand, is the tenderest, most affectionate of mothers—influenced her erotic life. "She had wished to be a mother to her lovers without ceasing to be the mother of her children, and the conflict between the two feelings had always ended in the extinction of the less obstinate passion. The children triumphed, and the lovers, who, to speak metaphorically, had been taken from the Foundling Hospital of civilisation, were obliged, sooner or later, to return there."

Lucrezia speaks of her attitude to the verdict of the world on her character and life in terms which are directly applicable to George Sand. "I have never sought notoriety. I may have caused scandal, but never knowingly or willingly. I have never loved two men at the same time. I have

never, even in thought, belonged to more than one during any given time, that is, as long as my passion lasted. When I no longer loved a man, I did not deceive him. I broke off with him entirely. I had vowed, it is true, in my enthusiasm, to love him always; and I made the vow in absolute good faith. Every time I loved, it was so ardently and perfectly that I believed it was for the first and last time in my life. You cannot call me a respectable woman. But I myself am certain that I am one; I even lay claim to be a virtuous woman, though I know that, according to your ideas and public opinion, this is blasphemy. I submit my life to the verdict of the world without rebelling, without disputing the justice of its general laws, but not acknowledging that it is right in my case."[6]

The contrast between *Lucrezia Floriani* and the short series of simple, beautiful peasant stories which follow it after a short interval and bring us up to 1848, seems at first sight a very marked one. In reality, however, the gulf separating *Lucrezia* from *La Mare au Diable, François le Champi*, and *La petite Fadette* is not so wide as it appears. What attracted George Sand to the peasants of Berry, to the rustic idylls of her native province, was the very same Rousseau-like enthusiasm for nature that had lent impetus and weight to her protests against the laws of society. Her secretary and intimate friend, Müller-Strübing, a German, is said to have drawn her attention to Auerbachs earliest village stories, and thereby to have instigated her to the production of the works which, thanks to their simplicity and calm purity, no less than to their wealth of feeling, have gained her the widest circle of readers. Auerbach was consecrated peasant-annalist by Spinoza, the apostle of natural piety, George Sand by Rousseau, the worshipper of nature. Her French peasants are very certainly not "real" in the same sense as Balzac's in *Les Paysans*; they are not merely represented with a sympathy which is as strong as his antipathy, but are made out to be amiable, tender-hearted, and sensitively delicate in their feelings; they are to real French peasants what the shepherds of Theocritus were to the real shepherds of Greece. Nevertheless, these tales have one merit which they owe entirely to their subject-matter and which George Sand's other novels lack—they possess the charm, always rare, but doubly rare in French literature, of naïveté. All that there was of the peasant girl, of the country child, in George Sand; everything in her which was akin to the plants that grow, to the breeze that blows, knowing not whence it cometh nor whither it goeth; all that which, unconscious and dumb, was so legible in her countenance and behaviour, but was so often nullified in her works by sentimentality and phrase-mongering, revealed itself here in its childlike simplicity.

La Mare au Diable, written in 1841, is the gem of these village tales. In it idealism in French fiction reaches its highest level. In it George Sand gave to the world what she declared to Balzac it was her desire to write—the pastoral of the eighteenth century.

---

[1] Compare the passages from *Jacques* quoted in *The Romantic School in Germany*, pp. 104, 105. Émile Zola latterly adopted a different tone.

[2] Emile Zola writes of the characters in *Jacques* (*Documents littéraires*, 222): "I cannot describe the impression produced upon me by such characters; they confuse me, they astonish me, as people would who had made a wager to walk upon their hands. Their bitterness and everlasting complaints are quite incomprehensible to me. What is it they complain of? What is it they want? They take life from the wrong side; hence it is only natural that they should be unhappy. Life is fortunately a much more complaisant damsel than they make her out to be. One can always get on with her if one is good-natured enough to put up with the unpleasant hours," In caricaturing George Sand, Zola draws his own portrait, or rather his own caricature, for he is certainly not so narrow-mindedly matter-of-fact as this.

[3] Even that determined antagonist of Romanticism and George Sand, Émile Zola, is obliged to write of George Sand: "The Romantic spirit animated her creations, but her style remained classic." *Documents littéraires*. 217.

[4] The writer of an article in *Le Figaro* (Supplément littéraire) for June 3, 1893, maintains that it is Jules Sandeau who is referred to in this passage; but he is mistaken. See *Cosmopolis* of May 1896, p. 440.

[5] The Prince de Ligne is writing of the qualities of the true soldier, as De Musset writes of those of the true poet. He says: "Si vous ne rêvez pas militaire, si vous ne dévorez pas les livres et les plans de guerre, si vous ne baisez pas les pas des vieux soldats, si vous ne pleurez pas au récit de leurs combats, si vous ne mourez pas du désir d'en voir et de honte de n'en avoir pas vu, quoique ce ne soit pas votre faute, quittez vite un habit que vous déshonorez. Si l'exercice même d'une seule bataille ne vous transporte pas, si vous ne sentez pas la volonté de vous trouver partout, si vous êtes distrait, si vous ne tremblez pas que la pluie n'empêche votre régiment de manœuvrer; donnez-y votre place à un jeune homme tel que je le veux," &c., &c. The manner in which the prose style is reproduced in verse by De Musset shows his artistic genius even more plainly than the invention of a new style would have done. A hint from Émile Montégut put me on the track of this passage.

---

[6] *Lucrezia Floriani*, 169, 67, 130, 127, 38.

BALZAC

Side by side with George Sand and her work we come upon the man whose art she herself characterised as the antipodes of her own. Whilst she, in this particular a genuine Romanticist, turned with repugnance from the social conditions of her day, more disposed to revile and escape from them than to examine and depict them, he, if he did not feel contented, at least felt quite at home in his surroundings, and almost from the beginning of his career regarded the society of his own day and the immediately preceding period as his artistic property, his inexhaustible mine. George Sand was a great character limner, but she was almost more essentially a great landscape painter; and she represented human beings as the landscape painter represents plants; what she showed was the part of humanity which seeks and bathes in the light. Balzac's point of view was the opposite: the part of the human plant which he understood and loved to paint was the root. What Victor Hugo, in *La Légende des Siècles*, says of the satyr, is applicable to Balzac:

> "Il peignit l'arbre vu du côté des racines,
> Le combat meurtrier des plantes assassines."

In the exuberantly fertile province of Touraine, "the garden of France," the native province of Rabelais, Honoré de Balzac was born on a spring day in 1799—a man of an exuberantly fertile, full-blooded, warm-blooded nature, with plenty of heart and plenty of brain. Clumsy and tender, coarse and sensitive, the presentient dreamer, the minute observer, this man of curiously complex character combined sentiment, genuine and somewhat ponderous, with a marvellous keenness of vision, combined the seriousness of the scientific investigator with the light humour of the storyteller, the discoverer's perseverance and absorption in his idea with the artist's impulse to present to the eyes of all, in unabashed nakedness, what he had observed, felt, discovered or invented. He was as if created to divine and betray the secrets of society and humanity.

BALZAC

Balzac was a powerfully built, broad-shouldered man of middle height, corpulent in later life; the feminine whiteness of his strong, thick neck was his pride; his hair was black and as coarse as horse-hair, and his eyes shone like two black diamonds; they were lion-tamer's eyes, eyes that saw through the wall of a house what was happening inside, that saw through human beings and read their hearts like an open book. His whole appearance indicated a Sisyphus of labour.

He came as a youth to Paris, poor and solitary, drawn thither by his irresistible author's vocation and by the hope of winning fame. His father, like most fathers, was extremely unwilling that his son, whom no one credited with being a genius, should give up the profession of law for literature, and therefore left him entirely to his own resources. So there he sat in his garret, unwaited on, shivering with cold, his plaid wrapped round his legs, the coffee-pot on the table on one side of him, the ink-bottle on the other, staring out now and again over the roofs of the great city whose spiritual conqueror and delineator fate had destined him to be. The view was neither

extensive nor beautiful—moss-grown tiles, shining in the sun or washed by the rain, roof-gutters, chimneys, and chimney-smoke. His room was neither comfortable nor elegant; the cold wind whistled through the chinks of its window and door. To sweep the floor, to brush his clothes, and to purchase the barest necessaries with the utmost economy, were the daily morning tasks of the young poet who was planning a great tragedy, to be called *Cromwell*. His recreation was a walk in the neighbouring cemetery of Père Lachaise, which overlooks Paris. From this vantage-ground young Balzac (like his hero, Rastignac) measured the great metropolis with his eye, and made a defiant wager with it that he would compel it to recognise and honour his unknown name.

The tragedy was soon given up; Balzac's genius was too modern, too vigorous, to put up with the rules and abstract characters of French tragedy. And, besides, it was imperative that the young hermit, who had only obtained conditional leave of absence from home, should make himself independent as quickly as possible.

He took to hurried novel-writing. As yet he had not the experience of life requisite to give his productions any lasting value; but he had a vivid, inexhaustibly productive imagination, and had read enough to be able to write stories in a certain passable style, the style of most of the light literature of the day. In 1822 he published, under different pseudonyms, no fewer than five such novels; and during the following three years he wrote others which he himself, with all his self-esteem, could not regard as anything but pot-boilers. In 1822 he writes to his sister: "I did not send you *Birague*, because it is perfect trash. ... In *Jean Louis* there is some character-drawing, but the plot is wretched. The one merit of these books, dear, is that they bring me in a thousand francs; but I have received the sum in bills which have a long time to run—will it ever be paid?" Those who have toiled through one or more of these early works of Balzac's, will not consider his verdict too harsh. They are distinguished by a certain vivacity—what the French call *verve*—that is all the good that can be said of them. That they possessed the merit which their author himself described as their only one is doubtful, not only because Balzac in his later novels (see *Un grand Homme de Province à Paris*) gives most unflattering descriptions of the publishers who pay with promissory notes, but also because in 1825 he suddenly, in despair, gave up authorship for the time being, in the hope of making a living as a bookseller and printer.

His brain, which was constantly conceiving plans of every description, had conceived that of bringing out one-volume editions of the classic authors. No such editions as yet existed, and he felt convinced that they would be a good business speculation. And he was right; but the profits of this, as of all Balzac's later speculations, were reaped by others; the projector invariably lost by them. In 1837, for example, when he was in Genoa, the idea occurred to him that the ancient Romans had probably not exhausted their silver mines in Sardinia. He spoke of his idea to a Genoese acquaintance, and determined to follow it up. Next year he spent valuable time in taking a fatiguing journey to the island, to examine the slag of the mines. The state of matters answered exactly to his expectations; but when he applied to the authorities at Turin for permission to work the mines, he found that his Genoese friend had been beforehand with him, had acquired the exclusive right to do so, and was already well on the way to become a rich man. Undoubtedly many of the practical speculations which suggested themselves to Balzac's busy brain were mere chimeræ; nevertheless, his genius reveals itself in them. Just as Goethe's was a nature so at one with nature that his poet's eye, falling accidentally on a palm, discovered the secret of the metamorphosis of plants (one and the same original form in every part of the plant), and that his casual examination of a split sheep's skull laid the foundation of philosophic anatomy, so Balzac's was to such a degree the nature of the inventor and discoverer, on the small as well as on the great scale, that he seemed, like the legendary characters possessed of second sight, to know instinctively where riches lay hidden, seemed, as it were, to carry a divining rod which bent of itself towards gold, the nameless, sexless hero of his works. He certainly was not successful in his attempts to secure the treasure; he was a magician, not a business man.

This first idea of his was as felicitous as it was daring; he was to be type-founder, printer, bookseller, and author in one; for he himself, full of enthusiasm for his grand projects, wrote the prefaces for his editions of the classics. But, after he had persuaded his parents to put the greater part of their capital into the undertaking, after he had set agoing a type-foundry and printing establishment, and printed good, illustrated, one-volume editions of Molière and La Fontaine, the French booksellers to a man combined against their would-be colleague, flatly refused to circulate his editions, and quietly awaited his commercial ruin, to take up his idea and profit by it themselves. At the end of three years Balzac was compelled to sell his books as waste-paper, and dispose of his printing machinery at a great loss. He himself underwent all the misfortunes of the poor inventive printer in *Ève et David*. He was left not only poor, but so overburdened with debt that he had to work all the rest of his life simply to pay his creditors, regain his independence, and restore his mother's fortune. And this debt, to demolish which he had no weapon but his pen, was not a passive enemy; it grew, and attacked him from new quarters; as for long his only means of meeting one engagement was to incur another. It was in the course of these transactions that he became acquainted with all the various types of Parisian money-lenders, of whom he has given such striking portraits in Gobseck and kindred characters; and the words: "My debts! my creditors!" are constantly in his thoughts and of constant recurrence in those letters to his intimate friends in which the warm heart of the heavily burdened man allows itself free expression. "Remorse," he writes in one of his novels, "is not so bad as debt, for it cannot clap us into prison." He actually had a short experience of life in a debtor's prison, and to avoid a repetition of it had often to hide, to change his place of residence, or have his letters sent to misleading addresses. The genuine poet, he lived with his debts as with an inexhaustible source of emotion; his imagination received, as it were, a daily spur to industry when the thought of his debts awoke him and he seemed, as soon as he opened his eyes, to see

his promissory notes appearing out of every corner and jumping like grasshoppers all over the room.

He set to work with herculean energy, and worked, one may say without a pause, through all the years of his youth and manhood, until, at the age of fifty, he collapsed from over-exertion—fell as suddenly as the bull that has received its death-thrust on a Spanish arena. The reason of production being so little of a pleasure, so entirely a labour to him, is to be sought in the fact that, though his great and active imaginative power was unceasingly impelling him to write, it was not supported by any innate or early acquired stylistic skill. In mastery of form Balzac was not the equal of many of his contemporaries. He never succeeded in writing a pleasing poem (those which are to be found in his novels are the work of others—Madame de Girardin, Théophile Gautier, Charles de Bernard, Lasailly), and he and none other was the author of the much derided, halting line with which his Louis Lambert begins the epic of the Incas:

"O Inca! ô roi infortuné et malheureux!"

Novel after novel did he write under a pseudonym and repudiate before he attained to a style; his struggle to obtain the mastery of French prose was a desperate one; and it was one of his greatest griefs that the young Romanticists who followed in the steps of Victor Hugo long refused to acknowledge him as a real artist. The delicately sympathetic Gautier, ever ready to admire, was the only author to greet him with prompt recognition. But Balzac's astonishment was boundless when he saw young Gautier, without preparation or any great exertion, and without needing to make any corrections, fling off, at a desk in the printer's office, an article irreproachable in both style and matter. It was long before he could be persuaded that Gautier had not had his *feuilleton* ready in his head. At last he grasped the fact that there is such a thing as innate faculty of style, a faculty which had been denied him. How he toiled to acquire it! How ardently he admired Gautier when he really comprehended the quality of his plastic talent! We come upon a curious proof of this so late as the year 1839, when Balzac, in describing the principal female characters in his novel *Beatrix*, employs almost word for word descriptions from articles written by Gautier two years previously on Jenny Colon and Mademoiselle Georges, the actresses.[1] We feel, in comparing the passages, how eagerness when we see how commonplace and feeble the additions from his own vocabulary are.

Balzac was bound to fail in his attempt to rival Gautier in the latter's special province, for this reason, that he sees and feels in a perfectly different way. Gautier the stylist is an artist of the first rank, but Gautier the author, in spite of his poetic qualities, is cold and at times arid. His talent may be defined as the talent of the plastic artist who has won a place for himself in literature. Balzac, on the other hand, is an inferior stylist, but an author of the highest rank. He cannot place his characters before us with a few telling words, because he does not himself see them in one single plastic situation. When, conjured up by his imagination, they present themselves to the eye of his mind, he sees them, not gradually, but at once, in different stages of their lives and in different costumes; he overlooks their whole career; he observes all the multitude of their peculiar movements and gestures, and hears the sound of their voices in utterances so characteristic that they bring the speaker bodily before us. It is not, as in the case of the stylist, a single picture, the result of a single, perhaps subtle, but somewhat dry association of ideas, which reveals the character to us; no, Balzac's character is composed of a hundred thousand associations of ideas which unconsciously blend and form a unit, complicatedly rich as nature itself, as that real human unit, which consists of a strange mixture of innumerable physical and spiritual elements. It would require a whole book to give a sufficient number of examples of Balzac's incomparable power of bringing personalities vividly before us by means of their manner of expressing themselves, or even simply by some peculiarity in their dress, their household arrangements, and the like.[2] His difficulty lay in the proper disposal of the wealth of material which his memory and his inspirations thrust upon him. At one time he would compress too many ideas, the association between which was intelligible to himself alone, into a few words (as when he says of an innocent, unoffending lady that "her ears were the ears of the slave and the mother"); at another, he would write down, one after the other, all the observations and fancies which his prolific brain suggested every time he invented a fictitious personage, and lose himself in a diffuse, descriptive, argumentative flow of words, which conveyed no distinct impression to the reader—the reason being that the electric communication between the organs of poetic vision and poetic eloquence in the author's brain was faulty, and at times altogether broken off. Tenfold labour had to supply the bitterly felt deficiency.

When we remember that, in those days of collaboration, Balzac never had a collaborator, never even a copyist, we can understand what patience and what stupendous exertion were required to produce, in the course of twenty years, the novels, tales, and plays, more than a hundred in number, which proceeded from his pen.

Whilst Hugo writes as the artists of the Renaissance painted, surrounded by a company of youthful admirers and pupils, Balzac sits alone in his study. He allows himself little sleep. He goes to bed between seven and eight, gets up again at midnight and works in his white, Dominican monk's, habit, with a gold chain round his waist, until daybreak, when, feeling the want of exercise, he rushes off himself to the printer's to deliver his manuscript and correct proofs. His is no ordinary proof-correcting. He demands eight or ten impressions of each sheet. This is partly because he is not certain of having found the final, correct expressions, but also because it is his habit to complete the general outline of his story first, and fill in the details by degrees. Half, sometimes more than half, the payment he receives, goes into the pocket of the printer; but not even extreme need will induce him to allow his work to appear before it seems to him as perfect as he can make it. He is the despair of the type-setter, but his proof-reading is also

his own most painful task. The first impression is set with wide spaces between the paragraphs, and gigantic margins; and both of these are by degrees filled to overflowing. When he has done with it, the page, with its dots and dashes, strokes and stars, looks like a picture of a firework. Then the heavily built, untidily dressed man with the crushed felt hat and the sparkling eyes, hurries home along the crowded street, every here and there respectfully made way for by some one who knows or guesses him to be a genius. More hours of work follow. Before dinner he seeks recreation in a call on a lady, or a raid on the old curiosity shops in search of a rare piece of furniture or an old painting. Not till evening comes again does this indefatigable worker think of rest.

"Sometimes," writes Gautier, "he would come to my house in the morning, groaning, exhausted, dizzy with the fresh air, like a Vulcan escaped from his forge, and fling himself down on the sofa. His long night's work had made him ravenously hungry, and he would pound sardines and butter into a kind of paste which reminded him of a dish he had been accustomed to at home, and which he ate spread upon bread. This was his favourite food. As soon as he had eaten he would fall asleep, begging me, before he closed his eyes, to wake him in an hour. Paying no attention to this request, I took care that no noise in the house should disturb this well-earned slumber. When he awoke at last and saw the evening twilight spreading its grey shadows over the sky, he would jump up and overwhelm me with abuse, call me traitor, robber, murderer. I had been the means of his losing 10,000 francs, for he would have earned as much as that with the novel which he would have planned if he had been awake, even leaving possible second and third editions out of the question; I was causing the most terrible catastrophes and most inconceivable complications; I had made him miss appointments with financiers, publishers, duchesses; he would not be in a position to meet his engagements; this fatal sleep would cost him millions.... I was consoled by seeing the fresh Touraine colour returning to his cheeks."

When, taking Charles de Lovenjoul's bibliographical work as a guide, we follow Balzac's labours week by week; when we see from his own letters how, never allowing himself to be distracted by those Parisian gaieties in which he nevertheless often took part, nor to be scared by the literary cannonades of his frequently envious critics, he steadily, stone by stone, raised the pyramid of his life's work, determined to make it as broad and as high as possible, we are inspired by a feeling of respect for the man and his courage. The good-natured, stout, noisy Balzac was no Titan; indeed, in that generation of heaven-storming Titans and Titanesses he appears a peculiarly earth-bound creature. But he is of the race of the Cyclopes; he was a mighty master-builder who worked with a giant's strength; and the uncouth, brick-laying, carpentering Cyclops raised his building as high as the two great lyric geniuses of the day, Victor Hugo and George Sand, mounted on their wings.

He had never any doubt of his own ability. A self-confidence which corresponded to his talent, and which sometimes displayed itself in naïve boastfulness, but never in petty vanity, carried him bravely through all the trials and struggles of the first years; and in the moments of depression which occurred in his, as they do in every artist's life, he was, as we understand from his letters, comforted and strengthened by faithful, secret love. A woman whose name he never mentioned to his friends, whom he only alludes to with reverence as "an angel," "a moral sun," and who to him was "more than a mother, more than a friend, more than one human being can be to another," supported him with her self-sacrificing devotion, with word and deed, in the many troubles which beset his youth. We know that he was acquainted with her in 1822, and for twelve years (she died in 1837) she managed from time to time "to steal away from duty, family, society, all the hampering ties of Parisian life," and spend two hours with him.[3] Balzac, always ardent in his praise, naturally employs the strongest expressions where he loves; what is really worthy of notice is the delicacy of feeling displayed by this man, who is so invariably decried for his cynical sensuality—the admiration and gratitude in which his love takes shape.

---

[1] Compare the following sentences:—

GAUTIER.
Les cheveux ... *scintillent* et se contournent aux faux jours en manière de *filigranes d'or bruni*....

BALZAC.
Cette chevelure, au lieu d'avoir une couleur indécise, *scintillait* au jour comme des *filigranes d'or bruni*....

GAUTIER.
Le nez, fin et *mince*, d'un *contour assez aquiline* et presque *royal*....

BALZAC.
Ce nez d'un contour *aquilin, mince*, avec je ne sais quoi de *royal*....

GAUTIER.
Elle ressemble à s'y méprendre à une ... *Isis des bas-reliefs éginétiques*....

BALZAC.
Ce visage, plus rond qu'oval, ressemble à celui de quelque belle *Isis des bas-reliefs éginétiques*.

GAUTIER.
Une singularité remarquable du col de Mademoiselle Georges, c'est qu'au lieu de s'arrondir intérieurement du côté de la nuque, il *forme un contour renflé* et soutenu, *qui lie les épaules au fond de sa tête sans aucune sinuosité*, diagnostic de tempérament *athlétique, développé* au plus haut point chez l'hercule Farnése. *L'attache des bras* a quelque chose de formidable.... Mais ils sont très-blancs, très-purs, *terminés par un*

poignet dune délicatesse enfantine et des *mains mignonnes frappées de fossettes*.

BALZAC.
Au lieu de se creuser à la *nuque*, le col de Camille *forme un contour renflé qui lie les épaules à la tête sans sinuosité*, le caractère le plus évident de la force. Ce col présente par moments des plis d'une magnificence *athlétique. L'attache des bras*, d'un superbe contour, semble appartenir à une femme colossale. Les bras sont vigoureusement modelés, *terminés par un poignet d'une délicatesse* anglaise et *des mains mignonnes et pleines de fossettes*.

[2] Merely to show exactly what I mean, I give a single example. The courtesan Josépha asks the old, worn-out roué, Baron Hulot, one of Napoleon's generals, if it is true that he has caused the death of his brother and his uncle, brought misery and disgrace upon his family, and defrauded the government, all to gratify his mistress's whims.

"Le baron inclina tristement la tête.—Eh bien! j'aime cela! s'écria Josépha, qui se leva pleine d'enthousiasme. C'est un *brûlage générale*! c'est Sardanapale! c'est grand! c'est complet! On est une canaille, mais on a du cœur. Eh bien! moi j'aime mieux un mange-tout passionné comme toi pour les femmes que ces froids banquiers sans âme qu'on dit vertueux et qui ruinent des milliers de familles avec leurs rails.... Ça n'est pas comme toi, mon vieux; tu es un homme à passions; on te ferait vendre ta patrie! Aussi, vois-tu, je suis prête à tout faire pour toi! Tu es mon père, tu m'as lancée! c'est sacré. Que te faut-il? Veux-tu cent mille francs? On s'exterminera le tempérament pour te les gagner."

Do not these words give life to the woman who speaks and the man she addresses?

[3] (The lady's name was Madame de Bemy. Letters to Louise, Nos. I. and XXII., the letter to his mother, dated Jan. I, 1836, and that of October 1836 to Madame Hanska, taken in combination, show this plainly.

XIII

BALZAC

Balzac's earliest literary model was, as already mentioned, Sir Walter Scott, an author of whom he can never have reminded any one, and with whom, when his genius reaches its maturity, he has hardly anything in common. The writer of the *Comédie Humaine* was a man of far too modern a spirit to be able to remain faithful to historic fiction. He felt no home-sickness for any past century; he had amassed a vast wealth of observation, and involuntarily chose themes in which he could turn this to the best account. He was dimly conscious that the writer of historical novels, unless he be content simply to thrust the characters which he has before him as models into antiquated costumes, must take his modern, personal, psychological observations, and, as it were, force them back into a more primitive age—a difficult task, the attempt at which seldom resulted in more than a thinly disguised reproduction of the manners and customs of the writer's contemporaries, or at any rate of their ideas. It was not in Balzac's nature to collect information laboriously from old chronicles; he studied the living men and women of his own day.

La Physiologie du Mariage, the first of his works to arouse attention, supplemented Brillat-Savarin's harmless *Physiologie du Goût* with a half-jocose, half-scientific, wholly coarse analysis of that institution of society which French literature from time immemorial has treated as a butt for witticisms, an object of ironical homage, and a matter for unsparing investigation. Balzac regards it in the light of a tragi-comic social necessity, defends it, and assists it with good advice in its struggle with those destructive elements, masculine and feminine caprices and passions. Marriage has a special attraction for Balzac as being the battle-ground of two egoisms; he rushes with the ruthlessness of a wild boar through its boundless domain of attractions and repulsions, snuffing and poking his nose into everything. In France marriage has always been a tolerably external, public matter; it need not surprise us that Balzac has little reverence for its mysteries. He writes of them with Molière's outspokenness, but less healthily—more pessimistically and more grossly. The book is full of clever, coarse conceits and laughable anecdotes, and is often extremely amusing from the contrast between the frivolous, licentious matter and the professorial or father-confessor style in which it is expounded by the youthful lecturer on the science of marriage. It is, nevertheless, an immature production of a writer who has been early robbed of all beautiful illusions; and it must certainly be a repulsive book to most readers of the female sex, though we are told that a considerable proportion of its contents was communicated to the author by two women, neither of them young—Madame Hamelin and Madame Sophie Gay. *La Physiologie du Mariage* reveals none of Balzac's nobility of thought and delicacy of feeling—nothing but his gift of ruthless, searching analysis.

It would seem as if the opening of his authorial vein in this book had freed him for a long time from bad blood. His conception of life is henceforward a more elevated one, or rather, it divides itself into two conceptions, a serious and a sportive. The serious and the sensually cynic philosophy of human life, which in *La Physiologie du Mariage* blent into one repulsive whole, now separate, displaying themselves in the form of tragedy and satyric comedy. In 1831 he both writes his first philosophic novel, *La Peau de Chagrin* (which laid the foundation of his fame as an author) and begins, with *La belle Impéria*, the long series of the *Contes drôlatiques*, a collection of tales in the freest Renaissance style, reminiscent of Queen Marguerite and Brantôme in matter and of Rabelais in language. Told in the language of our own day, they would be both disgusting and dull; but the grand, simple, old-fashioned prose style, which lends more nobility to the

subject than even the severest metrical forms, metamorphoses these deifications of the flesh into genuine works of art, burlesque as the tales told by one of those worldly-minded, handy, jovial monks who swarm in the legendary lore of every country.

In one of the masterly prologues to this collection of tales the author tells how, having lost his patrimony in his youth, and being reduced to the direst poverty, he cried to heaven, like the woodcutter in the fable who had lost his axe, in hopes that the gods might take pity on him and give him another axe. What Mercury threw down to him was an ink-horn, on which were engraved the three letters AVE. He stood turning the heavenly gift round and round in his hands until he caught sight of the letters backwards, EVA. What was Eva? What but all women in one? A heavenly voice had called to him: "Think of woman; she will heal thy woes and fill thy pockets; she is thy fortune, thy property. Ave, I salute thee! Eva, O woman!" Which, being interpreted, meant that what he was now to attempt was to win a smile from the unprejudiced reader by mad and merry love stories. And he succeeded. In none of his other writings did his style attain such brilliance and vigour; Rubens's colouring is not bolder nor richer, and Rubens hardly equals this herculean wantonness with his fauns and drunken bacchantes. But it is difficult to find ten successive lines that are fit for quotation or reading aloud.

La Peau de Chagrin is Balzac's first literary tussle with the reality of his age; it is a spirited, many-sided work, rich in germs and shoots; and with its fine, simple symbols it anticipates that almost comprehensive picture of modern society which its author was to give to the world in his complete works. The externalities of modern life, such as the theatre and the fashionable lady's boudoir; the dissatisfied and hopeless poverty of the talented young author thrown into relief by the orgies of wealthy journalists and women of the demi-monde; the contrast, in the two principal female characters, between the worldly and the loving heart—all this is shown us in a strange, fantastic light. The book consists of a few connected gaudy spectacular scenes; there is more reflection and symbolic art than plastic talent in it. The youthful hero, who is on the point of committing suicide in despair over his hopeless poverty, receives from an aged dealer in curiosities a piece of wild ass's skin, on which neither steel nor fire produces the smallest effect, and which secures to its possessor the fulfilment of his every wish, but which shrinks a line or two with the gratification of each; simultaneously with the final disappearance of the ass's skin the life of its owner comes to an end. The persuasive powers of a marvellous imagination have succeeded in imparting credibility to the supernatural part of this profound allegory. Balzac has given the fantastic element in it a form which permits of its blending with the modern realistic elements, Aladdin's lamp, when it was rubbed, instantly worked a direct miracle; even in Oehlenschläger's *Aladdin* it supersedes the law of cause and effect. Not so the ass's skin; it does nothing directly; it only ensures the fortunate issue of events, steadily shrinking the while. It seems to be made of the fabric of which our lives are composed. The gradual annihilation of the human being is brought about, we are told, by two instinctive actions, which exhaust its sources of life. "Deux verbes expriment toutes les formes que prennent ces deux causes de mort: vouloir et pouvoir. *Vouloir* nous brûle et *pouvoir* nous détruit." That is to say, we die at last because we go on killing ourselves every day.

The ass's skin is, like ourselves, at last annihilated by "vouloir et pouvoir." With real profundity Balzac shows in this powerful representation of the chief impulse of the younger generation of his day—to drink the cup of life greedily to the very dregs—what emptiness there is in satiety, how certain it is that death lies cowering in the satisfaction of desire. Youthful, fertile, suggestive, and vaguely melancholy, like all books produced by genius before the acquirement of personal experience, *La Peau de Chagrin* made its mark abroad as well as in France. Goethe read it during the last year of his life. Riemer (who attributes the authorship of the book to Victor Hugo) reports Goethe to have said on October 11, 1831: "I have been reading more of *La Peau de Chagrin*. It is an excellent work in the newest style, distinguished by the vigour and cleverness of its back-and-forward movement between the impossible and the painful, and by the logical manner in which the marvellous is employed in producing the most extraordinary chains of thought and events, of which, taken in detail, much that is favourable might be said." In a letter of the 17th November of the same year he writes of the same work: "This book, the production of an intellect of very high order, points to a deep-seated, incurable corruption in the French nation, which will spread steadily unless the provinces, which can neither read nor write, restore it to health again, as far as that is possible." (*Goethe-Jahrbuch*, 1880, pp. 287, 289.)

The novel contains not a little autobiography. Balzac knew from his own experience the feelings of the impecunious youth, who, descending from his garret, picks his way in his solitary pair of white silk stockings and dancing-shoes across the muddy street, in deadly fear of being splashed by a passing carriage, and consequently deprived of the sight of his beloved. But what interests us more, is the sum of inward experience which is contained in the book, and which amounts to this: Society detests misfortune and suffering, avoids them like infectious diseases, never hesitates in choosing between a misfortune and a crime. Let a misfortune be never so sublime, society will manage to belittle it, to make it ridiculous by some witty sally; it has no sympathy to spare for the fallen gladiator. To Balzac, in short, even now in his youth, society appears devoid of every higher religious or moral feeling; it shrinks from the old, the sick, and the poor; it does homage to luck, to strength, and, above all, to wealth; it tolerates no misfortune out of which it cannot by some means or other coin money.

Before Balzac's day the novel had occupied itself almost exclusively with one theme—love; but the god of Balzac's contemporaries was money; therefore in his books money, or rather the lack of money, the desire of money, is the pivot on which society turns. The idea was audacious and novel. To enter in a work of fiction, a romance, into accurate details regarding the incomes and

expenditure of the principal characters, in short, to treat money as of prime importance, was a perfectly new departure; and many denounced it as prosaic, nay, coarse; for it is always considered coarse to say what every one thinks, and what consequently all have tacitly agreed to conceal or to prevaricate about—and especially coarse to proclaim it in an art which is often regarded as the art of beautiful lying.

XIV

BALZAC

But Balzac was young yet; his poet's soul, though winter fell early in it, had its spring; he, too, felt constrained to make love and woman the central interest of a whole series of novels; and he treated the old theme with an originality which made it seem quite new. The stories in which he most successfully varied it form a distinct group among his works.

It was not beauty, at least not plastic beauty, which Balzac worshipped in woman. And one thing that distinguished him from many of his contemporaries was, that beauty did not impress him most when seen through the medium of art. A great proportion of the Romantic literature of France, as well as of Germany and Scandinavia, was art literature. Such an art-loving author as, for instance, Gautier (who soon became the head of a whole school), was actually prevented by his love of art from appreciating reality. He himself has told how disappointed he was the first time he went to paint a female figure from the life in Rioult's studio, and this in spite of the unquestioned beauty of the model and the classical grace of her outlines. "I have always," he confesses, "preferred the statue to the woman, marble to flesh." Significant words! Picture Gautier and Balzac together in the museum of antiquities in the Louvre, in that holy of holies, where the Venus of Milo shines in solitary majesty. The plastic poet hears, resounding from the marble, the loveliest of all the hymns of Greek art to the perfection of the human form. Gazing at Venus, he forgets his surroundings. Not so Balzac! His attention is promptly diverted from the goddess by the first Parisian lady who stops in front of her, wearing, in the fashion of the day, a long shawl in which there is not a fold from neck to heel, a coquettish hat, and tightly fitting gloves. He takes in at a glance all the little artifices of the fashionable toilette, the secrets of which are no secrets to him.[1]

Here, then, we have the first characteristic feature in Balzac's work. No artistic tradition stands between him and the woman of the period. He studied no statue, worshipped no goddess, did no homage to ideal beauty; he saw and understood woman exactly as she was then, with her gowns, shawls, gloves, and hats, her caprices, virtues, temptations, and faults, her nerves and passions, with all their traces of unnaturalness, morbidness, and ennui. He loves her as she is. And he is not satisfied with studying her in the street, in the boudoir, or even in the bedchamber; he is not satisfied with analysing her soul; he inquires into the physiological causes of the psychological phenomena, into the sufferings and the diseases of women. He does more than merely indicate all that the weak and suffering sex silently endures.

The second characteristic feature is, that it is not the young girl, nor even the young married woman, whom Balzac represents as the object of love; his chief female type, which has taken its name from the title of one of his stories, is *la femme de trente ans*. He discovered and proclaimed the simple truth that in such a climate as that of the north of France, a woman is not at her best, either physically or spiritually, at the age of eighteen. He described the woman who has left her first youth behind her, who feels more profoundly, thinks more maturely, has already suffered disappointments, but is still capable of intense, unalloyed feeling. Life has already set its mark upon her—here a line of suffering, and there a wrinkle—but she is still in full possession of all the attractions of her sex. She is melancholy; she has tasted happiness and has tasted suffering, is misunderstood or lonely; she has often been deceived, but is still waiting, capable of inspiring the strong, ardent passions which draw their nourishment from compassion. And, curiously enough, she is not seen and described from the point of view of the man of her own age, but from that of a younger man, with little experience of life. The vernal emotion, the ardent desire, the naïve enthusiasm, the unconscious idealisation of youthful passion, surround this no longer perfectly youthful figure with a glorifying halo, embellish, rejuvenate, deify the woman whose real attractions are her refinement, her feminine seriousness, and the grace born of genuine passion. The delineation is never idealistic in the sense that George Sand's delineations are; for nothing is suppressed of what women, when they talk or write of their own sex, are accustomed to ignore—of what even George Sand passes over in silence when she is describing women for whom she desires to awaken sympathy and admiration. To George Sand woman is above all a soul; to Balzac she is a natural phenomenon, and therefore not flawless, either physically or spiritually. His idealisation is either purely external (the transfiguring power of certain lights, of the erotic situation, &c), or else it consists in passion for a certain limited time invalidating everything else, everything previous, and ennobling with its glow. Maternal love, wifely love, the bashful tenderness of the young girl, are painted by Balzac during this period with as masterly a touch as the unbridled erotic passion of the courtesan.[2]

He shows us the Frenchwoman of four different historical periods.

First, the Frenchwoman of the days of the Revolution. In that little masterpiece, *Le Réquisitionnaire*, one of his few perfectly proportioned stories, he represents, with the Reign of

Terror as a background, a mother's love for her son. The little out-of-the-way town and Madame de Dey's curious house are drawn with a few strokes. Apprehension of the possible fate of a son who has been condemned to death; the expectation of his arrival in the disguise of a soldier who is to be quartered on her; the terrible anxiety, increasing from hour to hour till late at night; the apparently mysterious arrival of the young soldier who, unseen by the mistress of the house, is at once conducted to the bedchamber comfortably prepared for him; the mother's torturing restlessness and almost uncontrollable joy when she hears his steps in the room above, but feels obliged, in order not to betray his arrival, to continue her conversation in the drawing-room; her hurried entrance into his room, and the frightful discovery that the person who has arrived is not her son, but a real recruit—all this, compressed into a few pages, is described with extraordinary power and truth to nature.

Next Balzac paints the women of the Napoleonic period, upon a background of military pomp and splendour, in all the glow and warmth of their admiration for the successful warriors. His picture bears the impress of the restless, pleasure-seeking haste with which life was lived at a time when it was possible for the young woman "to become fiancée, wife, mother, and widow between a first and a fifth bulletin from the Grande Armée," and when the near prospect of widowhood or honours or an immortal name, made the women more reckless and the officers more seductive. A period and a distinct female type are represented in the description of the review in the Tuileries Gardens, and of the evening party at the time of the battle of Wagram (in *La Femme de trente Ans* and *La Paix du Ménage*).

But it is not until the plots of his stories are laid in the days of the restored Legitimist monarchy that Balzac finds his true province, and produces his most acutely observed, skilfully drawn female types and his most wonderful psychological analyses. Eminently fitted as he was, with his unshrinking eye and his hard hand, to paint the dullness and the dishonesty of the reign of the Citizen King, he was poet enough to look back regretfully from the prosaic days of the plutocracy to the refined elegance and freer, gayer tone of the days of the Legitimist Monarchy. That had still been an aristocratic period; and Balzac, who, without any proper claim to the title, regarded himself as an aristocrat, had no small respect for the aristocracy; the high-born, well-bred, beautiful woman was in his eyes the flower of humanity. He was of the generation that worshipped Napoleon; Napoleon's name appears on every tenth page of his novels, and (like Victor Hugo) he dreamed of rivalling, in his own domain of literature, the Emperor's world-wide dominion; in his study stood a statuette of Napoleon, and on the scabbard of the sword he had written: "What he has conquered with the sword I will conquer with the pen." But, granted all this, he nevertheless, with his dreams, his weaknesses, his vanities and his refinements, belonged to the Legitimist Monarchy, for which, moreover, the fact that his youth had been spent under it gave him a warmer feeling. In the days of gilded state-coaches and old French ceremonial, under the shelter of ecclesiasticism and frivolity, it had been possible for liberal ideas and humane morals to thrive in the higher classes of society; they disappeared when money ascended the throne. The social life of Paris lost that refined charm for which it had been so famous. It is not surprising, then, that Balzac painted the fair sinners of the Faubourg St. Germain with a lenient hand and flattering colours. One of the most eminent women of the day, the charming Delphine de Girardin, whose salon was a fashionable resort, was a true friend to Balzac as well as to Hugo and Gautier; but as far as his works are concerned, he undoubtedly learned more from the two duchesses who personified to him the greatness of Imperial France and the gay refinement of the *ancien régime*, and with whom he became intimate almost at the beginning of his literary career. These were Madame Junot, the Duchess of Abrantés, whom he assisted in her literary pursuits, and the Duchesse de Castries, who began their acquaintance by writing anonymously to him of her interest in his works, and to whom a probably unrequited passion on his side and violent jealousy on hers long bound him. She appears in his *Histoire des Treize* under the name of the Duchesse de Langeais.

At the beginning of the Thirties, Balzac has, of course, not yet begun to write of society under the Constitutional Monarchy, its women and their passions. This happens later. And when it does happen, what we observe is, that he as a rule envisages this new material much more gloomily and austerely. The feeling of spring has vanished. Woman and love still form the centre of interest in many of the books. But affection has become passion and passion has become depravity. We read little of unselfish feeling and innocent sympathies, much of self-interested calculation, on the part of women as well as of men, nay, especially on the part of women; even in love, and still more when it is only a substitute for love which is described. In many of these novels the courtesan thrusts the fine lady into the background, and occasionally the former is represented as more disinterested than the latter. Abysses of selfishness and vice open before the reader's eyes.

---

[1] *Cf.* Th. Gautier, *Portraits contemporains*, p. 108.

[2] See *Le Message, La Grenadière, La Femme abandonnée, La grande Brétèche, Madame Firmiani, Une Fille d'Eve*, and *La Femme de trente Ans*, which last work is a collection of stories not originally written in connection with each other.

XV

BALZAC

Of the books published by Balzac in 1833 and 1834, two are especially deserving of notice—the delicately wrought, classic tale, *Eugénie Grandet*, and the powerful, fateful *Père Goriot*. In the first-mentioned work Balzac competes with Molière (*l'Avare*) in the second with no less a writer than Shakespeare (*King Lear*).

Eugénie Grandet does not represent the full measure of Balzac's talent, though he long went by the name of its author as a kind of title of honour. The book interested because of its careful and accurate descriptions of provincial life with its virtues and vices; it could be recommended for family reading, because the heroine was a chaste and noble-minded young girl; but its chief distinction lay in the wonderful manner in which Balzac's genius makes of covetousness and avarice, qualities of which hitherto only the comical side had been displayed, imposing vices. He shows how the instinct of amassing money, which it is the custom to regard as a laughable weakness, by degrees stifles every human feeling, and, raising its terrible Medusa head, tyrannises over the miser's surroundings; and he at the same time makes the miser himself a more human figure. To Balzac he is not the stereotyped comedy bourgeois, but a power-loving monomaniac, a petrified enthusiast, a poet, who at the sight of his gold revels in satisfied desire, but also in wild dreams. The miser is simply a man who is more thoroughly impressed than other men with the truth that money represents all human powers and pleasures. In the representation of such a character, Balzac displays his peculiar gift, which is that of producing a powerful effect with small means, with what others have overlooked or despised. From the symbolic standpoint the horizon of *Eugénie Grandet* is not narrow; but it was narrow in comparison with Balzac's characteristic and usual one.

In *Père Goriot* it widens. Here it is not an out-of-the-way provincial nook, but the great city of Paris which is studied, and which is unrolled, like a panorama, before our eyes. And there is no generalising and symbolising, as in *La Peau de Chagrin*; each class of society and each character in each class is provided with its own characteristic features. I have spoken of *King Lear*; but the story of the two cold-hearted daughters and their father, full of deep meaning and feeling as it is, is only in an external sense the theme of the book. The real theme is the comparatively uncorrupted provincial youth's introduction to the world of Paris, his gradual discovery of the real nature of that world, his horror at the discovery, his refusal to do what others do, his temptations, and his gradual, yet rapidly completed, education for the life that is being lived around him. Nothing more profound than this study of the development of Rastignac's character has been produced by Balzac, or indeed by any modern novelist. He shows with marvellous art how on every side, except where men's words are dictated by hypocrisy or extreme naïveté, the young man meets with the same conception of society and receives the same advice. His relative and protectress, the charming and distinguished Madame de Beauséant, says to him: "The more coldly you calculate, the higher you will rise. Think of men and women simply as post-horses to be left behind you, broken-winded, at each stage of your journey.... If you have any real feeling, hide it; never let it be suspected, or you are lost.... If you can manage to make women think you clever, men will soon believe that you are, unless you destroy their illusion too rudely.... You will find out what society is—a company of dupes and rogues. Be neither the one nor the other." And the escaped galley-slave Vautrin says to him: "One must either force a way for one's self into the heart of that crowd as a cannon-ball does, or sneak in like the plague. Honesty is of no use. Men bend and submit to the power of genius; they hate it, they try to calumniate it, because it takes without sharing; but they yield if it persists; they adore it on their bended knees if they have not succeeded in burying it in the mud.... I defy you to take two steps in Paris without stumbling on infernal machinations. Hence the honest man is the common enemy. But who do you suppose is the honest man? In Paris he is the man who keeps silence and refuses to share."

Rastignac is the typical young Frenchman of that period. He is talented, but not in any uncommon degree, and has no idealism beyond that which is begotten by the inexperience of youth. Profoundly impressed by all that he sees and experiences, he begins to aspire with steadily diminishing conscientiousness, steadily growing desire, after fortune's favours. How indignantly he repudiates the idea when Vautrin first puts the old hypothetical question to him—whether, if a mere act of will could do it, he would kill an unknown mandarin in China to obtain the millions he desires! Yet how short a time elapses before "the mandarin" is lying in his death-throes! Rastignac says to himself at first, as all men do in their youth, that to resolve to become great or wealthy at any cost is the same as to resolve to lie, cheat, and cringe to and flatter those who have lied, cheated, cringed, and flattered. Presently he dismisses the thought, determining not to think at all, but to follow the instincts of his heart. There comes a time when he is still too young to make definite calculations, but old enough to be haunted by vague ideas and hazy visions, which, if they could be chemically condensed, would leave no very pure deposit. His liaison with the fashionable lady, Delphine de Nucingen, Goriot's daughter, completes his education. And whilst he has been acquiring a full and perfect understanding of that sum of small and great meannesses which constitutes fashionable life, he has been influenced by Vautrin's satirical cynicism. "One or two more such political reflections, and you will see the world as it is. If he will but act an occasional little virtuous scene, the man of superior powers may satisfy all his fancies and receive loud applause from the fools in the pit.... I give you leave to despise me to-day, being certain that ere long you will love me. You will find in me those yawning abysses, those great concentrated feelings, which the foolish call vices; but you will never find me either cowardly or ungrateful."

Rastignac's eyes are opened; he sees all the shams by which he is surrounded, sees that morals and laws are simply screens behind which impudent vice acts unrestrainedly. Everywhere, everywhere, sham respectability, sham friendship, sham love, sham kindness, sham sacredness, sham marriages! With masterly skill Balzac has seized and immortalised that moment in the

young man's life when, as I have already put it, his heart swells and becomes strangely heavy, and he feels, when he looks about him, as if a fountain of scorn were surging in his breast. "His reflections whilst he was dressing were of the saddest and most depressing. Society appeared to him like an ocean of mud, in which the man who dipped his foot at once sank up to the neck. 'In society men commit only mean crimes,' he said to himself; 'Vautrin is greater.'" In the end, after he has taken all the measurements of this hell, he settles down comfortably in it, and prepares to scale the heights of society, to rise to the elevated official position which we find him occupying when we meet him again in later novels.

Almost all Balzac's characteristic qualities stood him in good stead in the evolution of this broadly planned work. His almost animal liveliness, his inexhaustible flow of cutting epithet, lent themselves naturally to the reproduction of the conversation of the mixed, shabby, wanton, impudently clever company who sat at the table of the Pension Vauquer. There are hardly any noble characters in the book, and the author has consequently no opportunity of indulging in tasteless pathos; but the reader has countless opportunities of rejoicing in the unerring eye and the precision with which Balzac dissects the soul of a criminal, a coquette, a millionaire, an envious old maid. The neglected, disowned old father, from whom the book takes its title, is by no means an entirely successful character. Père Goriot is a victim, and Balzac always waxes sentimental over victims. With extremely bad taste he calls the old man "the Christ of paternal love"; and to the paternal love he imparts such a sensually hysterical character that he almost disgusts us with it.[1] Nevertheless the fact that the whole plot centres round this forsaken old man, upon whose heart his own daughters trample, gives to the composition a satisfactory unity and solidity. The whole Juvenal-like satire of society is concentrated, is compressed, as it were, into an epigram, in the passage which describes how Delphine does not visit her dying father because it is imperative, if she desires to mount a step higher on the social ladder, that she should avail herself of the long-coveted invitation to Madame Beauséant's ball—a ball to which "the whole of Paris" is crowding merely to spy with cruel curiosity for traces in the hostess's face of the pain caused her by the engagement of her lover, the news of which had only reached her that morning.

We follow Delphine as she drives, with Rastignac by her side, in her own carriage to the ball. The young man, who is well aware that she would drive over her father's corpse to show herself at this ball, but who is neither able to give her up nor brave enough to incur her displeasure by reproaching her, cannot refrain from saying a few words about the old man's pitiable condition. The tears come into her eyes. "I shall look ugly if I cry," she thinks; and they dry at once. "To-morrow morning I shall go to my father," she says, "and nurse him, and never leave his pillow." And she means what she says. She is not a radically bad woman, but she is a living picture of the discords of society; she belongs to the lower classes by birth, to the upper by marriage; she is rich, but the humiliating conditions of her marriage deprive her of the control of her fortune; she is pleasure-loving, empty-minded, and ambitious. Balzac's creative power was not equal to the production of a simple, pure, Shakespearean Cordelia; his region is not the region of the noble; but he has created a Regan and a Goneril who are more human and true to life than the great Englishman's.

---

[1] "Mon Dieu! pleurer, elle a pleuré?"—"La tête sur mon gilet," dit Eugène.—"Oh! donnez-le-moi, ce gilet," dit le père Goriot.

XVI

BALZAC

One day in 1836 Balzac appeared in his sister's room in the wildest of spirits. Imitating the gestures of a drum-major with his thick cane (on the cornelian handle of which was engraved in Turkish a sultan's motto: "I am the destroyer of obstacles"), he shouted to her during the pauses of an accompaniment of martial music made with his tongue: "Congratulate me, little one, for I am on the point of becoming a genius." He had conceived the idea of combining all his novels, those already published and those yet to be written, into one great work—*La Comédie Humaine*.

The plan was stupendous and perfectly original; nothing of the kind existed in any known literature; it was a product of the same genius for systématisation which at the beginning of his career had inspired him with the idea of writing a series of historical romances embracing a succession of centuries. But this was a far more interesting and fertile idea. For, if the work were successful, it would possess the same force of illusion as if it dealt with historic facts, and it would, moreover, not merely be a little fragment of life symbolically and artistically enlarged into an image of the whole, but might justly lay claim to be, in the scientific sense of the word, a whole. In the *Divina Commedia* Dante had, as it were, focussed all the philosophy and experience of life of the Middle Ages; his ambitious rival purposed giving to the world by means of two to three thousand characters, which each represented hundreds of others, a complete psychology of all the different classes of French society, and thus, indirectly, of his age.

It is undeniable that the result was something unique.

Balzac's country has, like the real country, its ministers, its judges, its generals, its financiers, manufacturers, merchants, and peasants. It has its priests, its town and country doctors, its men

of fashion, its painters, sculptors, and designers, its poets, prose authors, and journalists, its old and its newly created aristocracy, its vain and unfaithful, and its lovable, victimised wives, its authoresses of genius and its provincial blue-stockings, its old maids, its actresses, and its host of courtesans. And the illusion is astonishing and complete.

The personages reappear in one after another of the numerous novels; we make acquaintance with them in all the different stages of their lives; they are constantly being alluded to by other characters when they do not appear themselves; the descriptions of their appearance, dress, homes, habits, and daily life are as minute and exact as if they had been given by a dressmaker, a doctor, a tradesman, or a lawyer, and at the same time so vivid that we feel as if we must certainly find the person described either in the street and house indicated as his home, or else paying a call upon the distinguished lady whose salon is the rendezvous of all the people of fashion in the novels. It seems almost impossible that these beings, one and all, should be mere figments of the brain; we involuntarily think of the France of that day as peopled by them.

And it is the whole of France. For Balzac described in their turn towns and districts in every part of the country.[1] Far from despising the provinces, he took a pride in displaying his intimate knowledge of all the peculiarities of their stagnant life, of their virtues, all culminating in resignation, and their vices, the offspring of narrow-mindedness. But Paris in a very special manner lives in his pages. And Balzac's Paris is not the old city of *Notre-Dame de Paris*, the picturesque, medieval capital with its marked social contrasts, its animated street life, and its superstitious ecclesiasticism; still less is it Victor Hugo's ideal Paris, that impossible New Jerusalem of intellect and enlightenment; it is the real modern city with its joy, its sorrow, and its shame—the entrancing wonder of our own age, which throws the seven of antiquity into the shade—the gigantic polypus with the hundred thousand tentacles which drag everything, near and far, into its clutches—the great cancer eating into France. The Paris of the author's own day lives in his books, with its narrow streets, of which he gives Rembrandt-like etchings, with its rattle and shrieks, its street cries in the early morning and its mighty evening chorus of voices—a sea of sound which he reproduces for us with an orchestral effect, reminding us of the men initiated into the mysteries of old, who seemed to have eaten drums and drunk cymbals.[2] Balzac knows about everything in Paris—the architecture of the houses, the furniture of the rooms, the pedigrees of the fortunes, the successive owners of the valuable objects of art, the ladies' toilettes, the dandies tailors' bills, the lawsuits which divide families, the state of health, means of subsistence, needs, and desires of all the different classes of the population. He had absorbed the town through every pore. Contemporary novelists sought refuge from the mist-veiled sun of Paris and the commonplace modern Parisian, in Spain, or Africa, or the East; but to Balzac no sun was fairer than that which shone on Paris. Those about him endeavoured to conjure forth the shades of a distant or departed beauty: but to him ugliness was no more repulsive than the nettle is to the botanist, the snake to the zoologist, or disease to the doctor. He would never, in Faust's place, have called Helen from the grave; he would have been much more likely to send for his friend Vidocq, the Prefect of Police and quondam criminal, and get him to tell tales of what he had gone through and seen and heard.

By dint of observation he amasses an enormous collection of separate traits, and the cataloguing of these traits frequently makes the introductory part of his novel tiresome and confusing; at the end of an interminable description of a house, a figure, a face, a nose, the reader sees nothing, is simply bored. But then comes a moment when the author's glowing imagination melts and fuses together all these commonplace elements presented to it by his faithful memory, as Benvenuto Cellini melted down plates and spoons and from them cast his Perseus. Goethe says (in his diary of February 26, 1780): "The collecting and putting together of details does not help me to understand. But after I have long occupied myself in dragging together sticks and straws, and have attempted to warm myself in vain, although there is fire at the heart of the heap and smoke everywhere, suddenly the flame springs up and the whole is in a blaze." In Balzac's novels the descriptive parts are often smothered in smoke, but the flame never fails to burst forth.

For Balzac was not merely an observer; he was a seer. If he happened to meet a workman and his wife going home from the theatre between eleven and twelve at night, he as likely as not followed them the whole way to their little house beyond the outer boulevards. He heard them talk (the mother dragging their child after her by the hand) first of the play, then of their own affairs. They talked of the money that was to be paid them next day, spending it in imagination in twenty different ways, quarrelling during the process and revealing their characters in the squabble. And Balzac listened so intently to their complaints of the length of the winter, the dearness of potatoes, the rise in the price of turf, that he at last lived their life, and, as we are told in his *Facino Cane*, "felt their rags upon his back and walked with his feet in their soleless shoes." Their dreams, their necessities, entered into his soul, and he went about in a kind of waking dream. Whilst this mental intoxication lasted he gave up all his usual habits and became something different from himself, became the age. He did not only write his stories, he lived them; his fictitious characters were so vividly present to him that he spoke of them to his acquaintances as if they actually existed. When he undertook a journey to a place he wished to describe, he would say: "I am going to Alençon, where Mademoiselle Carmon lives; to Grenoble, where Dr. Bénassis lives." He used to give his sister the news of his imaginary world. "Do you know who it is Félix de Vandenesse is marrying? A Mademoiselle de Grandville. It is a good match, in spite of all Mademoiselle de Bellefeuille has cost the family." One day when Jules Sandeau was speaking of his sister, who was ill, Balzac, who had been listening absently for some time, suddenly said: "This is all very well, my friend; but now to return to *realities*—let us talk of Eugénie Grandet." It was necessary that the illusion in his own case should be as strong as this, if he was to

communicate it to others with approximate strength. His imagination had the commanding power which allows no doubt to arise. It exercised this quality in practical matters too. Amongst the hundreds of projects which occurred to him as possible means of freeing himself from debt, was that of covering the bare fields surrounding the little country-house of Les Jardies (which he had bought that he might have a security to give his mother) with enormous forcing-houses, which, because of the entire absence of shelter from the sun's rays, would require very little artificial heat. In these forcing-houses a hundred thousand pine-apples were to be grown, which, sold at five francs each, instead of at the ordinary price of twenty, would yield the fortunate grower a yearly income of 400,000 francs "without his requiring to produce a scrap of manuscript." With such convincing eloquence did the originator of this plan demonstrate the absolute certainty of its success, that his friends actually looked out for a shop on one of the boulevards for the retail of the pine-apples, and consulted him as to the form and colour of the signboard. At another time he was firmly persuaded, I know not upon what grounds, that he had discovered the place in the outskirts of Paris where Toussaint Louverture had buried his treasure; and so successful was he in communicating his belief to his friends Sandeau and Gautier, neither of them particularly simple-minded persons, that these two gentlemen armed themselves with spades and stole like criminals out of Paris at five o'clock in the morning to dig at the spot indicated—naturally to find nothing. The expression, "the *power* of imagination," is peculiarly applicable in Balzac's case.

And this imagination which prevailed over others was his own tyrant. It gave him no peace. Not satisfied with the conception of plans, with the sweet, but barren joy of artistic dreams, it compelled him to be continually carrying out his plans, to keep himself in that habit of producing, without which inspiration so soon vanishes.

When, writing in *La Cousine Bette* of the gifted sculptor, Wenceslas Steinbockes idleness, he quotes these words of "a great writer": "I sit down to my work with despair and rise from it with sorrow," he is obviously in a half-modest way quoting himself. And he adds: "If the artist does not fling himself, without reflecting, into his work, as Curtius flung himself into the yawning gulf, as the soldier flings himself into the enemy's trenches, and if, once in this crater, he does not work like a miner on whom the walls of his gallery have fallen in; if he contemplates difficulties instead of overcoming them one by one … he is simply looking on at the suicide of his own talent." The method of production which he describes is his own; but it is not the only, not even the highest method. More tranquil, less modern spirits have kept their heads clear and their eyes undimmed above the seething crater of their work; and by doing so have preserved a sound critical sense which has prevented them from ever becoming as tediously entangled in their material as the author of *Le Curé de Village* and *Le Medicin de Campagne*. But, on the other hand, a certain dull glow, a thrilling, enthralling something which has become a necessity to modern nerves, is too often lacking in their works.

In the long preface to the *Comédie Humaine* Balzac sets forth his intentions and his aim. He begins by expressing his contempt for the usual method of writing history. "In reading those dry and most unattractive registers of events which go by the name of history, we observe," he writes, "that the historians of all countries and ages have forgotten to give us the history of morals." This deficiency he intends, as far as it lies in his power, to supply. He purposes producing a record of the passions, virtues, and vices of society by condensing kindred characters into types—thus, with patience and perseverance, writing the book which Rome, Athens, Tyre, Memphis, and Persia "have unfortunately neglected to bequeath to us." We see what a low opinion Balzac has of history. His extremely slight acquaintance with it made it easier for him to be contemptuous. Nor was he himself really the historian of his age; he was, to use his own striking and correct expression, its naturalist. He followed the lead of Geoffroy St. Hilaire, who demonstrated the unity of structure of all the different species. Among scientists he felt himself a scientist, a professor of sociology. "Society produces from man, according to environment, as many different men as there are species in zoology. The difference between soldier, labourer, official, lawyer, idler, scientist, statesman, merchant, sailor, poet, priest, is, though more difficult to grasp, quite as great as the difference between wolf, lion, horse, raven, shark, seal, and cow." The analogy is not complete, partly because, as Balzac himself immediately admits, the wife and husband of society do not always correspond to each other as do the male and female of the zoologist, partly because it is in the power of the social individual to pass from one class or calling to another, whereas in nature transition from one species to another is impossible during the lifetime of an individual.

What Balzac really means, and what is perfectly true, is that the standpoint from which he views society corresponds exactly, as a rule, to the standpoint from which the scientist investigates nature. He never moralises and condemns; he never, in this unlike most of his fellows, allows himself to be led by disgust or enthusiasm to describe otherwise than truthfully; to him, as to the naturalist, nothing is too small, nothing too great to be examined and explained. Seen through the microscope, the spider is larger and more complicatedly organised than the hugest elephant; regarded from the scientific standpoint, the majestic lion is only a pair of jaws upon four legs. The kind of food determines the shape of tooth, jaw, shoulder-blade, muscle, and claw, and explains the majesty. And in exactly the same manner, that which under certain circumstances seems a foul, despicable crime, reveals itself, regarded from another standpoint, to be a miniature edition of one of the grand, brilliant vices of which history tells—and this is Balzac's standpoint.

Even in as early a work as *Eugénie Grandet* we come upon expressions which prove it. The time is approaching when Eugénie will be forced to confess to the miser who is her father that she no longer possesses her ducats, that she has actually given them away. "Three days later," writes

Balzac, "a terrible drama was to be enacted—a bourgeois tragedy without poison, dagger, or bloodshed, yet more cruel than any of those which happened in the famous family of the Atrides." This is as much as to say: My middle-class novel is more tragic than your classic tragedy. In *Père Goriot*, when the mistress of the famous boarding-house is loudly and despairingly bewailing the departure of her boarders, Balzac remarks: "The lamentations which Lord Byron has put into the mouth of Tasso are beautiful, but they lack the profound truth of Madame Vauquer's." Which means: The pettiness and vulgarity which I describe, is, vigorously apprehended, more interesting than all your noble generalities. In *César Birotteau* Balzac not only makes jesting reference in his titles to Montesquieu's famous book on the Roman Empire, but, with the audacity of genius, compares his elaborate, lengthy description of a clever Parisian perfumer's successes and misfortunes with the story of the Trojan wars and the changeful fortunes of Napoleon. "Troy and Napoleon are only heroic epics. May this tale be an epic of middle-class life, of destinies to which no poet has turned his attention, so destitute of all greatness do they appear. Its subject is not a single man, but a whole host of sufferings." Which is as much as to say: In literature nothing is in itself little or great; in a poor hairdresser's struggle for existence I can read a heroic poem; I show how the events of a humble private life, if we connect them with their causes and trace these back to their source, are as important, as interesting and engrossing as the great revolutions in the lives of nations. And when, in that masterpiece, *Un Ménage de Garçon*, the cunning, handsome bravo, Max Gilet, is killed in a duel, the author observes: "Thus died one of those men who are capable of great things when their environment is favourable; a man whom nature had treated like a spoiled child, for she had given him the courage, the coolness, and the political sagacity of a Cæsar Borgia." So effective is the last of these reflections, that the reader feels as if he had not understood Max's character until now, when he sees it in the light of this name.

And virtue is in Balzac's eyes just as much of a result as vice. Although he is at times weakly sentimental and bombastic in his descriptions of dutifulness and benevolence, to which he moreover imparts a strong Roman Catholic colouring, he never fails to direct attention to the sources of the virtues he describes, which are to be found, now in a natural frigidity of the senses, now in pride, now in unconscious calculation, now in inherited nobility of sentiment, now in feminine remorse, masculine simple-mindedness, or the pious hope of reward in a future life.

Un Ménage de Garçon, Cousine Bette, and *Les Illusions perdues* are works which ought to be read by any one who is desirous of appreciating the growth of their author's literary powers during the last stage of his career.

The first, which is one of Balzac's least known and read novels, is an admirable psychological analysis of the life of a small country-town and of a family with branches there and in Paris. The chief character is a decayed officer of Napoleon's Guards, originally a strong, energetic character, now the personification of brutal, passionate egoism. He is the *miles gloriosus* of antiquity, except that in place of being cowardly he is vicious. The second novel mentioned, *La Cousine Bette*, a well-known and much read one, gives an incomparable realistic representation of the ruinous power of the erotic passion. Even Shakespeare (in *Antony and Cleopatra*) does not treat the theme in a more masterly and convincing manner. *Les Illusions perdues* is devoted to demonstrating the degrading results of the abuse of the press.

The title of this last novel is characteristic of Balzac. It might, in a manner, be the title of his complete works. But no other single book of his gives such a good general idea of his attitude to modern civilisation. The pernicious side of the influence of the newspaper press is treated as the dark side of public life generally.

Like most great authors who have not lived to be old, Balzac had little reason to rejoice over the criticism meted out to him by the press. He was not understood. Even the best critics, men of the type of Sainte-Beuve, were too unlike him and too near to him in time to understand his greatness. He lived a solitary life; contrary to Parisian custom he took no steps to get his books praised; and, as usually happens, such success as he earned procured him as much envy as fame. In *Les Illusions perdues* he gave a picture of the press which the insulted journalists never forgave him. The most eminent of them was Jules Janin. His portrait was, not exactly ill-naturedly, but far from flatteringly painted in the novel under the name of Etienne Lousteau. This made and still makes his criticism of the book very amusing. It appeared in the *Revue de Paris*, a periodical to which Balzac had been a regular contributor until he brought and gained a lawsuit against it, after which it naturally treated him as an outlaw. It is a malicious, trivial, witty piece of writing, which has not survived the book it was intended to ruin.

A young, poor provincial poet, beautiful as a god, but of weak character and mediocre talent, is brought to Paris by the Muse of the Department, an elegant, aristocratic bluestocking. They are in love with each other, and it has been the lady's intention to allow him to play the part of her accepted lover in the capital; but when she is received with open arms by the fashionable world, she suddenly sees herself and her knight in a new light. Coldness and neglect on her part ensue; Lucien is thrown into the shade by a more than middle-aged man of the world. And now we are called on to observe the stages of another of the many processes by which provincials are educated into Parisians. Lucien hopes to make his way as an author; he has written a novel in Sir Walter Scott's style and a volume of poems; he is received into a little circle of poor, proud young authors, artists, and scientific men, chosen spirits, to whom the future of France belongs. But the months of poverty, self-denial, laborious study, and ideal hope are too long for him; he pines for immediate pleasure and fame, for revenge upon all who humiliated him when he was the ignorant country prophet. The so-called "minor press" offers him the chance of completely satisfying his desire; his head is turned, and he plunges, without cause to advocate or principle to uphold, into

daily journalism.

Lousteau takes him to the shop of a rich Palais-Royal bookseller and newspaper proprietor. "Each time the bookseller opened his lips he grew in Lucien's eyes; the young man seemed to see politics and literature converging towards this shop as their true centre. To find an eminent poet prostituting his muse to a journalist ... was a terrible lesson to the great man from the country.... Money! in that word lies the solution of every problem. He is lonely, unknown, has only a doubtful friendship to look to for happiness. He blames his true and sorrowing friends of the literary brotherhood for having painted the world to him in false colours and having hindered him from rushing, pen in hand, into the great mêlée." From the bookshop Lousteau and Lucien make their way to the theatre. Lousteau, as a journalist, is welcome everywhere. The manager tells them how a conspiracy against the play has been defeated by means of a free use of the purses of his two prettiest actresses' wealthy admirers. "During these last two hours Lucien had heard of nothing but money. Everything had resolved itself into money. At the theatre and in the bookshop, with publisher and with editor, there had been no question of art or real merit. He felt as if the huge stamping-machine of the mint were imprinting its mark with dull, heavy blows on his head and heart." His literary conscience evaporates, and he becomes the literary and dramatic critic of an impudent, stupid newspaper. Loved and supported by an actress, he sinks ever deeper in the life led by the man who has sold his pen. He goes over from the Liberals to the Conservatives. The depth of his degradation is most strongly borne in upon us in the scene where, having been compelled by his editor to write a malicious attack on an admirable book written by the best and noblest of his own friends (Balzac's ideal author), he is found knocking at this friend's door, on the evening before the article appears, to beg his forgiveness. Outward is soon added to inward misery. His mistress dies, and he is in such straits that he has to write obscene songs sitting by her death-bed, to raise the money for her funeral expenses. He ends by accepting from her maid a louis which the woman has just earned in a shameful manner, and with it paying his journey home to his native village. And all this bears the stamp of truth—horrible truth. In this one book Balzac renounces the impartiality of the scientific observer. Everywhere else he preserves his equanimity; here he chastises with scorpions.

---

[1] Issoudun in *Un Ménage de Garçon*, Douai in *Le Recherche de l'Absolu*, Alençon in *La vieille Fille*, Besançon in *Albert Savarus*, Saumur in *Eugénie Grandet*, Angoulême in *Les deux Poètes*, Tours in *Le Curé de Tours*, Limoges in *Le Curé de Village*, Sancerre in *La Muse du Département*. &c.

[2] See the introduction to the indecent story, *La Fille aux Yeux d'Or*, in which the hurry, the crowdedness, the whole spirit of Parisian life, is represented with an incomparable skill in the art of word-painting.

XVII

BALZAC

In his history of France Michelet dates a new epoch in the intellectual life of that country from the period when coffee came into general use as a beverage. This is pushing an idea to the extreme; but there would be no exaggeration in asserting that in Voltaire's style we can trace an inspiration of coffee, just as we can trace an inspiration of wine in the style of earlier authors. Balzac's method of working obliged him to refresh himself during his long, fatiguing nights of labour with an injurious quantity of coffee. It has been aptly said: "He lived on 50,000 cups of coffee and died of 50,000 cups of coffee."

One is conscious in his works of his ceaseless toil and of his nervous excitement, but it is probable that if he had worked more calmly he would not have communicated the same life to them. While we are reading his pages we feel the confused tumult of the great capital, its furious competition, its fever of work and pleasure, the sleepless whirr of the great loom. All these hearths and lamps and furnaces have lent some of their fire to his books. He was in his native element when he had work before him and behind him and round him—when, like a sailor in mid-ocean who sees nothing but sea, he saw nothing but work as far as his sight could reach.

During the last seventeen years of his life his labours were interrupted and enlivened by intellectual intercourse with a lady who lived at a great distance from Paris, to whom he wrote almost every day. We have an account of this friendship, only slightly disguised, in *Albert Savarus*.

In February 1832 a young Polish Countess, Madame Evelina Hanska, then aged twenty-six or twenty-eight, wrote an anonymous letter to Balzac, in which she thanked him for his writings and tried to persuade him to look on things from a more spiritual point of view. This led to a correspondence between them. Madame Hanska, a gifted, highly educated woman, belonged by birth to the famous Rzewuski family; the eminent Polish author, Henri Rzewuski, was her brother. Her husband was a rich old man, an invalid, with a peculiar temper. They lived a very lonely life on their estate in Little Russia, and literature and Balzac were her only interests.

Balzac and she had first met at Neuchatel in Switzerland early in 1833, but on this occasion they were only for a few minutes alone together; in December of the same year, however, they spent six weeks together at Geneva, and, before they parted, agreed that they would marry whenever

Countess Hanska became a widow. Henceforward they met almost every year, in Switzerland or Austria; and they carried on a constant correspondence. There is not the slightest doubt that Balzac was devotedly attached to Countess Hanska, although his devotion to her did not prevent his having numerous liaisons with other women. She was his guiding star, and he felt impelled to communicate all his thoughts and all the events of his life to her.

She undoubtedly loved him in return, with a love which was partly real passion, partly satisfied vanity; but Balzac's letters to her show that she never ceased tormenting him with her passionate jealousy. He had begun to cool when a meeting in Vienna in 1835, arranged by Countess Hanska, fanned the sinking fire of his passion into a blaze again. After this a number of years passed without their seeing each other. In 1841 Madame Hanska in her turn manifested a certain coldness, born of suspicion; and after Count Hanska's death, which happened in November of that year, she does not seem to have shown much inclination to marry Balzac. But the agreement remained in force, and Balzac's one wish was to marry the woman he loved. She held back. They did not meet till 1843 (in St. Petersburg). In 1845 they met in Paris, in 1847 at her home at Vierzchovnia; and there Balzac spent part of 1848 and the whole of 1849. But it was not till 1850, when his health was already undermined, that Madame Hanska consented to marry him. A fatal affection of the heart, the consequence of years of over-exertion, had declared itself before the wedding took place at Berditsjev in March 1850. Three months from that date Balzac was dead. He had furnished a beautiful house in Paris for himself. His friends were reminded of the Turkish proverb: "When the house is ready, Death enters."

Short as was the married life of the couple, it was long enough for Balzac to discover how mistaken had been his estimate of the woman he had worshipped and treated as a higher being for years. She seems to have been in reality a very heartless creature, with an ill-regulated mind; and her youthful passion for the great author had entirely evaporated. In Victor Hugo's book, *Choses Vues*, he tells how in June 1850, hearing disquieting reports of Balzac's condition, he went to inquire after him. The door was opened by a maid-servant, who said: "Monsieur is dying. Madame has gone to her own room." Hugo went up to Balzac's bedroom, and found an old woman, a nurse, and a man-servant standing by the bed. The old woman was Balzac's mother. His wife was not with him in his last moments.

It is difficult to define her influence upon him as a writer; but it was inconsiderable. To it we owe the fanciful Swedenborgian romance, *Séraphita*, and the delicately finished, clever story, *Modeste Mignon*.

Death came when Balzac's intellectual powers were in their zenith. He never wrote better than in the last year of his life. Hence his fame, too, was at its height. It had grown slowly. The first score of his novels gained him no widespread reputation among the general public; but they attracted the attention of the men of talent of the younger generation, who gathered round him and watched the progress of his literary career with the deepest interest. To those of them who wished to succeed in literature he recommended three things—diligence, a solitary life, and (this half in jest) the vow of chastity. He sanctioned correspondence with the object of their affections, because "letter-writing forms one's style." The young men were astonished to receive such advice from a man whose books were invariably greeted by the press with angry shrieks of offended morality; they had yet to learn that the charge of immorality is the invariable insult hurled by literary impotence at everything in literature that is vigorous and virile. In spite of all the attacks upon it, his name was held in ever more honourable repute, and at the time of his death his contemporaries had almost grasped the fact that in Balzac they possessed one of the really great authors who imbue a whole school of art with their spirit. Not only had he laid the foundation of the modern style of novel-writing, but—true son of a century during which science has penetrated ever farther into the domain of art—he had introduced a method of observation which could be followed by others. His name in itself was a great name, but the name of the founder of a school is Legion.

The fact that he did not obtain full recognition in his lifetime is explained by two deficiencies in his works.

His style was uncertain. It was at times vulgarly trivial, at times bombastic. And deficiency in the matter of style is a serious deficiency; because what distinguishes art from that which is not art, is just that determined exclusion of what is almost, but not quite right, to which we give the name of style. It is, moreover, a particularly objectionable deficiency in the eyes of Frenchmen, with their keen rhetorical sense. But after Balzac's death his works began to be much read abroad as well as in France, and foreigners made very light of this shortcoming of his. The man who understands a language well enough to read it, but has not sufficient knowledge to appreciate all its refinements, easily forgives sins of style when they are compensated for by rare and attractive qualities. And this was the position of the great novel-reading European public. Educated Italians, Austrians, Poles, Russians, &c., read Balzac with unalloyed pleasure, paying small heed to the inequality of his style. The fault will, however, undoubtedly affect the duration of his work. Nothing formless or only half-formed endures. The great *Comédie Humaine* (like the 10,000 stadia long painting which Aristotle maintained would not be a work of art at all) will not be regarded by posterity in the light of a single work, and the length of time during which its separate fragments retain their place in the literature of the world will be exactly proportioned to the degree of artistic perfection possessed by each. After the lapse of a few centuries they are not likely to be read simply because of the material they provide for the student of the history of civilisation.

To deficiency in the matter of form Balzac adds a much greater deficiency in the matter of abstract ideas. It was impossible that the man who was great only as a writer of fiction should

receive full recognition in his lifetime. Men had become accustomed to see in the author the spiritual guide, and Balzac was certainly not that. His great powers as an analyst of the human soul were obscured by his total want of understanding of the emancipatory religious and social ideas of his age, ideas which so early aroused George Sand's enthusiasm, and had such a powerful influence on Victor Hugo, Lamartine, and others. His political and religious doctrines, which were a species of homage to absolutism and Catholic orthodoxy, were obnoxious to many. At first men smiled when the sensuous writer with the reformatory ideas quoted the dogmatists of the white banner, Joseph de Maistre and Bonald; but by degrees they comprehended the confusion that reigned in his mind.

The sensuousness of his temperament and the unbridled strength of his imagination inclined Balzac to mysticism in both science and religion. Animal magnetism, which from about 1820 onwards plays such a prominent part in literature, was a power in the influence of which over men's minds he had a strong belief. In *La Peau de Chagrin, Séraphita*, and *Louis Lambert*, will is defined as a force resembling steam, as "a fluid which according to its density can alter everything, even natural laws." In spite of the modernity of his intellect Balzac was enough of the Romanticist to believe in clairvoyance, and to have a leaning generally to the occult sciences. Nevertheless, in spite of the bias given to his mind by his age, the age of Romanticism, he belonged, as Victor Hugo said at his grave, "whether he knew it and desired it or not, to the mighty race of revolutionary authors."

His nature and education prepared him to understand life in all its fulness, and, by virtue of this understanding, to enjoy it; but, early initiated into the corruption of society, his horrified, order-loving mind sought for a bit and bridle for erring humanity, and could find it in nothing but the restored Church. Hence the painful contradiction between sensual and aesthetic tendencies which we so often find in Balzac's writings, especially when he is treating of the relations between the sexes. It is this contradiction which gives an unpleasant, impure tone to *Le Lys dans la Vallée*_(which Balzac himself considered his masterpiece) and *Les Mémoires de deux jeunes Mariés*. And it also explains how his philosophic principles and his ecclesiastical leanings so often contradict each other. In the preface to the complete edition of his works he first asserts that man is originally neither good nor bad, and that society invariably makes him better, thus unconsciously declaring himself directly opposed to the Church's fundamental doctrine of the corruption of man by sin; a few lines farther on he extols Catholicism as the "only perfect system for the suppression of the corrupt tendencies of humanity," and demands that the education of the nation shall be entrusted to the clergy. His conviction of the existence of those "corrupt tendencies" led him almost always to regard and represent the lower classes, servants and peasants, as the enemies of the propertied class (see his comic pathos on the subject of servants in *Cousine Bette* and his peasants in *Les Paysans*); and he enjoyed making sallies against the populace and democracy, the Liberals, the two Chambers, and parliamentary government, from the vantage ground of clericalism and absolutism.

With all his great and brilliant qualities there was something wanting in Balzac, the something which goes by the name of culture. He lacked its calm, or, to be more exact, his restless, perpetually producing imaginative mind never enjoyed the calm which is a condition of culture.

But he possessed what is more important in an author—profoundly penetrating, truth-loving genius. Those who seek merely the beautiful, describe only the stem and flower of the human plant; Balzac drew it with its roots; to him it was of most moment to trace all the ramifications and workings of that underground life of the plant which conditions its visible life. The flaws in his artistic and intellectual culture will not prevent posterity from recognising his genius.

XVIII

BEYLE

From the standpoint of our own day we see side by side with Balzac another French author whom it would never have occurred to any one in their day to couple with him, and whose literary existence was as quiet and unremarked as Balzac's was noisy and obtrusive. Curiously enough, Balzac was the only one of Henri Beyle's contemporaries who accorded him full, unqualified recognition. In the eyes of the younger generation of the France of to-day, Beyle and Balzac complement each other as unmistakably as do Lamartine and Victor Hugo. It may seem in so far inappropriate to couple the names of the two authors, that the one wrote close on a hundred novels, the other only two of any length; but the quality of Beyle's two is so remarkable that they entitle their author to rank with the father of the modern novel; and certain of his other works (he wrote, reckoning everything—novels, tales, critical and theoretical essays, biographies, and descriptions of travel—a score of volumes) have exercised as great a literary influence as have his novels.

Beyle's relation to Balzac is that of the reflective to the observant mind, of the thinker in art to the seer. We see into the hearts of Balzac's characters, into the "dark red mill of passion," which is the motive force of their actions; Beyle's characters receive their impulse from the head, "the open light-and-sound chamber";[1] the reason being that Beyle was a logician and Balzac a man of an effusively rich animal nature. Beyle stands to Victor Hugo in much the same position as Leonardo da Vinci to Michael Angelo. Hugo's plastic imagination creates a supernaturally

colossal and muscular humanity, fixed in an eternal attitude of struggle and suffering; Beyle's mysterious, complicated, refined intellect produces a small series of male and female portraits which exercise an almost magic fascination on us with their far-away, enigmatic expressions and their sweet, seductive, wicked smiles. Of course, Michael Angelo towers as high above Victor Hugo as Leonardo does above Beyle; but just as there is a resemblance in Hugo's style to the style of Michael Angelo's Moses, so there is a kinship between Beyle's Duchess of Sanseverina and Leonardo's Mona Lisa; and, in spite of the immense superiority of the great Italians, the resemblance in the relative positions of the two artists and the two authors is striking. Beyle is the metaphysician among the French authors of his day, as Leonardo was the metaphysician among the great painters of the Renaissance.

We have already encountered Beyle as one of the leaders in the advanced-guard attacks upon the conventional French tragedy style and the patriotism of the Classicists, which ignored ail foreign literature simply as being foreign. In those engagements he was one of the first to break the enemy's ranks; no one dealt more crushing blows to the Imperialist men of letters than this writer, who in a manner was himself distinctly a Frenchman of the Empire. Indeed, the very circumstance that he was the only one of the great authors of 1830 who had really known the Empire, gives him a prominently peculiar position in the Romantic group. This man alone among them all had been present at the battle of Marengo and the entry into Milan, the battle of Jena and the entry into Berlin, had seen the burning of Moscow and shared in the horrors of the retreat through Russia. He alone among them all had spoken to Napoleon and had known Byron. He was only a year younger than Nodier; but Nodier as forerunner was not much more than a herald whose trumpet-blast announced and awakened, whereas Beyle as forerunner was a doughty trooper with lance and pennon, one of those Uhlans who capture a town single-handed. In Nodier's intellectual life the French Revolution was the great event which dominated everything—he never wearied of describing its heroes and its victims, its prison scenes, its conspiracies, secret societies, &c; in Beyle's, Napoleon's career and fall were the facts of vital importance.

STENDHAL

Marie Henri Beyle was born at Grenoble on the 23rd of January 1783. His family belonged to the upper middle class, the aristocracy of the law. When only eight years old he lost his mother, a loss which he felt deeply and to which his thoughts perpetually recurred. His father was a reserved man, who took little notice of his children, and treated them with extreme severity. He entrusted the education of his son to needy abbés, whom the boy hated, regarding them as tyrants and hypocrites. Between him and his father there was early kindled a feeling of real animosity, which was never extinguished. Everything good that fell to Henri's lot in childhood came to him through his maternal grandfather, a clever and cultured doctor; but so strictly were his father's cruelly severe educational principles adhered to, that at the age of fourteen he was not acquainted with more than two or three children of his own age. This boy, in whose nature there lay germs of profound originality, in whose character determined independence was a main feature, whose energetic temperament begot a keen desire to do unusual deeds, and in whom the life of the senses stirred early and strongly, was subjected in the process of education to such severe, unrelieved, oppressive control, that passionate inward revolt was the inevitable consequence. Because the abbés, who lived in terror of the Revolution, educated him as a royalist and Catholic, he naturally developed into a revolutionist, a Bonapartist, and a freethinker in the

extreme sense of the word. But the constant strife between his father's will and his own desires engendered, besides, a want of confidence, a distrust of humanity so deeply rooted that it was never eradicated. And ere long there was added to the fear of being deceived or exploited by others, the fear of deceiving himself, which bred in him the habit of being constantly on his guard, of constant self-examination and self-control.

A certain something in his character is traceable to the influence of the province in which he was born and in which his family had been settled for at least two centuries. The natives of Dauphiné are a keen, obstinate, argumentative race, as different from their neighbours of Provence as they are from the Parisians. The Provençal gives noisy or eloquent expression to his feelings; he rails and curses when he is angry or hurt; the Parisian is polite, witty, brilliantly superficial; the character of the native of Dauphiné is distinguished by a peculiar obstinacy; there is both depth and refinement in it; he remembers an insult and avenges it, but his anger never finds vent in abusive language. Beyle's mother, who read Dante and Ariosto in the original, a very uncommon accomplishment for a provincial lady in those days, was understood to be of Italian descent. This may in part explain Beyle's strong leaning to everything Italian; but it is also to be remembered that until 1349 Dauphiné did not form part of France, and was in its politics a semi-Italian state. It was one of Beyle's fancies that Louis XI, who, as Dauphin, governed the little country for several years, had imparted to its inhabitants something of his own distinguishing quality of prudence, of distrust of first inspirations. Improbable as this is, the surmise is in itself characteristic.

Circumstances early intensified the tendency to distrust with which Henri's home life had imbued him. When he at last attained to the liberty after which he had so long aspired, that is to say, when he was sent to school, a bitter disappointment awaited him. The little strong, thick-set, heavily built boy with the bright, speaking face (nicknamed "the walking tower" on account of his determined step, herculean limbs, and round Hercules head) was, in spite of the ironic expression of his mouth, an enthusiast. And in his schoolfellows he did not find the gay, amiable, noble-minded comrades he had pictured to himself, but a troop of selfish young whelps. When telling his friend Colomb this, he added: "It was a disappointment which has gone on repeating itself throughout my whole life." "Nor was I any luckier," he continued, "in the impression I made on my schoolfellows; I can see now that I displayed a ridiculous mixture of haughtiness and desire to amuse myself. To the other boys' coarse selfishness I responded with my Spanish hidalgo ideas of honour; and I was overwhelmed with despair when they went off to play together and simply ignored me." Compare this utterance with the bitter disappointment of young Fabrice (in *La Chartreuse de Parme*, published in 1839), when, during the battle of Waterloo, he begs some soldiers whom he meets for a piece of bread and is answered with a coarse jest: "These cruel words and the general laugh which followed were too much for Fabrice. War was not, then, it appeared, that noble, mutual impulse of souls who loved glory above everything, which Napoleon's proclamations had led him to understand it to be." We can easily imagine what memories of wild outbursts of animal selfishness Beyle brought back with him from his campaign; of these the tale of Fabrice's experiences is probably composed. He had formed too high an estimate of the comradeship existing among soldiers, just as he had over-estimated the comradeship of schoolboys.

About the year 1798 he began to devote himself with great ardour to the study of mathematics, for the characteristic reason, as he told his friends, that there was hypocrisy in every other science, but none, so far as he could discover, in the science of mathematics. But no doubt his ardour was stimulated by the growing fame of the young French general in Italy whom mathematics, practically applied in the science of artillery, had led from one great victory to another.

His studies at an end, Beyle arrived in Paris on the 10th of November 1799, the day following the 18th Brumaire. He had a letter of introduction to the Daru family, who were relatives, and when, after the *coup d'état*, Pierre Daru was made Secretary of War and Inspector of Reviews, he gave young Beyle a place in his office. I fancy I can trace reminiscences of this appointment in the episode of Julien's appointment as secretary to the Comte de la Mole in (*Rouge et Noir*). Colomb tells that on one of the first days after Beyle entered on his duties, when he was writing a letter to Daru's dictation, he absently spelled *cela* with two l's, and thereby brought on himself a playful, but none the less humiliating, reproof. A precisely similar incident occurs in the novel. But Daru was evidently a very much kinder and more considerate patron than the Comte de la Mole; he proved himself Beyle's faithful friend and benefactor. Besides his talent for military organisation, Daru had undoubted literary talent; his translations of Horace and his historical prose are excellent examples of the literary style of the Empire, and all the authors of that period looked up to him. It was a strange freak of fortune which determined that throughout most of his campaigns he should have in immediate attendance on him one of the literary pioneers of the following period—not that he had any suspicion of his protege's gifts, gifts of which the young man himself was scarcely conscious as yet.

When Daru and his younger brother, acting under Carnot, then Minister of War, had organised the memorable Italian campaign of 1800, and had themselves been ordered to Italy, they sent for Beyle to come to them there, though they had for the moment no definite appointment to offer him. The youth of seventeen, who was by nature as energetic as he was imaginative, and whose dreams were all of daring deeds and the First Consul, did not wait to be called twice. He packed a dozen standard works in his knapsack and started for Geneva; there, though he had never learned to ride, he mounted a horse which Daru had left behind ill, but which had recovered, and, encountering many difficulties, rode over the Saint Bernard on the 22nd of May, two days after

Napoleon. On the 1st or 2nd of June he reached Milan, the city where he was to have his first experience of the joy of life, and which was always to loom largely on his mental horizon. He witnessed the outburst of rapturous joy with which the abolition of the hated supremacy of Austria was hailed, and on the 4th of July was present at the battle of Marengo. After holding an appointment in the commissariat for some months, he entered the seventh regiment of dragoons as sergeant (as we are reminded in a curious note to the fifth chapter of *Rouge et Noir*) was promoted to a lieutenancy at Romanego, and was shortly afterwards made adjutant to General Michaud. He distinguished himself in all the subsequent engagements, and especially at Castel-Franco, not only by courage; but by the ardour, accuracy, and intelligence with which he executed all the tasks entrusted to him. We have, evidently, a very exact account of young Beyle's feelings as a spectator of the battle of Marengo, in the description of Fabrice del Dongo's youthfully enthusiastic and heroic emotions as spectator of the battle of Waterloo, a description which undoubtedly owes much of its masterliness to its being a faithful reproduction of personal experiences. The period which begins with the youth's ride across the Alps and ends with his farewell to the army after the Peace of Amiens, was the period of his life to which Beyle looked back as that of perfect happiness; it was rich in every variety of romantic experience; during it he did daring deeds, fought a comical duel, had various youthful love affairs, and enjoyed the poetry of a soldier's life in a beautiful country, where the foreign conquerors were greeted as saviours and heroes by a careless, naïvely passionate people, who were prevented by no scruples from indulging their thirst for pleasure.

When Henri returned to Grenoble from this his first flight into the wide world, he found everything as he had left it. His family still revered what he despised, and detested all that he enthusiastically admired. After some violent altercations, the young Hotspur obtained permission to take up his abode in Paris. There he studied Montaigne, Montesquieu, and the eighteenth-century philosophers, more particularly Cabanis and De Tracy, with the latter of whom he was at a subsequent period to become intimately acquainted. (For De Tracy's *Ideology* Beyle had a profound admiration from his earliest youth.) He also took lessons in English.

In this quiet life of study, which lasted for a few years, there was an odd interlude. In 1805, during a visit to his native town, Henri fell in love with a beautiful young actress who was playing there. His love was returned, and, unable to endure the idea of separation from his beloved, he followed her to Marseilles, where she had obtained an engagement, and took a place as clerk in a large grocery business—the only possible means of earning a living which presented itself. He was quite happy on his office stool during the year his passion lasted; but, when the actress suddenly determined to marry a Russian, he returned to Paris and resumed his studies. Before long he received an invitation which he was incapable of refusing, to accompany Marshal Daru to the army. He fought in the battle of Jena, took part in Napoleon's triumphal entry into Berlin, and was appointed superintendent of the Imperial demesnes in Brunswick. This appointment he held for two years, during which he gained some knowledge of the German language and literature, and distinguished himself by his zeal in the Emperor's service. Receiving orders to levy a war tax of five millions, he levied seven. This was what they in those days called "being possessed of the sacred fire." When the Emperor was told, he said, "Well done!" and noted the assessor's name. But Beyle also won honour for himself in ways which appeal more to our sympathies. In 1809 he was left in a little German town, in charge of stores and of the wounded soldiers who were not fit to be removed. No sooner had the garrison departed than the citizens were summoned by the alarm-bell to attack the military hospital and seize the stores. The other officers lost their heads; but Beyle armed all the convalescents, every man who was able to be out of bed, posted the weakest at the windows (which he transformed into loopholes), and, placing himself at the head of the others, made a sortie and scattered the attacking mob.

He followed the army to Vienna, was employed in the negotiations which preceded Napoleon's marriage with Marie Louise, and afterwards received the appointment of inspector of the buildings and movable property belonging to the crown. In this capacity he appeared at court, and was introduced to the Empress.

After a stay in Milan he received permission, in 1812, to take part in the Russian campaign. His love of adventure had been more than satisfied by his previous campaigns; he had been sickened and pained by the sight of corpses, and whilst his carriage wheels passed over and mutilated them, he had tried to divert his mind by poetic fancies. But war always attracted him anew. We see the man whose books, written at a later period in his career, contain such store of delicate and profound insight into national psychology, studying, during the passage of the Niemen, the appearance and temperament of the soldiers of all lands who composed the Grand Army. But by the time Smolensk was reached he had had enough. From that town he writes:—

"How man changes! My old longing for novelty is quite gone. Since I have seen Milan and Italy, everything else repels me by its coarseness. Would you believe it? without any personal reason I am sometimes on the point of shedding tears. In this ocean of barbarism there is not a sound which finds its echo in my soul. Everything is coarse, foul, stinking, both literally and metaphorically. My one pleasure has been hearing a fellow, who is about as musical as I am pious, play a little on a piano which is terribly out of tune. Ambition has no longer any power over me; the most gorgeous order would be no compensation for what I am enduring. I represent to myself the summits on which my spirit dwells (planning books, listening to Cimarosa and loving Angela in a perfect climate) as beautiful heights; far below them on the plain lie the fetid marshes in which I am now sunk.... You will hardly believe it, but what really gives me pleasure is to attend to any Italian official business there is to transact. There has been some lately, and even though it is over, it continues to occupy my imagination like a romance."

In the diary he kept at Moscow we find traces of the same duality in his nature—the craving to occupy his imagination, and the desire to act and to be in the midst of action. During the great fire he writes: "The fire soon reached the house we had left. Our carriages stood for five or six hours on the boulevard. Tired of this inaction, I went to look at the fire, and spent an hour or two with Joinville ... we drank a bottle of wine, which restored us to life. I read a few lines of an English translation of *Paul et Virginie*_ which restored me to a feeling of intellectual life in the midst of the universal barbarism."

During the terrible retreat through Russia, Beyle was superintendent of the depots at Minsk, Vitebsk, and Mohilof; he did good service by supplying the army as it passed Orcha with provisions for three days, the only provisions served out to it between Moscow and Beresina. The coolness and determination which had characterised him from his childhood did not desert him now. It has been often told how, on one of the most calamitous days of the campaign, he made his appearance in Daru's quarters cleanly shaved and carefully dressed, and was greeted by his chief with the words: "You are a brave man, Monsieur Beyle; you have shaved to-day."

During the retreat he lost everything—horses, carriages, clothes, and money—even the sum with which he was provided for emergencies. Before he left, his sister had replaced all the buttons on one of his overcoats with pieces of twenty and forty francs, carefully covered with cloth. On his return she asked him if they had been useful to him. After much reflection, he remembered that somewhere in the neighbourhood of Wilna he had presented his coat to a waiter, considering it worn out. The incident is a characteristic one; for Beyle, who was quite as eager to excel in diplomacy as in literature, was extremely prudent, but at the same time extremely forgetful.

He re-entered on his official duties in Paris; in 1813, he was, as a member of the Emperor's staff, at Mainz, Erfurt, Lützen, and Dresden; and for a time he held the appointment of Commissary-General in Silesia. His health giving way, he went to recruit it by the Lake of Como, in the region to which he always returned as to an earthly Paradise, and where, as usual, he passed in blissful idleness such leisure as the pursuit of a happy love affair left him. He was once more actively employed under Napoleon in 1814; but the Emperor's fall blasted all his hopes of a successful official career. He lost everything—his appointment, his income, his position in society; and he bore the loss not merely without complaint, but with cheerfulness, resigning himself with philosophic equanimity to being henceforward simply the cosmopolitan, dilettante, and author.

From 1814 till 1821, except for a short absence in 1817, Beyle was an inhabitant of his beloved Milan. He did not leave it even during the Hundred Days, being convinced that Napoleon's fortunes were irretrievable. A passionate lover of Italian music and singing, he spent happy evenings at the La Scala Theatre. He was received into the best society of the town; in Count Porro's house, or in Lodovico de Brême's box at the theatre, he made acquaintance with the Italian authors and patriots—Silvio Pellico, Manzoni, &c.; and also with such famous travellers as Byron, Madame de Staël, Wilhelm Schlegel, and a whole host of other English and German notabilities. An attachment which lasted for several years made him, what he was capable of being, perfectly happy; but this happiness was rudely disturbed in the summer of 1821 by his summary banishment from Milan. The Austrian police suspected him, quite groundlessly, of intrigues with the Carbonari.

He returned once more to Paris in a state of the deepest dejection; and it was during the height of his grief at being separated from the woman he loved, that he wrote his famous book, *De l'Amour*. Hitherto he had written, or at least published, nothing but biographies of Haydn and Mozart, which were only adaptations of Italian and German works, and the *Histoire de la Peinture en Italie*, with its proudly humble dedication to the captive of St. Helena. None of these books had made any sensation; but the last-mentioned had won him the goodwill and friendship of De Tracy, the philosopher. Beyle at first felt himself completely isolated in Paris. Many of his old associates under the Empire were banished; others had forfeited his regard by cringing to the new Government. At De Tracy's house, however, he met the best of the good society of the day—Lafayette, the Comte de Ségur, Benjamin Constant, &c., &c.; and at such houses as Giuditta Pasta, the famous opera-singer's, he met the young authors, men like Mérimée and Jaquemont. Beyle remained in Paris, except for short visits to England and Italy, until 1830. From 1830 until his death in 1842, he was again in government employment, holding posts which were practically sinecures. The first year he was Consul at Trieste, a place which he disliked, and the rest of the time at Civita Vecchia, which was almost equivalent to being in Rome. Here he lived under the sky he had always loved and among the people he preferred to all others, but his solitude and idleness were unutterably wearisome to him. To such of his countrymen as sought him out and suited him, he was an amiable and most efficient cicerone; but he longed to be back in Paris, although the old martial spirit of the Empire forbade him to acknowledge himself a Frenchman after Louis Philippe's Government yielded (in 1840) to the verdict of Europe on the Eastern question without striking a blow. During the last years of his life his health was bad. He died suddenly of apoplexy while on leave in Paris.[2]

---

[1] Expressions of Gottfried Keller's.

[2] The inscription on his tombstone in the cemetery of Montmartre, directions for which were contained in his will, shows what a hold Milan had on him to the last. It runs:

ARRIGO BEYLE
MILANESE
SCRISSE
AMO
VISSE

ANN. LIX M. II
MORI IL XXIII MARZO
M.D.CCC.XLII.

XIX

BEYLE

Henri Beyle's is, without doubt, one of the most complex minds of the rich period to which he belongs. What chiefly distinguishes him from his brethren of the Romantic School is his direct intellectual descent from the severely rational sensationalistic philosophers of the eighteenth century. Not even in any short youthful or transition period is there a trace to be found in his soul of the Romantic reverence for religious tradition so prevalent in his day. All his life long he was the unfaltering philosophic antagonist of everything in the great Romantic movement which was of the nature of a reaction against the spirit of the eighteenth century. He was absolutely uninfluenced by Chateaubriand and Madame de Staël—was neither a colourist like the former nor eloquent like the latter; and absolutely uninfluenced by André Chénier, Hugo, and Lamartine—for he was wanting in the sense of metre, and was neither lyric nor pathetic. His models as a Romantic writer were not French; and his allegiance to Condillac and Helvetius, philosphers despised by the Romanticists of every country, never for a moment wavered, even at the time when the prejudice against them was universal.

He was a passionate atheist; that is to say, there was in his conviction that the world is not governed by any God the Father, as it were an element of enmity towards the being in whom he did not believe, an indignation at the horrors of life, which found expression in the sad and witty saying: "What excuses God is that he does not exist." Beyle never let slip an opportunity of displaying his dislike of so-called revealed religion. If he had occasion to write "the one true religion," he did not forget to add in parenthesis "(the reader's);" and when he touched on the subject of Christian morality, he was fond of remarking that it might be reduced to the calculation: "It is advisable not to eat truffles; they give you a stomach-ache."

As moral philosopher (and private individual) he was a pronounced epicurean. He acknowledged no mainspring of action but self-interest, that is to say, the desire of pleasure and the fear of pain; and, in his opinion, no other was necessary to explain even so-called heroic actions, since fear of self-contempt—*i.e.* fear of something that is painful—is quite enough to make a man, let us say, jump into the water to save another.[1] By virtuous actions, he understands actions which are attended with inconvenience or suffering to the actor, but are beneficial to others.

Psychological phenomena engrossed his attention to the exclusion of everything else; as the observant traveller, as the student of old chronicles, as the author of novels and stories, he was the psychologist, and that alone. His one constant study was the human soul, and he is one of the first modern thinkers who regard history as being in its essence psychology. But to Beyle, with his utilitarian philosophy, the science of the human soul and the science of happiness are one and the same thing. All his thoughts turn on happiness. By a man's character he understood the particular manner of seeking happiness which had become habitual to him; and the reason of his pronounced partiality to the Italians as a people was, that Italian men and women seemed to him to have found the most certain and direct way to happiness.

A man of an independent, original, ardent nature, he regarded it as the first condition of happiness to be one's self. Everywhere throughout his works we find, endlessly varied, the same warning: Be distrustful! Believe only what you have seen; admire nothing that does not appeal to you personally; always take it for granted that your neighbour has been paid to lie! The charge which he never wearies of bringing against the French is that they are too vain to know what happiness is, or rather, that they are unsusceptible to any higher happiness than that of gratified vanity, which he, personally, values very cheaply. According to Beyle, the Frenchman is perpetually asking his neighbour if he, the questioner, is feeling pleasure, is happy, &c.; he dare not decide the question for himself. The fear of not being like others, or of what others will say, is, in Beyle's opinion, the Frenchman's dominant feeling. He himself, on the contrary, not content with his natural originality, cherished a dislike of resembling others which led him into oddity and affectation. The man who was constantly ridiculing others for thinking of the opinion of their neighbours, who loved and exalted frankness, self-forgetfulness, straightforwardness, and simple-mindedness, was constantly keeping guard over himself, observing himself, prescribing to himself such duties as defiance of this neighbour, revenge upon that—and not neglecting to fulfil them. The thought of what his neighbour might say or do plagued him quite as much as it plagued the veriest philistine, merely with this difference, that the philistine was haunted by the thought of his neighbour because he desired to imitate him, Beyle because he wished to defy or avoid him. This eternal antagonism to the philistine is a genuinely Romantic trait. And it is also characteristically Romantic, that the man who was perpetually preaching and lauding naturalness and unconstraint should all his life have had a passion for concealment, disguise, and mystification, for hiding his personal experiences and thoughts under layer upon layer of wrappings and drapery.

Beyle's early years had been passed in profound spiritual solitude. An overflowing fount of feeling had been turned inwards. The child who had lost his mother, and who hated and was hated by his

father, learned early to look upon himself as different from others—no doubt also as superior to others, though he defined his superiority as unlikeness.[2] He was conscious that this unlikeness would exclude him from any general sympathy and prevent his being generally understood. Hence his desire that it were possible for him to write his books in a language which should only be understood by a chosen few—a sacred language. Hence also his wish to find "un lecteur unique, unique dans tous les sens," and his dedication of *La Chartreuse de Parme*: "To the happy few."

This, too, was the real source of the inclination to concealment. Not only did Beyle publish all his books under a pseudonym (all, with one exception, under the name of *De Stendhal*, presumably derived from Stendal in Prussia, the birthplace of Winckelmann), but in many of them, *De l'Amour*, among the rest, the pseudonymous author assumes any number of second pseudonyms. Any sentiment which he does not care to acknowledge as his own, any anecdote which might shed light upon his private life, is laid to the account of an Albéric, or a Lisio, or the amiable Colonel So and So. And he has given himself as many occupations as names; now he is a cavalry officer, now an ironmonger, now a customs officer, now a commercial traveller; here he figures as a man, there as a woman; at one time he is of noble, at another of plebeian birth; at one time English, at another Italian. He would have liked to write in a cipher language for the initiated. This delight in leading his readers on the wrong track is in part to be ascribed to the secretiveness of the diplomatist; but in his private correspondence it was also due to a suspicion of the police which almost amounted to a mania. In his youth Beyle had made acquaintance with both Napoleon's and the Austrian police, and he always retained a fear of his letters being seized and opened. Therefore he hardly ever signed a private letter with his name. I have counted in his correspondence more than seventy pseudonymous signatures, varying from the strangest to the most ordinary names—Conickphile, Arnolphe II, C. de Seyssel, Chopin d'Ornonville, Toricelli, François Durand, &c., &c. He sometimes subscribes himself captain, sometimes marquis, sometimes engineer; sometimes gives his age, or the name of his street and number of his house. Grenoble he calls Culars, Civita Vecchia, Abeille. It amuses him at times to append a misleading indication of locality to his fictitious signature: for example, Théodore Bernard (du Rhône); he actually signs such a document as a public petition to Louis Philippe's Government for a new coat-of-arms for France:

Olagnier,
De Voiron (Isère).

Such satisfaction did it give him to make himself unrecognisable and hold himself aloof, that the words, *Odi profanum vulgus et arceo*, may be employed to express what to him was certainly one condition of happiness.

What did he himself regard as its conditions?—In his early days, evidently daring action and passionate love. The thrill with which a man, in his unbounded devotion to a cause or another man, risks his life; and the tremor communicated to the soul by happy love—these to him were the supreme moments of human existence. Writing of Milan in the introduction to *La Chartreuse*, he observes characteristically: "The departure of the last Austrian regiment marked the downfall of the old ideas. It became the fashion for men to hazard their lives. They saw that in order to be happy after centuries of hypocrisy and vapidity, they must love something with real passion, and be capable, on occasion, of risking their lives."

These two passions, love of war and love of woman, were in Beyle's case only two expressions of one fundamental passion, namely, love for what he was wont to call *le divin imprévu*—the passion which makes a poet of him. How war, especially war as conducted by Napoleon, satisfied his craving, requires no explanation. How women, and especially Italian women, satisfied it, Beyle tells us himself. In a letter from Milan, dated 4th September 1820, he writes: "As I have spent fifteen years in Paris, nothing on earth leaves me so completely indifferent as a pretty Frenchwoman. And my dislike of the commonplace and the affected often carries me beyond mere indifférence. When I meet a young Frenchwoman who has had the misfortune to have been well brought up, I am at once reminded of my own home and my sisters' upbringing; I foresee not only all her movements, but the most fugitive shades of her thoughts. That is why I am partial to bad company; it offers far more of the unforeseen. If I know myself at all, this is the chord in my soul which people and things in Italy set vibrating—the women first and foremost. Imagine my delight when I found out, what no writer of travels had deprived me of the pleasure of discovering, namely, that in that country it is in good society that there is most of the unforeseen. Nothing deters these remarkable geniuses except want of money or pure impossibility; if prejudices still exist, it is only in the lower classes."

In other words, what Beyle loves best is reckless energy, both in action and emotion—energy, whether revealing itself as the irresistibleness of the military genius or the boundless tenderness of the loving woman. Therefore he, the cold, dry cynic, positively worshipped Napoleon.[3] Therefore he loved the women of Milan. Therefore he understood and depicted the life of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in Italy much better even than modern Italian life. A work which he long purposed writing was a *History of Energy in Italy*; and it is not too much to say that his Italian Chronicles, copied, adapted, or imitated from old manuscripts, are equivalent to a psychological analysis of Italian energy.

One utterance will suffice to show that the same love of the unforeseen which had irresistibly attracted him to the war, made of him, when the war was over, a traveller, an emigrant, a cosmopolitan. In a letter in which he tells that he has been transferred to another post and is going unwillingly because of the tender ties which bind him to the place where he is living, he

expressly mentions the pleasure which he nevertheless involuntarily feels, "the moment there is any talk of travelling and seeing new life." And it is equally evident that the same love of the unforeseen, the same strong personality, the same recklessness, or, taking it in a profounder sense, genius, which attracted him to woman and made him love more passionately and tenderly than others, reveals itself in the devotion to music and plastic art which made of him the enthusiastic dilettante, cicerone, and biographer. His love for Cimarosa and Correggio, Ariosto and Byron, was a passion. Take his attitude to Byron. His published criticism of the great English poet was severe and cold; he was haughty in personal intercourse with him, disputed with him on the subject of Napoleon, &c.; he actually left unanswered a most charming letter which Byron wrote him seven years after their meeting, because he fancied there was a trace of hypocrisy in the English poet's defence of Sir Walter Scott. But observe the way in which, when he is writing unreservedly, he describes his feelings on the occasion of his first meeting with Byron: "I was at the time wildly enthusiastic on the subject of *Lara*. My second look no longer showed me Lord Byron as he really was, but the author of *Lara* as I thought he ought to be. When the conversation in the box flagged, Monsieur de Brême tried to get me to speak; but I simply could not; I was too full of awe and tenderness. If I had dared, I should have kissed Lord Byron's hand and burst into tears.... My tenderness made me urge him to take a carriage."[4]

Many other men in every age and country have loved war and travel, women and art; but what is peculiarly characteristic and distinctly modern in Beyle is his tendency and his ability to examine himself in the moment of action or of passion. He is constantly observing himself, has, so to speak, constantly his hand on his pulse; and with unfailing coolness he renders account to himself of his condition under all different circumstances, and draws a whole chain of general inferences from it. Let us follow him into a battle. During the cannonade at Bautzen he writes in his journal:

"Between twelve and three we see remarkably well all that can be seen of a battle, that is to say, nothing. The entertainment consists in one's being slightly [the "slightly" is very characteristic] excited by the certainty that something dreadful is happening before one's eyes. The majestic roar of the cannons contributes greatly to this effect; if they made a whistling sound I do not believe that the same degree of emotion would be produced. The whistle might be as terrible, but could not be so grand."

Or let us listen to him when he is in love. He writes:—

> OF THE BIRTH OF LOVE.
>
> What takes place in the soul is:
>
> 1. Admiration.
>
> 2. One says to one's self: "What happiness it would be to kiss her, to be kissed by her, &c."
>
> 3. Hope.
>
> One studies the perfections of the object of one's admiration ... the eyes of even the most reserved women flush in the moment of hope; the passion is so vehement, the pleasure so ardent, that it betrays itself by unmistakable signs.
>
> 4. Love is born.
>
> To love is to have pleasure in seeing, touching, perceiving by all the senses, in as close contact as possible, a lovable person who loves us.
>
> 5. The first crystallisation begins.
>
> One takes pleasure in adorning with a thousand perfections the woman of whose love one is sure; one rehearses all the details of one's happiness with infinite satisfaction.
>
> Allow the brain of a lover to work for twenty-four hours, and the result will resemble what happens at Salzburg when a leafless branch is let down into the deserted depths of the salt mines. When it is drawn up again two or three months later, it is covered with sparkling crystals; the smallest twigs, those that are not thicker than a titmouse's claw, are decked with myriads of dazzling, twinkling diamonds; the original branch is unrecognisable. What I denominate crystallisation is the operation of the mind which, from everything that presents itself, draws the discovery of fresh perfections in the beloved object. A traveller speaks of the coolness of the orange groves near Genoa during the scorching summer heat—what a pleasure it would be to enjoy their coolness with her!... This phenomenon which I take the liberty of naming crystallisation, is a product of the nature which ordains that we shall feel pleasure and that the blood shall rush to our heads, of the feeling that our pleasure increases with the perfections of the beloved object, and of the idea: she is mine. The savage has not time to proceed further than the first step. He feels pleasure, but the energy of his brain is employed in the chase of the deer which is to provide him with food.... The man who is passionately in love sees every perfection in the woman he loves; nevertheless his attention may still be distracted, for the mind tires of everything that is monotonous, even of perfect happiness. But then comes what rivets attention:
>
> 6. Doubt is born.
>
> After ten or twelve looks or any other series of actions have inspired the lover with hope and strengthened his hope ... he demands more positive proofs of his happiness. Coldness, indifference, or even anger is displayed if he shows too much assurance....

He begins to doubt his certainty of the happiness he had promised himself. He determines to solace himself with the other pleasures of life, but finds that they no longer exist for him. Fear of a dreadful misfortune attacks him, and his attention is concentrated.

7. Second crystallisation.

Its diamonds are confirmations of the idea: She loves me. Every quarter of an hour during the night which follows the birth of doubt, the lover, after a moment of terrible suffering, says to himself: Yes, she loves me; and he discovers new charms. Then doubt attacks him again; he sits up, forgets to breathe, asks himself: But does she really love me? And in the midst of these distressing and delightful reflections the poor lover feels with ever greater certainty: She would give me pleasures which she alone in all the world is capable of giving me."

Few such acute and delicate analyses of a passion exist. Not without reason have Beyle's descriptions of what happens in the human soul when it is under the influence of a passion, reminded his best critics, Taine and Bourget, of the third part of Spinoza's Ethics, the masterly *De Affectibus*. In this soldier, administrator, diplomatist, and lover there was a good deal of the philosopher. He endeavoured to resolve every phenomenon of emotional life into its elements, and, on the other hand, he showed the connection between the ideas and emotions, which, united into a system, constitute the disposition and character of the individual. He paid as much attention to the comparative strength of the emotions as to the variety of their connections and concatenations; he traced peculiarities of character to the deepest lying national and climatic causes; he sketched a psychology of race; and, though he did not adhere to strictly scientific methods, there was a strong scientific tendency in his psychological studies. He loved to define by the aid of numbers, measure, weight. Writing of a king's visit to a little town, he describes the procession, the Te Deum and clouds of incense within the church, the salvoes of artillery outside, and concludes: "The peasants were beside themselves with joy and piety; *one such day undoes the work of a hundred issues of the Jacobin newspapers*." In one of his books, an exiled revolutionist is telling how the revolt he headed failed because he would not consent to the execution of three men, and would not divide among his followers seven or eight millions of francs contained in a box of which he had the key. "Who wills the end must will the means," says Beyle's hero; "if, instead of being an atom, I were a power, *I would hang three men to save four*," [5]—a stupid and indefensible theory, by the way, based on the childish premise that any four men are of more value than any three.

It is plain enough that in Beyle's case the final condition of happiness was understanding. The real aim and object of all his endeavour was a clear understanding of the state of his own mind, and insight into the mechanism of the human soul generally. He was of opinion that prosperity, happiness in love, happiness generally, clears the understanding and sharpens the critical faculty, but was equally convinced that nothing contributes so much to make a man unhappy as want of clear-sightedness. In a letter to a friend, dated Moscow, 1812, he writes characteristically: "The happiness you now enjoy ought to lead you back naturally to the principles of pure *Beylism*. I read Rousseau's *Confessions* last week. It was simply for want of two or three *Beylean* principles that he was so unhappy. *The mania of seeing duties and virtues everywhere* made his style pedantic, his life miserable. After three weeks of friendly intercourse with a man—crash! the duties of friendship, &c." Two years afterwards the man in question has forgotten him; Rousseau seeks and finds some pessimistic explanation. *Beylism* would have told him: "Two bodies approach each other; warmth and a fermentation result; but every such state is transitory. It is a flower to be voluptuously enjoyed." These words contain a fragment of excellent practical philosophy, and would testify to an unusually well-balanced mind if the practice of their writer's life had corresponded to his theory. But although Beyle was by nature a robust sensualist, and had accustomed himself to a cynical boldness of expression (he shocked George Sand by his cynicism when she and De Musset met him on their way to Italy), and although as a thinker he was what he required a philosopher to be, namely, clear-headed, unimpressionable, and free from illusions (he used to say that to have been a banker was to have gone through the best preparatory school for philosophy), there lay behind the robust temperament and the dryness of the logician an artistic receptivity to every impression, an irritability and feminine sensitiveness which did not fall far short of Rousseau's. And this sensitiveness Beyle retained to the end of his life. In the autobiography (*Vie de Henri Brulard*) which was found amongst his papers, we come upon the following confession: "My sensitiveness is excessive; what only grazes another man's skin draws blood from me. Such was I in 1799; such am I in 1840. But I have learned to hide it all under an irony which the vulgar do not understand."

Seldom has a character combined so great a love of spontaneity and straightforwardness with so much calculation and subterfuge; seldom has a mind been so truthful and at the same time so addicted to dissimulation, so ardent in its hatred of hypocrisy and yet so lacking in openness and straightforwardness.

---

[1] See Beyle's dissertation on the subject in a most interesting letter, dated 28th December 1829.

[2] In a letter of July 16, 1813, he writes: "If the so-called superiority is only a superiority of some few degrees, it makes its possessor amiable and attractive to others—see Fontenelle. If it is more, it destroys every relation between him and other men. This is the unfortunate position in which the superior man, or, to speak more correctly, the man

who is different from others, finds himself. Those who surround him can contribute nothing to his happiness. The praise of all these people would very soon disgust me, and their criticism would gall me."

And in the fourth chapter of *La Chartreuse de Parme* we read: "His comrades found out that Fabrice was very *unlike* themselves, at which they took umbrage; he, on the contrary, began to have a very friendly feeling towards them."

[3] In the letter which he wrote, but did not send, to Byron, he writes of Napoleon as "le héros que j'ai adoré." And a letter of 10th July 1818 contains the following lyrical outburst—probably the only one in his twenty volumes: "O Sainte-Hélène! roc désormais si célèbre, tu es l'écueil de la gloire anglaise." We are reminded of Hugo and Heine.

[4] For references to Lord Byron in Beyle's works, see the essay "Lord Byron en Italie" in the volume entitled *Racine et Shakespeare*, 261; and *Lettres à ses Amis*, i. 273, &c.: ii. 71, &c.

[5] *Rouge et Noir*, i. 105; ii. 45.

XX

BEYLE

Prior to 1830 Beyle published no imaginative work of any importance except a novel entitled *Armance*, an unsuccessful book, the hero of which, a gifted young man, makes the woman he loves unhappy, because he suffers from a half-physical, half-mental ailment, the nature of which is not precisely defined, but which appears to resemble that which played a part in the lives of Swift and Kierkegaard. The year 1830, epoch-making in history, is also epoch-making in Beyle's literary career. It is the year in which he writes or plans both his great novels—*Le Rouge et le Noir*, published in 1831, and *La Chartreuse de Parme*, which was not completed till 1839, when it was published simultaneously with the most important of his Italian Chronicles, *L'Abbesse de Castro*.

Both of the novels deal with the period immediately succeeding Napoleon's fall, and both deal with it in the same spirit. The motto of both might be the passage from De Musset's *Confession d'un Enfant du Siècle* quoted in *The Reaction in France*: "And when the young men talked of glory they were answered: Become priests! and when they talked of honour: Become priests! and when they talked of hope, of love, of power, of life, it was always the same: Become priests!" The scene of *Rouge et Noir* is laid in France, that of *La Chartreuse* in Italy, but in both books the principal character is a young man with a secret enthusiasm for Napoleon, who would have been happy if he could have fought and distinguished himself under his hero in the bright sunlight of life, but who, now that that hero has fallen, has no chance of making a career except by playing the hypocrite. In this art the two young men gradually develop a remarkable degree of skill. Julien and Fabrice are cut out for cavalry officers; nevertheless both become ecclesiastics; the one passes through a Catholic seminary, the other rises to be a bishop. Not without reason have Beyle's novels been called handbooks of hypocrisy. The fundamental idea inspiring them is the profound disgust and indignation which the spectacle of triumphant hypocrisy aroused in their author. Desiring to work off this feeling he gave vent to it by simply, without any display of indignation, representing hypocrisy as the ruling power of the day, to which every one who desired to rise was compelled to do homage. And he tries to play the modern Macchiavelli by frequently applauding his heroes when their attempts at impenetrable hypocrisy succeed, and expressing disapproval when they allow themselves to be surprised or carried away, and unguardedly show themselves as they are. A certain unpleasant forcedness is inseparable from this ironic style of narration.[1]

As Beyle's was essentially a reasoning mind, with a gift of purely philosophic observation, externalities did not impress him strongly, and he had little skill in depicting them. His one interest is in emotional and intellectual processes, and, himself an adept in the observation of these processes, he endows almost all his characters with the same skill. They as a rule have an understanding of what is happening in their own souls which far surpasses that derived by ordinary mortals from experience. This conditions the peculiar construction of Beyle's novels, which consist in great part of connected monologues that are at times several pages long. He reveals all the silent working of his characters' minds, and lends words to their inmost thoughts. His monologues are never the lyric, dithyrambic outbursts which George Sand's often are; they are the questions and answers—short and concise, though entering into minute details—by which silent reflection progresses.

The fundamental characteristic of Beyle's principal personages, who, measured by the current standards of morality, have no conscience and no morals, is, that they have evolved a moral standard for themselves. This is what every human being ought to be capable of doing, but what only the most highly developed attain to; and it is this capacity of theirs which gives Beyle's characters their remarkable superiority over other characters whom we have met with in books or in real life. They keep an ideal, which they have created for themselves, constantly before their eyes, endeavour to follow it, and have no peace until they have won self-respect. Hence Julien, who is executed for an atrocious attempt to murder a defenceless woman, is able to comfort himself in the hour of his death with the thought that his life has not been a lonely life; the idea of "duty" has been constantly present with him.

It is evident that Beyle found this feature which he has bestowed on his heroes in his own character. In a letter written in 1820, after remarking that he detests large hotels because of the incivility shown in them to travellers, he adds: "A day in the course of which I have been in a passion is a lost day for me; and yet when I am insolently treated I imagine that I shall be despised if I do not get angry." This is precisely the manner in which Julien and Fabrice reason. With some such thought in his mind Julien compels himself to lay his hand caressingly on Madame de Rênal's, Fabrice compels himself defiantly to repeat the true but contemptuous words he had used in speaking of the flight of the French soldiers at Waterloo. Julien is French, and acts with full consciousness of what he is about; Fabrice is Italian and naïve, but they both possess the quality to which we may give the name of moral productivity. Julien says to himself in prison: "The duty which I, rightly or wrongly, prescribed to myself, has been like the trunk of a strong tree against which I have leaned during the storm"; the light-hearted Fabrice, reproaching himself with a momentary feeling of fear, says to himself: "My aunt tells me that what I need most is to learn to forgive myself. I am always comparing myself with a perfect model, a being who cannot possibly exist." Mademoiselle de la Mole in *Rouge et Noir* and Mosca in *La Chartreuse de Parme* are distinguished by the same superiority and self-reliance. Mosca, a character in whom Beyle's contemporaries naïvely saw a portrait of Metternich, is, in spite of his position as prime minister of a small legitimist state, quite as free from prejudice in his views of the system he serves as Beyle's young heroes are. The object of his private hero-worship is Napoleon, in whose army he held a commission in his youth. He jests as he puts on the broad yellow ribbon of his order. "It is not for us to destroy the prestige of power; the French newspapers are doing that quite fast enough; *the reverence mania* will scarcely last out our time."

But whether the personages described be eminently or only ordinarily gifted human beings, the manner in which their inner life is revealed is unique. We not only see into their souls, but we perceive (as in the writings of no other author) the psychological laws which oblige them to act or feel as they do. No other novelist offers his readers so much of the pleasure which is produced by perfect understanding.

Madame de Renal loves Julien, her children's tutor. We are told that "she discovered with shame and alarm that she loved her children more than ever *because they were so devoted to Julien*." Mathilde de la Mole tortures Julien by confiding to him her feelings for her former lovers. "If molten lead had been injected into his veins he would not have suffered so much. How was the poor fellow to guess that it was *because she was talking to him* that it gave Mademoiselle de la Mole so much pleasure to recall her flirtations with Monsieur de Caylus and Monsieur de Luz?" Both these passages elucidate a psychological law.

Julien has entered the Church from ambitious motives, and secretly detests the profession he has embraced. On the occasion of some festival he sees a young bishop kneeling in the village church, surrounded by charming young girls who are lost in admiration of his beautiful lace, his distinguished manners, and his refined, gentle face. "At this sight the last remnant of our hero's reason vanished. *At that moment he would, in all good faith, have fought in the cause of the Inquisition*." The addition "in all good faith" is especially admirable. A parallel passage is to be found in *La Chartreuse*. After the death of a Prince whom he has always despised and who has actually been poisoned by his (Mosca's) mistress, Mosca has been obliged to put himself at the head of the troops and quell a revolt against the young Prince, whose character is as despicable as his predecessor's. In the letter in which he communicates the occurrence to his mistress, he writes: "But the comical part of the matter is that I, at my age, actually had a moment of enthusiasm whilst I was making my speech to the guard and tearing the epaulettes from the shoulders of that coward, General P. *At that moment I would, without hesitation, have given my life for the Prince*. I confess now that it would have been a very foolish way of ending it." In both these passages we are shown with remarkable sagacity how an artificial enthusiasm dazzles and is, as it were, caught by infection.

No other novelist approaches Beyle in the gift of unveiling the secret struggles of ideas and of the emotions which the ideas produce. He shows us, as if through a microscope, or in an anatomical preparation where the minutest veins are made visible by the injection of colouring matter, the fluctuations of the feelings of happiness and unhappiness in acting, suffering human beings, and also their relative strength. Mosca has received an anonymous letter which tells him that his mistress loves another. This information, which he has several reasons for believing to be correct, at first utterly unmans him. Then, as a sensible man and a diplomatist, he involuntarily begins to take the letter itself into consideration and to speculate as to its probable writer. He determines that it has been composed by the Prince. "This problem solved, *the little feeling of pleasure produced by the obviously correct guess* was soon effaced by the return in full force of the painful mental apparition of his rival's fresh, youthful grace." Beyle has not neglected to note the momentary interruption of the pangs of jealousy by the satisfaction of discovery.—In the course of a few days Julien is to be executed. Meanwhile he is receiving constant visits from the woman he loves, but from whom he has been separated for years, and is absorbed by love to the exclusion of all thought of his imminent fate." One strange effect of this strong and perfectly unfeigned passion was *that Madame de Renal almost shared his carelessness and gentle gaiety*. This last bold touch speaks to me of extraordinarily profound observation. Beyle has correctly felt and expressed the power of a happy, absorbing passion to banish all gloomy thoughts (even the thought of certain death) as soon as they attempt to intrude themselves; he knows that passion wrestling with the idea of approaching calamity renders it powerless, when it does not succeed in dismissing it as utterly incredible. It is such passages as these which make other novelists seem shallow in comparison with Beyle.

His characters are never simple, straightforward beings; yet he manages to impart to them, to the women as well as the men, a peculiar imprint of nobility. They possess a certain genuine, though distorted heroism, a certain strength of aspiration which elevates all their emotions; and in the hour of trial they show that they have finer feelings and stouter hearts than the generality of human beings. Observe some of the little characteristics with which he stamps his women. Of Madame de Rénal in *Rouge et Noir* we are told: "Hers was one of those noble and enthusiastic souls which feel almost as keen remorse for not having performed a magnanimous action of which they have perceived the possibility, as for having committed a crime." Mathilde de la Mole says: "I feel myself on a plane with everything that is audacious and great.... What great action has not seemed foolishness at the moment when it was being ventured on? It is not till it is accomplished that it seems possible to the ordinary mortal." In these two short quotations, two uncommon female characters of opposite types, the self-sacrificing and the foolhardy, are outlined with the hand of a master. We feel that Beyle was absolutely correct when, in his letter to Balzac, he defines his artistic method as follows: "I take some person or other whom I know well; I allow him or her to retain the fundamental traits of his or her character—*ensuite je lui donne plus d'esprit*."

Of the two novels, *Le Rouge et le Noir*, the scene of which is laid in France, is unmistakably the better; in *La Chartreuse de Parme* we only occasionally feel that we are treading the firm ground of reality. Beyle constructed his own Italy upon the foundation of the fantastically interpreted experiences of his youth, and upon us moderns this Italy produces an impression of untrustworthiness. Both in his novel and in his essays he shows that the Italian mind, by reason of its quality of vivid imagination, is much more plagued by suspicions and delusions than the French, but that in compensation its pleasures are more intense and more lasting, and that it possesses a keener sense of beauty and less vanity. We are every now and then surprised by observations in the domain of racial psychology, which, provided they are correct (which I believe them to be), are extraordinarily acute. We are told, for instance, of the Duchess of Sanseverina, that, although she herself had employed poison to make away with an enemy, she was almost beside herself with horror when she heard that the man she loved was in danger of being poisoned. "The moral reflection did not occur to her which would at once have suggested itself to a woman educated in one of those religions of the North which permit personal examination: 'I employed poison and am therefore punished by poison.' In Italy this species of reflection in a moment of tragic passion would seem as foolishly out of place as a pun would in Paris in similar circumstances." What evidently attracted Beyle most profoundly in the Italian character was its purely pagan basis, which none of the ancient or medieval religions had really affected. But, in spite of the excellence of its racial psychology, *La Chartreuse de Parme* is less to the taste of the modern reader than *Le Rouge et le Noir* from the fact of its containing more of the purely extrinsic Romanticism of its day in the shape of disguises, poisonings and assassinations, prison and flight scenes, &c. A deeper-seated, intrinsic Romanticism is common to both books.

In many ways Beyle is extremely modern; his constant prophecy, "I shall be read about 1880," has been accurately fulfilled; nevertheless, both in his emotional life and in his delineation of character, he is distinctly a Romanticist. It is to be observed, however, that his Romanticism is the Romanticism of a powerful and of a critical mind; it is the element of enthusiasm to the verge of madness and of tenderness to the pitch of self-sacrifice, that is sometimes found in characters the distinguishing features of which are sense and firmness. In Beyle's essentially self-conscious characters this Romanticism acts like a powerful explosive. It is enclosed in a hard, firm body, but there it retains its power. A blow, and the dynamite shatters its casing and spreads death and destruction around—*vide* Julien, the Duchess of Sanseverina, &c. At times these characters appear rather to belong to that sixteenth century which Beyle studied so devoutly than to the nineteenth. Beyle himself remarks of Fabrice that his first inspiration was quite in the spirit of the sixteenth century; and Mathilde is represented as living her whole life in that spirit. But with this Romanticism of energy and daring deeds Beyle combines the form of Romantic enthusiasm peculiar to the France of 1830. His Julien, the gifted plebeian who is kept from rising by the spirit of the Restoration period, who feels himself eclipsed by the all-prevailing gilded mediocrity, is consumed by hunger and thirst for adventures and impressions, and employs, when he is reduced to impotent hatred, every possible means to raise himself above his original social position, but remains, even when he is for the moment successful, at war with his surroundings and unsatisfied. As the melancholic rebel, as the vengeance-breathing plebeian, as *l'homme malheureux en guerre avec la société* (Beyle's own name for him), he is a brother, about the same age but more prudent, of the step-children of society whom Hugo paints—Didier, Gilbert, Ruy Blas; of the hero of Alexandre Dumas' youth, Antony the bastard; of De Musset's Frank, George Sand's Lélia, and Balzac's Rastignac.

As a stylist, Beyle is directly descended from the prose writers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. He formed his style upon Montesquieu's; he occasionally reminds us of Chamfort; he is an admirer of Paul Louis Courier, who, like himself, exchanged a military for a literary career, and whose perspicuous, classic simplicity of style strongly commended itself to him. But when Courier made it his chief aim to attain to perfect harmony and pellucidness of style, when, praising an ancient author, he said of him that he would have let Pompey win the battle of Pharsalus if he could thereby have rounded his own period better, he adopted the standpoint farthest removed from Beyle's. Beyle the stylist has no sense for either colour or form. He neither could nor would write for the eye; the picture was nothing to him in comparison with the thought; he never made even the slightest attempt to write in the manner of Chateaubriand or Hugo. And just as little did he appeal to the ear; poetic prose was an abomination to him; he detested the style of Madame de Staël's *Corinne*, and scoffed at that of George Sand's novels. It was in his

scorn of poetic eloquence that he penned the well-known sentence in his letter to Balzac: "When I was writing *La Chartreuse* I used to read two or three pages of the *Code civile* every morning, to help me to catch the proper tone and to be perfectly natural; I do not wish to fascinate the reader's mind by artificial means." An author could hardly express greater or more unreasonable contempt for the artistic. Nevertheless, Beyle has artistic qualities. Though the construction of his books is wretched—the drawing of them, so to speak, bad—many of the details are painted with a masterly touch. Though his style is not in the least musical—which is curious in the case of such a worshipper of Italian music—unforgettable sentences abound in his pages. He was not master of the art of writing a page, but he had the genius which sets its stamp on a word or a descriptive phrase. In this respect he is the antipodes of George Sand; her page is always much superior to her word; Beyle's word is far better than his page. He had a genuine admiration for Balzac, but a horror of his style. In *Mémoires d'un Touriste* he expresses the opinion that Balzac first wrote his novels in sensible language, and then decked them out in the ornamental Romantic style with such phrases as "The snow is falling in my heart," &c. Beyle's own style has the merits and the defects which are the inevitable results of his philosophic and abruptly intermittent mode of thought. It is rich in ideas and guiltless of ornamentation, but it is slipshod and jerky.[2] A horror of emptiness and vagueness is its distinguishing and truly great virtue; writing so full of well-digested matter as his is rare.

Beyle often said that only pedants and priests talk about death; he was not afraid of it, but he looked upon it as a sad and ugly thing of which it becomes us best to speak as little as possible. When in 1842 he died suddenly, as he had hoped he might, his name was almost unknown to the public. Only three people attended his funeral, at which not a word was spoken. Such notices of him as appeared in the newspapers, though well-intentioned, only proved how little understood he was by those who appreciated him most. But since then his fame has steadily increased. At first he was regarded as a more or less affectedly eccentric original; and at a later period, when his great gifts were acknowledged, he was still looked upon as an isolated figure, as a paradoxical, unfruitful genius. I, for my part, see in him not only one of the chief representatives of the generation of 1830, but a necessary link in the great intellectual movement of the century; for as a psychologist his successor and the continuer of his work was no less a man than Taine, and as an author his successor and disciple was Prosper Mérimée.[3]

---

[1] For example: "Julien's answers to these objections were very satisfactory as far as the actual words were concerned, but the tone in which he spoke and the ill-concealed fire which gleamed in his eyes made Monsieur Chélan uneasy. Yet we must not augur too unfavourably of Julien. He had found the very expressions which a crafty hypocrite would have used. This, at his age, was not bad. As to tone and gestures, it is to be remembered that he had lived among peasants and had had no opportunity of studying the great masters. Hardly had he had the privilege of seeing these said gentlemen than he became as admirable in the matter of gesture as in that of language." On another occasion Julien is dining with a brutally cruel governor of a prison. He feels ashamed of the company he is in; he says to himself that he too may some day attain to such a position, but only by committing the same base actions to which his companions have accustomed themselves. "O Napoleon!" he ejaculates, "how glorious was thy day, when men rose to fortune by the dangers of the battle-field! But think of doing it by basely adding to the sufferings of the unfortunate!" Beyle adds: "I confess that the weakness which Julien betrays in this monologue gives me a poor opinion of him. He would be a fit colleague of those gloved conspirators who aim at completely changing the destinies of a great country, but are determined not to have even the smallest scratch to reproach themselves with."

[2] The following consecutive sentences will show at a glance how well and how badly Beyle could write: "Ce raisonnement, si juste en apparence, acheva de jeter Mathilde hors d'elle-même. Cette âme altière, mais saturée de toute cette prudence sèche, *qui passe dans le grand monde pour peindre fidèlement le cœur humain*, n'était pas faite pour comprendre si vite le bonheur de se moquer de toute prudence qui peut être si vif pour une âme ardente." One has an idea what the writer means, although the sentence, apart from its clumsy construction, is not even logically correct. But immediately upon it follows one which astonishes us equally by its profundity and its wit: "Dans les hautes classes de la société de Paris, où Mathilde avait vécu, la passion ne peut que bien rarement se dépouiller de la prudence, et c'est du cinquième étage qu'on se jette par la fenêtre."

[3] The best appreciations of Beyle are Balzac's criticism of *La Chartreuse*; Taine's of *Rouge et Noir*; Mérimée's notice in the introduction to Beyle's *Correspondance inédite*, somewhat amplified in *Portraits historiques*; Colomb's biographical essay; Sainte-Beuve's two articles in the *Causeries du Lundi*, T. 9; Bussiere's article in *Revue des deux Mondes* of Jan. 15,1843; Zola's in *Les Romanciers naturalists*; and Paul Bourget's in *Revue Nouvelle*, August 15, 1882. Alfred de Bougy's *Stendhal* is mere plagiarism and self-assertion.

XXI

MÉRIMÉE

Readers of the present generation—familiar with Victor Hugo's contemptuous allusion to Mérimée in *L'histoire d'une Crime*, and apt to see in Hugo only the rhetorically poetic republican,

in Mérimée the polished, sarcastic secretary of the Courts of Love of the Second Empire—find it difficult to realise that these two men, whom literary and political antipathies in course of time separated so widely, belonged in their youth to the same camp, and associated not merely on peaceful but on friendly terms. On one of the bright spring days of Romanticism, the all-seeing sun beheld the studiously correct author of *Mateo Falcone* in shirt-sleeves and apron in Victor Hugo's kitchen, where, surrounded by the whole family, he gave the cook a successful demonstration in the art of preparing *macaroni à l'italienne*. And we know that on a certain festive evening Hugo, possibly roused to enthusiasm by that same excellent macaroni, made the applicable and flattering anagram, "M. Première Prose," out of the name Prosper Mérimée.[1]

Victor Hugo himself, at a later period, would have utterly denied the applicability of the anagram (when Mérimée's sober style happened to be praised in his hearing, he ejaculated, "The sobriety of a weak stomach!"), but it may safely be maintained that it exactly expresses the opinion of the oldest living generation of Frenchmen. In the estimation of the elderly cultured man of the world, no style surpasses Prosper Mérimée's.

MÉRIMÉE

Note that I say man of the world; for precision, simple naturalness, and brevity, though they may be admired by the sensuous and picturesque prose authors of a later day and their public, are not the qualities most highly valued by them. The ordinary well-educated Frenchman, on the other hand, likes a story and dislikes description; he is, unconsciously, a firm adherent of the principles propounded in Lessing's *Laokoon*, a genuine worshipper of common-sense, who sneers at the Romantic and naturalistic mania for description, and has always infinitely preferred Voltaire's style to Diderot's. The writer who, without confusing his general impression, presents as many facts as possible in the narrowest possible space, approaches the artistic ideal of the average educated man, nay, attains it when, as in Mérimée's case, he combines with this compactness absolute self-control in the matter of tone and style. The older generation in France, to whom the word "Romanticism" has gradually become almost the equivalent of bombastic rhodomontade, can hardly understand how Mérimée was ever reckoned among the Romanticists; they acknowledge that he took part in the first Romantic campaign, but insist that this happened partly by mistake. Jules Sandeau, in welcoming Louis de Loménie, Mérimée's successor in the Académie Française, related, in order to show the kind of Romanticist Mérimée had been, the old anecdote of the gentleman who, during the Revolution of July, impatiently seized the gun of one of the insurrectionists who could not shoot, aimed at a Swiss soldier posted at one of the windows of the Tuileries, shot him dead, and then politely replied to the entreaties of the insurgent that he should keep the weapon which he used so skilfully: "Many thanks, but, to tell the truth, I am a royalist." Mérimée was, Sandeau thus implied, always a Classicist; if, in the first stage of his career, he almost outdid the Romanticists, it was only because he could not withstand the temptation to show them how to shoot. The idea underlying this amusing exaggeration is, however, anything but correct. It is easy to prove that Mérimée, in spite of the classic severity of his style, is in many respects a typical representative of the French Romantic tendency. The more we study his character the more convinced of this do we become.

Prosper Mérimée (born 28th September 1803) came of a family of artists. His father, a man of

varied culture, was a good painter, who wrote a book on the technique of his art; his mother was also a painter, well known for her portraits of children; she had a talent for storytelling, and was accustomed to keep her little sitters quiet while she was painting them by telling them interesting tales. The portrait which she painted of her only son in his fifth year gives an equally favourable impression of her talent and of her child's looks. The face possesses a style of beauty very uncommon in such a young boy; for there is something of the pride and intellectual superiority of the distinguished man in this infantine countenance framed in fair, soft curls. The eyes are innocent and frank, but there is mischief in the curve of the sagacious, firmly closed lips. The bearing is that of a little prince.[2] One can quite well understand how this child one day, seeing his parents, who had pretended to be angry with him, laugh behind his back at his tears of repentance, determined "never to ask forgiveness," a determination which he adhered to as a man. His mother, with whom he lived until her death in 1852, was a woman of remarkable strength of character, in whose mind the philosophy of the eighteenth century had engendered such an aversion for every form of religious belief that she would not even allow her son to be baptized—a circumstance which he, in later life, used to mention with a certain satirical satisfaction. To a pious and amiable lady who was using all her eloquence to induce him to undergo the ceremony, he replied: "I will, upon one condition, and that is, that you stand godmother, and carry me, dressed in a long white frock, in your arms."

The outward events of Mérimée's life may be simply and shortly narrated. At the age of twenty-two, after completing the legal studies which form part of the education of most well-to-do young Frenchmen, he made a brilliant *début* as an author. During the following six years he led an independent life in the social circles belonging to the Liberal Opposition, dividing his time between literature and the pursuit of pleasure. In 1831, when his political friends came into power, he was appointed Inspector of Historical Monuments, as successor to Vitet, in whose footsteps he had already followed as an author. He fulfilled the duties of his office zealously and capably. Repeated tours in Spain and England, one in the East, and two in Greece, completed his peculiar training and enriched him with stores of impressions of foreign characters and customs. His extraordinary proficiency as a linguist enabled him to reap every advantage from his travels; he moved about in foreign countries like a native. It is especially unusual for a Frenchman to know as many languages as Mérimée did. He spoke English, Spanish (in all its dialects, including the gipsy language), Italian, modern Greek, and Russian, and had thoroughly studied the literatures of these languages, besides mastering those of ancient Greece and Rome. In his official capacity he published accounts of his travels in France, full of erudite detail; these and some studies on episodes in Roman history procured his election to the Académie des Inscriptions in 1841. In 1844 he was made a member of the Académie Française. Under the Second Empire, as an old friend of the Countess Montijo, he was on intimate terms with the Imperial family; and he and Octave Feuillet were long the only literary ornaments of the new court. In 1853 he was made a Senator. The appointment was beneath his dignity, and his acceptance of it injured his reputation, in spite of the fact that he almost never took part in the deliberations of the Chamber. During his last illness Mérimée heard of the fall of the Empire. He died at Cannes on the 23rd of September 1870.

The inner life of this man, as revealed by his books, is by no means so simple. The character of the youth who went out into the world at eighteen was composed of many conflicting elements. He was exceedingly proud; bold and bashful at the same time. He had an audacious intellect and a shy, reserved disposition. To conceal the shyness, which wounded his pride, he assumed either a stiff, cold manner, or an appearance of frivolity tinged with cynicism. This cynicism became a kind of mannerism with him in conversation with men. As a youth he was certainly not so suspicious and reserved as he afterwards became, but it is a mistake to attribute his general scepticism to any one particular disappointment. He met, like the rest of us, with many disappointments, and was often roughly disillusioned; he was deceived by friends, sacrificed by the woman he loved (d'Haussonville gives particulars in the *Revue des deux Mondes*, 15th August 1877); he learned to know the world, learned that life is warfare, and that a man has not only to protect himself against false and untrustworthy friends, secret and open enemies, but also against those who, as he himself puts it, "do evil for evil's sake." But if the germs of suspicion had not been in him from the first, a dozen consecutive bitter experiences would not have cured him of faith in his fellow-men; for the man of a trustful nature has always had at least an equal number of contrary experiences which outweigh the others. But Mérimée's nature was as critical as it was productive, and men of his character are apt to make the rule by which we judge the professional critic—that he only deserves trust in proportion as he shows distrust—the rule of their lives. We can imagine the suffering which his own poetic impressionability entailed on a man with Mérimée's highly developed critical sense.

The critical temperament is above everything truthful; and Mérimée was remarkably so. His natural audacity, moreover, impelled him to say exactly what he thought, regardless of conventionalities. One sees from his letters how frank he was by nature, how inclined to speak the undisguised truth, and how impatient of conventional falsehoods and even of alleviating or embellishing circumlocutions. This is especially noticeable in the first volume of *Lettres à une inconnue*. Even in these love-letters Mérimée is almost rude when it seems to him that the object of his affections has expressed some merely conventional opinion. Though his fear of ridicule and his ever-increasing scepticism did not dispose him to knight-errantry or lead him to court martyrdom, he nevertheless, in his fiftieth year, committed a chivalrous folly of which most men of the world would only be capable in their extreme youth. When his friend, the notorious Libri, was found guilty of having abused his position as public librarian to the extent of appropriating and selling a number of valuable books belonging to the nation, Mérimée, unable to believe Libri

capable of such an action, undertook his rehabilitation with an ardour worthy of a better cause, and attacked the committee of investigation and the judges in an article in the *Revue des deux Mondes* (April 15, 1852), the sparkling wit of which recalls Paul Louis Courier's pamphlets. A professed Don Quixote could not have acted more foolishly; nor is the case much altered if what the initiated maintain is true, namely, that his ardour was inspired rather by Madame Libri than by her husband.

Under the Empire, and even as a courtier, Mérimée preserved his freedom of speech. I am not referring to the fact that he, as a rule, spoke disparagingly of Napoleon III., which is not particularly to his credit, seeing that he accepted office under that prince's government; but even in conversation with members of the Imperial family he combined frankness with courtesy. Writing in July 1859, he tells that the Empress had asked him in Spanish what he thought of the speech made by the Emperor on his return from Italy. "In order," he writes, "to be both straightforward and courtier-like, I answered, '*Muy necesario!*' (Very necessary)."

Mérimée's natural tendency to outspokenness was, however, held in check by his pride and shyness. He early learned that the man who makes a naïve public display of his feelings not only lays himself open to ridicule, but invites the sympathy and familiarity of the vulgar crowd; and, as a youth, he resolved that he would never wear his heart upon his sleeve. Nor did it need all his mistrust to discover that the great majority of those around him who made a frank and childlike display of their feelings knew very well what they were about. The men who published their noble-mindedness, their earnestness, their love of morality and religion, their patriotism, &c., in the great market-place of publicity, always seemed to him either to be angling for applause or to be actuated by some business motive. He could not fail to see how well it pays, as a rule, to give expression to noble sentiments and warm feeling, and he found it difficult to suppose others ignorant of the fact. In any case, he could not bring himself to do as they did; he was one of those who cannot bear to proclaim the fact that they love virtue and hate vice, and to be always singing the praises of "the Good, the True, and the Beautiful."

To avoid all comradeship with the calculating "men of feeling," and to protect his emotional life from the gaze of the profane, Mérimée had recourse to the expedient of concealing his quivering sensibility under steely irony, as under a coat of mail. He determined rather to appear worse than he was, than to run the risk of being taken for one of these models of all the virtues. With this aim in view he dealt so hardly with himself that he lost his first fresh, simple naturalness, and acquired instead a manner which, though still natural and simple, was, nevertheless, distinctly a cultivated manner. In *Le Vase étrusque*, the one of his tales which gives most insight into his own intellectual and emotional life, we read of the hero, Saint-Clair: "He was born with a tender and loving heart; but, at an age when one is liable to receive impressions which last for the rest of one's life, too frank a display of his tender-heartedness drew down upon him the ridicule of his companions. He was proud and ambitious, and valued the good opinion of others, as all children do. Thenceforward he made it his study to conceal all the outward manifestations of what he regarded as a dishonourable weakness. He attained his aim, but his victory cost him dear. He succeeded in hiding the emotions of his feeling heart from others, but, by shutting them up in his own breast, he made them a thousand times more painful. In society he acquired the lamentable reputation of being unfeeling and careless, and in solitude his restless imagination created torments for him which were the more unbearable because he would confide them to no one." It is impossible to ignore the direct self-portraiture in this character sketch, though the colouring is too sombre.

---

[1] *Victor Hugo raconté par un témoin de sa vie*, ii 159. Eugène de Mirécourt: *Mérimée*, 25.

[2] A reproduction of the portrait is to be found in Maurice Tourneux's *Prosper Mérimée: ses portraits, ses dessins, sa bibliothèque*.

XXII

BEYLE AND MÉRIMÉE

Thus prepared, Mérimée, at the age of eighteen, made the acquaintance of Henri Beyle, who was twenty years his senior. They met at the house of the famous singer, Madame Pasta, who had left Milan and taken up her residence in Paris. It was inevitable that Beyle should exercise considerable influence over a kindred spirit so much his junior. Direct proof of this influence can hardly be given, for, before he met Beyle, Mérimée had written nothing; but, if we compare the works of the two authors, the resemblance between some of their peculiarities is striking; and the comparison is further instructive because it serves to throw Mérimée's own special characteristics into strong relief. I consider it impossible that Mérimée can have influenced Beyle, unless, indeed, we reckon as influence the communication of general information; for Beyle is undoubtedly indebted to Mérimée for many of the observations on the subject of art in his *Mémoires d'un Touriste*. Of the two minds Beyle's was obviously the first matured; therefore, when the younger of the two friends begins his biographical notice of the elder with the assertion that, in spite of their friendship, they had hardly had two ideas in common in the course of their lives, this obvious exaggeration may reasonably be attributed to the writer's anxiety to prevent his readers from applying certain of his remarks on Beyle to himself.

Beyle and Mérimée resemble each other, in the first instance, in their love of fact. All Mérimée's readers know that what he presents them with is the bare, accurately demonstrable fact, the exactly drawn detail. All that he cares for in history, as he himself confesses in his *Chronique du Règne de Charles IX.*, are the anecdotes; and of these he prefers the kind which illustrate the manners and types of character of the period. Exactly the same can be said of Beyle. Anecdote is positively the natural form of his thought; he thinks in anecdotes. He paints the individual in anecdotes, the period in biographies. His aversion for the vague leads him to write the kind of history which seems to him most full of life, in other words, to communicate fact in the form of a novel, or of a short, realistic drama. And the pithy, short anecdotes which he relates are never commonplace, but invariably the striking expression of some essential fact. In so far the resemblance to Mérimée is marked. When a modern admirer of Beyle (Paul Heyse) praises his short Italian tales, "in which strong, reckless passions assert themselves without any self-deception, and take their course with a fiery, or cold, heedlessness of consequences, prepared in the last resort to have recourse to the knife," we feel that these expressions might, without the alteration of a word, be applied to Mérimée's stories.

Nevertheless, a story as communicated by Mérimée conveys such a different meaning from a story as communicated by Beyle, that it is easy to determine the limits of the elder man's influence upon the younger. Beyle's salient characteristic is the tendency to generalise. The trait of character which is exhibited in any given action, is to him only an instance; it illustrates a psychological law, or is the evidence of certain social conditions or racial peculiarities, which it is of great consequence to him to elucidate. When, for example, he fills his book *De l'Amour* to repletion with anecdotes, he does it merely for the purpose of showing, in a practical and impressive manner, what he means by the different names which he gives to the different varieties of the passion and their different stages of development. To obtain the reader's assent to the conclusions he draws, he presents his material, his arguments, in the form of anecdotes. In his novels this tendency to generalise has almost a distracting effect. He too frequently explains to his reader: "She acted in such and such a manner because she was an Italian; a Parisian would of course have acted very differently."

No traces of anything similar are to be found in Mérimée's writings; no reflections or divagations —strictly accurate, bold representation of his fact, and nothing more. When he has chosen his subject, which is most frequently some survival of ancient savagery that has attracted his attention as an old coin among modern ones attracts the eye of the connoisseur, or an old building in a modern town the eye of the traveller, his whole aim is to make the curious phenomenon stand out in as strong relief as possible from the insipid dead-level of his own day; he removes everything which might prevent the strange survival of the past from producing its full effect; but such a proceeding as tracing its connection with the general condition of the society or country of which it bears the impress, never occurs to him. To see things in their whole bearing is not his affair: the bird's-eye view he leaves to others. He seeks and finds a curious phenomenon in the world of reality, delineates it, and in the process of reproduction imparts to it some of his own life; but he never regards it as anything but the curious phenomenon. And he is as strictly matter-of-fact in interpretation as in delineation. Note, for example, how he protests (in his *Portraits historiques et littéraires*) against any symbolic interpretation of *Don Quixote*, in which work he refuses to see anything but a masterly parody of the romances of chivalry. "Let us leave to solemn German professors," he exclaims, "the honour of the discovery that the Knight of La Mancha symbolises poetry and his squire prose. The interpreter will always discover in the works of a man of genius a thousand poetical intentions of which their author was entirely ignorant." Contrast with this kind of criticism the following fine passage from Sainte-Beuve. "This book, originally a purely topical work, has become part of the literature of the world. It has conquered the imagination of humanity. Every reader has worked his will with it, has shaped it to his taste.... Cervantes did not think of this, but we do. Each one of us is a Don Quixote to-day, a Sancho Panza to-morrow. In every one of us there is more or less of this discordant union of a high-flying ideal with the plain common-sense which keeps close to the ground. With many it is actually only a question of age; a man falls asleep Don Quixote and awakes Sancho Panza." Beyle would have endorsed these sentiments; Mérimée was kept from doing so by his antipathy to generalisation.

Their love of the fact in its simplicity produced in both Beyle and Mérimée a strong aversion for French classic rhetoric; and both are distinguished from all contemporary French Romanticists by the fact that they do not substitute lyric poetry for that rhetoric. Beyle never wrote a line of poetry; he had no ear whatever for rhythm. In spite of the enthusiastic admiration which he imagined he felt for the Italian poets, he regarded metre as merely an assistance to memory, and could see no reason for it in a composition not intended to be learned by rote. Mérimée is characterised by a similar dislike of verse. He had such a repugnance to the effeminate, languishing music of rhyme, that the numerous poems cited in his writings are, without exception, rendered in prose; he preferred letting them lose all their character to translating them in verse. The explanation naturally suggests itself that he did not feel capable of writing poetry. But I am rather of opinion that it was his pride which would not allow him to submit his poetry to the criticism of the public. His *Lettres à une inconnue* show that he could write English verse, so the question can hardly have been one of inability. But such talent as he had, he did not cultivate; an aversion to display of feeling, a shy reservedness, produced the same practical result as Beyle's want of ear.

In this matter, however, as in various others, Mérimée outdoes his master. In the depths of Beyle's soul there was a lyric tendency; it finds its way to the surface in his persistent enthusiasm for Napoleon, for Italy, for the sixteenth century, for Cimarosa and Rossini, Correggio and

Canova, and in all the superlatives which flow almost as abundantly from his pen as from Balzac's. Mérimée, on the other hand, not content with banishing the lyric form from his works, entirely abjures the spirit; he walls himself in; no prose is less lyrical than his.

In order to obtain an adequate impression of his literary matter-of-factness, let us for a moment compare his tales, not with Beyle's, but with George Sand's first novels, which were written about the same time. What George Sand offers us in hers is, principally, such a masterly revelation of the inner life of a young woman, with its modesty and its enthusiasm, its impulse to self-devotion and its susceptibility to passion, as no woman had ever given to the world before; but in the deepest recesses of her soul there is a purpose; she has a wrong to avenge, wrath to satisfy; she does not see the sufferings of the female sex from the standpoint of an outsider; she does not try to conceal that her heart has bled. Mérimée, on the other hand, has no cause, no theory, no political or social bias whatever. He has no enthusiasms and believes in nothing, neither in a philosophic system, nor in a school of art, nor in a religious truth; scarcely even in the general progress of humanity. The sceptical man-of-the-world, he hardens his heart against all reformers, missionaries, improvers of the world, and saviours of humanity; he does not answer the question whether or not he agrees with them; he turns a deaf ear to it. George Sand shows what marriage is in France, and asks her public with a quivering voice: "What do you say to this? Is it to be endured?" Mérimée writes *La double Méprise* and ends his tale without moving a muscle of his face.

As a rest from overpowering emotion George Sand goes back to primitive human nature, and with simple, beautiful touches delineates (as in Mauprat) the power and the happiness of faithful love, or produces (as in the peasant stories and *Jean de la Roche*) simple, touching, ideal representations of the innate nobility of the human soul. Mérimée does not believe in the ideal, and has no talent for the idyll. There is a sombre, dusky tone over everything he paints; the impulse of the soul towards a purity which it loves, or a heroism which it admires, is foreign to his art. In her inmost heart George Sand is the lyric poet. Whether she makes the passion of love the centre of her book, concedes it every right and gives it her whole sympathy even when it inspires an unworthy character (as in that remarkable and profoundly suggestive tale, *Valvèdre*), or whether she is carried away by her admiration for the courage and strength of character of the best of her own sex, she always shares the emotions and passions of her characters, rejoices, weeps, sighs, and smiles with them. Mérimée, on the contrary, resembles Beyle in giving an impersonal, dramatic expression to his ideas and feelings, and surpasses him in the artistic skill with which he does it. He has been at great trouble to shut up his feelings in his own breast, has imposed silence upon them, the absolute silence of the prison cell, and never, never once, does he give expression to them in his own name. He gives voice to them only through fully responsible characters, and that but sparingly. The characters thus evolved stand out before us with unusual vividness, and their language is peculiarly laconic and vigorous. The more intense and tender Mérimée's emotion originally was, the prouder is its outward bearing. There is nothing feminine in him. Even in his female characters it is not their femininity which he brings out. Beyle, a marked contrast to him in this respect, makes, in writing to him, the true and apt observation, that his novels are wanting in "delicate tenderness."[1] His women are masculine and logical in their passions; almost all of them are powerful individualities; even the most frivolous and immoral meet death with quiet fortitude (Arsène Guillot, Julie de Chaverney, Carmen). None of them have the melting Correggio-like quality which Beyle imparted to his female characters.

Beyle's more lyric style and profounder understanding of true womanliness are principally due to the fact that he was at heart an imaginative enthusiast. His matter-of-factness is only skin deep. Hence enthusiasm itself was a favourite theme of his, whereas it was one which Mérimée avoided. Compare them, for instance, as delineators of battle scenes; compare the two best prose descriptions of battles in existence at that time, Mérimée's famous *L'Enlèvement de la Redoute* and Beyle's equally famous account of the battle of Waterloo. They present a striking contrast. In Beyle's pages we have a youth's enthusiasm for Napoleon and thirst for military glory depicted with a touch of irony, but also with genuine sympathy; in Mérimée's we have only the dark side of war—the half-mechanical assault on a redoubt, and the tumult of battle, which he paints with as masterly a hand as Gérôme's, without thought of patriotism, enthusiasm, or any more elevated sentiment than soldier-like stoicism and hope of promotion.

Beyle and Mérimée resemble each other in their attitude to religion, which was a peculiar one for Romanticists. The French Romanticists were originally as little inimical to Roman Catholicism as the German. Several of them began life as good Catholics, and the attitude of the rest was, generally speaking, one either of respect or indifference. But both Mérimée and Beyle were from the very first thoroughly pagan in thought and feeling. And Mérimée's free-thought, as well as Beyle's, was of the ardent type. He was not naïve enough to cherish a species of enmity towards a personal God, but he shared Beyle's detestation of the representatives of religion. His dislike of Christianity is, however, far more indirectly expressed than Beyle's, which is incessantly forcing itself on our notice. He does not, like Beyle, hate Catholicism; he only smiles at it. He never puts out more than a finger tip from under his black domino. It amuses him to describe insinuating Catholic priests; and when his characters have occasion to speak of baptism, confession, or any other religious ceremony, he is apt to make them do it "in a sanctimonious, nasal tone." But when the words are his own, we never have more than such cautious, subtle irony as is contained in the following passage. "It was a religious book which Madame de Pienne had brought with her; and I do not intend to tell you its title, in the first place because I do not wish to injure its author, in the second, because you would probably accuse me of desiring to draw some opprobrious inference regarding such books in general. Suffice it to say that the work in question was written by a

young man of nineteen, with the special aim of restoring hardened sinners of the female sex to the bosom of the Church, that Arsène was terribly exhausted, and that she had not closed her eyes the whole of the previous night. Whilst the third page was being read, that happened which would have happened whatever the book had been—Mademoiselle Guillot closed her eyes and fell asleep."

Here again the difference between Beyle and Mérimée is mainly conditioned by the fact that the former was far less sceptical than the latter. Beyle was a materialist of the school of the Encyclopedists, and as such had firm beliefs. He had his philosophy—Epicureanism, to which he adhered faithfully; his method—psychological analysis; his religion—the worship of beauty in life, in music, in the plastic arts, and in literature. Mérimée has no philosophy; one cannot imagine anything less dogmatic than his half-stoical, half-sensual turn of mind; and he has no religion; he worships nothing. He avoids enthusiasm as carefully as if it were a disease. We are impressed by this fact in reading his remarks on Leonidas and the battle of Thermopylæ in the famous essay on Grote's *History of Greece*. He tells how he himself some years before had spent three days at Thermopylæ, and confesses that, "prosaic as he is," it was not without emotion that he climbed the little height where the last of the Three Hundred fell. But he did not allow himself to be overcome by his emotion. He examined the Persian arrow-heads, and found that they were of flint —these Asiatics, therefore, were but poor savages in comparison with the Europeans; if we have cause to marvel at anything, it is that they made their way through the Pass at all. He proceeds to criticise Leonidas severely for having occupied this impregnable position himself, leaving the other pass, which was much more difficult to defend, in charge of a coward. The death of Leonidas was undoubtedly the death of a hero; but let us picture to ourselves, if we can, his return to Sparta after having surrendered the key of Hellas to the Barbarians. Mérimée comes to the conclusion that Herodotus has written history as a poet, and moreover as a Greek poet, whose chief aim it is to throw the beautiful into strong relief; and he ends with the question: Can it be said that in this case the fiction is of more value than the truth? Ninety-nine men out of a hundred would unhesitatingly answer: Yes. Mérimée does not. He is writing in 1849, and with recent historical tragedies in his mind he answers: "Possibly. But it was by misrepresenting Thermopylæ, misrepresenting the ease with which three hundred free men could resist three million slaves, that the orators of Italy persuaded the Piedmontese to pit themselves alone against the Austrians." Compare with this sceptic spirit of Mérimée's the enthusiastic and simple faith with which Beyle retails the untrustworthy legend of Beatrice Cenci.

The period of 1830 was a time when the most eminent authors of France were very much on their guard against any excess in the matter of patriotism. The newly aroused appreciation of the merits of foreign literatures led, by a natural reaction, to contempt for their own and its classic authors, and even at times for the French spirit generally. The first, tolerably foolish, attack made by the Romantic School on Racine is a well-known episode. French classic literature was declared to be a literature only suitable for the schoolroom. Victor Hugo, who was by no means generally lacking in national pride, exclaimed, in the preface to *Les Orientales*: "Other nations say, Homer, Dante, Shakespeare. We say, Boileau." Hugo's youth had been spent in Spain, and he treated Spanish themes in his first dramas (*Inez de Castro, Hernani*), retaining the Spanish division of the play into days instead of acts. Spain and Italy were the Promised Land of the budding Romanticists. Alfred de Musset wrote *Contes d'Espagne et d'Italie*; Théophile Gautier never wearied of showering maledictions on the cold climate and colourless customs of France, called Spain his true fatherland, &c., &c.

Beyle and Mérimée both exemplify in a very marked degree this protest against national vanity. In Beyle's mouth the word "French" was almost a term of contumely; his satirical appellation for Frenchmen was *les vainvifs*; his books teem with such ejaculations as: "Could anything be more comical than to ascribe depth of character to a Parisian?" He calls his country, "le plus vilain pays du monde, que les nigauds appellent la belle France." We have seen that he eventually renounced his nationality. Mérimée, who was almost as much in love with Spanish as Beyle with Italian customs, had the essentially Romantic leaning to the foreign, the exotic; and he too, like his older friend, considered one of the leading traits of French national character to be that constant attention to the opinion of others (*le qu'en dira-t-on*) which destroys all originality, makes a joyless thing of life, and forms the best foundation for the hypocrisies of society. His general opinion of his countrymen was a tolerably low one, and he took no pains to conceal the fact from them. But, unlike Beyle, he in the end proclaimed his allegiance to the old gospel, the old creed, of patriotism. The step was not an easy one for a man who hated patriotic phrase-mongering like the plague; it took nothing less than the downfall of France to draw any expression of love for his country from his lips. But in a letter dated September 13, 1870, he writes: "All my life long I have endeavoured to keep free from prejudices, and to be a cosmopolitan rather than a Frenchman; but all these philosophic draperies are of no avail. I bleed to-day from these stupid Frenchmen's wounds, I weep for their humiliations, and, ungrateful and foolish as they are, I love them in spite of everything."

In his estimate of Beyle's character, Mérimée (in this agreeing with Sainte-Beuve) decides that one of its most marked traits was his fear of being duped. "Thence arose," he writes, "that artificial hardness, that overdone analysis of the low motives of all generous actions, and that resistance to the first impulses of the heart, all of which, in my opinion, was more assumed than real. The aversion and contempt with which sentimentality inspired him often led him into the contrary exaggeration, to the great scandal of those who, not knowing him intimately, took all that he said of himself literally." This fear of being duped, with all its consequences as here described, was quite as characteristic of Mérimée himself as of Beyle; only that Mérimée, being of a more refined nature, had to do more violence to himself in the process of acquiring that

cynical tone which in the end became as natural to him in intercourse with men as was insinuating gallantry in intercourse with women. He too, as a young man, enjoyed being considered a monster of immorality; and it was only when some comic incident, such as that of the country lady's refusing to travel alone with him in the diligence,[2] showed him what his reputation really was, that he felt a few days' remorse for his folly. Horror of hypocrisy actually made Mérimée a hypocrite, inducing him to feign vice and hard-heartedness; and his fear of being deceived not only led him to deceive others, but to cheat himself out of many pure and simple pleasures. It is not only on the stage, as Gorgias says, that the dupe is often wiser than the man who is never duped. He who does not live in constant fear of treachery has more courage, is more productive, realises more of the possibilities which lie latent in his soul.

In Mérimée's case the constant fear of exposing himself had two bad consequences which it had not in Beyle's. In the first place, it produced in him in course of time a kind of official stiffness. As a member of the Academy and of the Senate, and as the trusted favourite of the Imperial family, he had to appear in public and make speeches on occasions when he could not but inwardly laugh at the figure he cut and at his own words. Beyle never placed himself in a position which obliged him to speak with respect of things he scorned, or to pay compliments to blockheads. It was a sincere feeling which he expressed in the words: "When I see a man strutting about a drawing-room with any number of orders on his coat, I involuntarily think of all the meannesses and the contemptible, nay, often treacherous actions which he must have committed to have amassed so many proofs of them."

In the second place, the fear in question made Mérimée so severely critical of himself as an author that he became unproductive. Beyle's motto was: "No day without its line." Mérimée never wrote much, and at last stopped altogether. His demands of himself in the matter of plasticity and technical perfection were so excessive that he preferred withdrawing from the contest with his own ideal to risking defeat. It seemed to him that it was better to rest contented with what he had done than to stake his reputation as an artist on any new work. And it made it the easier for him to refrain, that he was by nature of a reserved, retiring disposition, and not impelled by any uncontrollable impulse to constant production.

It was in vain that Beyle reproached him for "laziness." Amongst the causes of that laziness there was one which Beyle did not understand, and which constituted the main difference between the two men. Beyle was a psychologist and a poet, but not an artist; Mérimée was an artist to his finger-tips. It is as the artist and as the artist alone that he is great; and his superiority to Beyle lies in his artistic skill. It was he who gave imperishable artistic form to that wealth of intellectual material which Beyle brought to light. And the laziness was anything but absolute idleness. It found expression in essays, descriptions of historical monuments, translations from the Russian, and modest but careful historical research and historical writings. Mérimée was a philologist and an archaeologist, a scholar and a scientist. His art may be likened to an oasis lying in the midst of his arid technical studies; it borders on science on every side, and the passage from it to historical writing is an easy one; for there comes a moment when the love of fact and the passion for accuracy and precision can no longer find satisfaction in merely imaginary portraiture. In this particular the history of Mérimée's personal career as an author resembles the history of the Romantic School; he reflects a great movement on a small scale. For in France as well as in Germany, scientific criticism and historical research followed in the path which the literary criticism of the Romanticists had opened up for imaginative literature. When the poets had done with the foreign and medieval material, the scientists began to deal with it in the spirit which poetry had evoked.

As Mérimée's fiction was always in a manner the offspring of his researches, as many of his stories, such as *Carmen, La Vénus d'Ille*, and *Lokis*, are even sportively set in a framework of archæological or philological investigation, it was natural enough that science should gradually make its way from the outside to the heart of his work. In his position as a scientific man lies the last great difference between him and Beyle. Mérimée is not a scientist of the first rank; he has the second-class qualities of thoroughness and trustworthiness, but lacks the spark of inspiration which he possesses as an author. He has, however, the distinctive sign of the true man of science; he never speaks of what he does not understand; he never indulges in random conjectures or ingenious paradoxes; he progresses step by step. At times he may be dry and wooden, but he never makes a mistake.

If Mérimée is the sober, uninspired man of science, Beyle is the inspired scientific dilettante, with all the signs of genius, but also all the signs of dilettantism. His books teem with daring assertions, indemonstrable conjectures, theories regarding nations with whose languages he was unfamiliar, amateurish paradoxes like that which places Werner's *Luther* in the forefront of German drama. His essays are as entertaining and suggestive as Mérimée's are tiresome and dry; but Mérimée's conclusions are founded upon rock, Beyle's too often built upon sand.

Thus, both as the scientist and the author, Mérimée marks an advance upon Beyle. He is a man of a narrower and less fertile mind; but the contents of his mind are infinitely better ordered, and he is master of a highly perfected artistic style.

---

[1] "Souvent vous ne me semblez pas assez *délicatement tender*; or il faut cela dans un roman pour me toucher."

[2] *Lettres à une inconnue*, i. 72.

XXIII

MÉRIMÉE

Mérimée's earliest attitude as the dramatist and novelist is an attitude of literary aggressiveness. Although by nature an observer, he does not, like Balzac, set himself the task of representing, in all its breadth, the world he sees around him; neither is it his ambition that posterity shall study in his works the customs and ideas of his period; he desires to challenge a prevailing taste; and with the object of irritating and rousing his fellow-countrymen, he generally chooses themes which have as little connection as possible with modern civilised society.

It was natural that his hostility should first vent itself upon literary sentimentality. The shy, proud youth was penetrated with the idea that it is the duty of the author to communicate his ideas to the public, but that his dignity as a man requires him to keep his feelings to himself. But in this opinion he received no support from the French literary men of the day. Ever since Rousseau's novels, not to mention his *Confessions*, had prepared the way for orgies of half-real, half-fictitious emotion and a communicativeness which kept back nothing, a series of authors, from Chateaubriand to Lamartine and Sainte-Beuve, had dissected themselves for the entertainment of the public, initiated their readers into the secrets of their hearts, in short, unreservedly satisfied the low curiosity of the vulgar herd. And with what aim? To win its sympathy. Mérimée was far too proud to desire it. "For Heaven's sake no confessions!" he says to himself the first time he puts pen to paper. And to avoid all risk of becoming sentimental or morbid, he conceals himself completely behind the characters he describes, allows them and their destinies free play, and never expresses his opinion of their conduct. Beyle, who had quite as strong an aversion for sentimentality, was unable to refrain from putting in his word; Mérimée makes himself invisible, inaudible, untraceable. But his temperament makes it impossible for him to do this in any other way than by confining himself to the representation of intense, determined characters, who follow their impulses without much deliberation or talk, are carried away by their passions, and suddenly, unexpectedly, proceed to action. "To me," says Mérimée's South American sea-captain in *La Famille Carvajal*, "all these tragedy heroes are phlegmatic, passionless philosophers. If one of them kills his rival in a duel or any other manner, remorse overpowers him immediately and makes him as soft as a woollen mitten. I have seen twenty-seven years' service, I have killed forty-one Spaniards, and I don't know what such a feeling is.... Characters, emotions, actions—everything seems unnatural to us when we read these plays aloud in the mess-room. They are all princes, who vow that they are madly in love, and dare not so much as touch the tips of their mistresses' fingers, but keep these ladies a boat's hook length off. We sailors go to work more boldly in such matters."

Mérimée does not write for the "bourgeois," into whose eyes the slightest emotion brings tears; he addresses himself to people of stronger nerves, who require more violent shocks to move them. Therefore away with the regulation lengthy introductions, and all the preparations and omens of tragedy! Human beings with blood in their veins do not deliberate so long; and nervous weakness is not an interesting spectacle to any but the neurotic. If a woman loves, what can be more natural than that she should say so, and, regardless of every other consideration, make the intervals between the first avowal, the first kiss, and the first embrace as short as possible? If a man hates with a manly hatred, what more natural than that he should put an end to his torment and his enemy's life with a stab or a shot? It is, undoubtedly, natural, when the race which the author chooses to depict is not an effete, but a vigorous one; and this is the explanation of Mérimée's tendency to give to every feeling the character of a fierce passion, to dwell upon what is cruel and hard, to make death—not tragedy death, but real death, in all its cold, hard pitilessness—the dénouement of every tale which he sends out from his artist's workshop. It explains what may be summed up in a word as *l'atroce* in his writings.

He is familiar with death. If the old designations were applicable in his case, we should call him a great tragic author; but Mérimée does not believe in what dogmatic upholders of Aristotelian principles call tragic expiation. Concerning the representation of death in the works of other authors he seems to say with Schiller:

> "Aber der Tod, Ihr Herrn, ist so ästhetisch doch nicht."

Deepest down in his soul lies the love of strength. But he does not, like Balzac, love strength in the shape of strong desire, strong passions; he loves it in the form of original force of character and of stirring, decisive event; and therefore he naturally begins by feeling and reproducing the poetry of decisive event, long before he is mature enough to represent that of simple, strong character. Of all events, death is the most decisive; and hence it is that he falls in love with death—not, be it observed, with death as it is conceived of by spiritualists and believers, not with death as a purifying passage to another existence, but as a violent, sudden, bloody termination. Like Sièyes, he is for *la mort sans phrase*.

The idea not unnaturally suggests itself that a certain want of feeling, a certain tendency to cruelty, in Mérimée the man, probably lay at the root of this literary hard-heartedness. It can, however, almost be proved from direct assertions of his own, that the most extravagant manifestations of the quality were originally called forth by his strong aversion to sentimentality in literature. In his essay on the friend of his youth, Victor Jacquemont, we come upon the following passage: "I have never known a more truly feeling heart than Jacquemon's. His was a loving, tender nature; but he took as much pains to conceal his sensibility as others do to dissimulate their evil inclinations. In our youth we had been repelled by the false sentiment of Rousseau and his imitators, and the result in our case was the usual one—an exaggerated

reaction. We wished to be strong, and therefore we jeered at sentimentality."

It is, nevertheless, self-evident that this hatred of the pathetic, which contrasts so strongly with the extreme sentimentality of most of Mérimée's youthful contemporaries, and this predilection for the violent and the savage, were not purely and simply products of a spirit of contradiction. To gauge the strength of the predilection we have but to glance at the history of Mérimée's development: in another man we should expect to see such a feeling checked in its first outbreaks by the lighter, brighter mood of youth, and tempered in age by waning vigour. But such was not the case with Mérimée. His love of violent solutions is of the same age as his love of pen and ink, and the horrors and terrors with which in the works of his mature manhood his genius produces a tragic effect, become in those of his old age merely gloomy and repulsive.

In the *Théâtre de Clara Gazul*, Mérimée's first book, published when he was only twenty-two, it is amusing to observe the conflict of youth with the inveterate natural bias towards gloom and violence. Read superficially, the book produces the effect of a tolerably serious work. Professing to be written in the Spanish style, it nevertheless differs in many essential particulars from Spanish dramatic literature. The plays of which it is composed have no mutual resemblance; they do not, like the mantle-and-dagger tragedies, monotonously repeat the same types of character and the same situations, produced by jealousy and a touchy sense of honour; nor do they accept the extremely conventional ideas of morality current in the tragedies in question. Mérimée's characters have distinctly defined individualities; and instead of exhibiting superhuman self-control and resignation, they are carried blindly away by their passions and desires. Still less resemblance is there between these plays of Mérimée's and the great series of romantic and fantastic dramas (some of them breathing the spirit of Catholicism, others lacking it) in which Calderon reaches the zenith of his productive power and displays all his wealth of colour. It is only with certain heavy Spanish dramas, such as Calderon's *El alcalde de Zalamea, Las tres justicias in una, El medico de su honra, El pintor de su deshonra*, or Moreto's *El valiente justiciero*, that certain of Mérimée's, for example *Inès Mendo*, harmonise in their general tone. Taken as a whole, instead of being what it pretends to be, namely serious, the book is arrogantly wanton and audacious; genuine French frivolity and satire peep out beneath the costume of the Spanish actress. Personages are introduced upon the stage whom, as we are told in the preface to *Une Femme est un Diable*, our nurses taught us to regard with reverence. But the author hopes that "the emancipated Spaniards" will not take this amiss.

Clara Gazul is, then, a merry book; the good lady who wrote it is no prude. But what a strange kind of mirth it is! Amongst its manifestations is the free use of the knife. If we try to find a parallel to it, nothing suggests itself but the sportive springs of a young tiger. Mérimée finds it almost impossible to end without killing all his principal characters, and one sword-thrust succeeds the other almost automatically. But he amuses himself by destroying the illusion directly after the catastrophe; the actors rise, and one of them thanks the audience for their kind attention; the whole thing is turned into a jest.

> *Doña Maria.*
>
> Help! She is poisoned, poisoned by me. I will see to my own punishment; the convent well is not far off. (*Exit hurriedly.*)
>
> *Fray Eugenio* (*to the audience*).
>
> Do not take it too much amiss that I have caused the death of these two charming young ladies; and graciously excuse the shortcomings of the author.

Thus ends the wild play *L'Occasion*. The wittiest criticism passed on these dramas, and the style in general, is contained in a sentence in Alfred de Musset's *Lettres de Dupuis et Cotonet*: "Souvient l'Espagne, avec ses Castillans, qui se coupent la gorge comme on boit un verre d'eau, ses Andalouses qui font plus vite encore un petit métier moins dépeuplant, ses taureaux, ses toréadors, matadors, &c."

It was not in Mérimée's works alone that the Spain of the young Romantic School (to which De Musset himself contributed the pale-faced, brown-necked Andalusian beauty) was so passionate and hasty. But no one took such delight in it all as he. And the themes he chose in his old age are in complete accordance with this taste of his youth.

His last tale, *Lokis*, is the story of a young Lithuanian count of mysterious descent, who from time to time is possessed by, or at least feels that he possesses, the instincts of a wild animal. He goes mad on his wedding-night and kills his bride by biting her throat. The count's character is drawn with delicate skill; the progress of his mental derangement is indicated by a few slight but graphic touches; and Mérimée has evidently enjoyed contrasting this wild young Lithuanian nobleman with a peculiarly worthy and dull German professor (the German of French fiction prior to 1870), a guest in the count's house, who writes every evening to his *fiancée*, Fräulein Weber, and communicates the horrible catastrophe to the reader in one of his letters. But the impression left by this vampire tale is one of disgust mingled with horror. The masterly treatment, the perfect style, the refined manner in which the loathsome subject is dealt with, remind us of the white kid gloves of the headsman. The story is only of interest to us as a proof of the strength retained by one of its author's original tendencies.

Personally characteristic of Mérimée as this tendency undoubtedly was, it is plainly of near kin to a tendency of the whole of that school to which Southey gave the name of the "Satanic." The influence of Byron is unmistakable. By 1830 Frenchmen were thoroughly weary (as Englishmen had been for some time) of the "Immanuelistic" literature of the Reaction. The sceptre of

literature had passed from the hands of Lamartine into the hands of Victor Hugo, whose *Orientales* contain most sanguinary pictures of war and destruction. Lamartine himself, the Seraphic poet in chief, had struck a Satanic note in *La Chute d'un Ange*. And a young poet of Victor Hugo's school was treating gruesome themes in short, artistically finished stories at the same time as Mérimée, and entirely uninfluenced by him. I allude to Petrus Borel, who died poor and unknown. His *Dina, la belle Juive*, will bear comparison with any of Mérimée's tales of horror. Poor Borel was an enthusiast, an ardent moralist, who, concealing his fervour beneath his realism, desired to inspire indignation with the deeds of violence he described. The refined, polished Mérimée is often only pretending to be bloodthirsty because it amuses him to frighten his readers, especially those of the female sex. But in both cases we have also the genuine Romantic defiance of the "bourgeois."

Mérimée has not escaped unpunished for thus yielding up his talent to the service of literary bloodthirstiness. Though he avoided his Nemesis during his lifetime, she overtook him after death. When De Loménie pronounced the customary panegyric in the Académie Française, he concluded by expressing the opinion that what was wanting in Mérimée's life was the peace and joy of the domestic hearth—that he would have been happier as the father of a family, "with four or five children to bring up." And when his friend, Countess Lise Przezdzieska, published, under the title of *Lettres à une autre inconnue*, a series of his letters to her which were certainly never intended for publication, she devoted the proceeds of her book to the payment of masses for the soul of her anti-Catholic friend.

XXIV

MÉRIMÉE

At the time when Mérimée made his literary début in the disguise of a Spaniard, the Classic drama had reached the stage when the personages of a play had all, like the pieces on a chessboard, their prescribed duties and moves. There were the stereotyped king, tyrant, princess, conspirators, &c. It mattered not whether the queen who had killed her husband was called Semiramis, Clytemnestra, Johanna of Naples, or Mary Stuart, whether the lawgiver's name was Minos or Peter the Great or Cromwell—their words and actions, thoughts and feelings, were always the same. A young poet of the Classic School, who had treated a subject from Spanish history in a manner which was objected to by the censor, got out of the difficulty by transferring the action of his play with a stroke of the pen from Barcelona to Babylon, and from the sixteenth century to the days before the Flood. "Babylone" had the same number of syllables and rhymed with the same words as "Barcelone," and scarcely any other alteration was necessary.[1] The Spain which Mérimée, in the guise of Clara Gazul, shows to his readers, is not the country in which this Barcelona was situated. Nor does he rest content with masquerading as a Spanish lady. The genuine Romanticist, he regards it as the main task of the author to represent the manners and morals of different ages and countries without a touch of varnish or whitewash, bringing out distinctly and strongly what in those days was called "local colour." He therefore transforms himself into an inhabitant of the most dissimilar countries, in all different stages of civilisation. He is in imagination a Moor, a negro, a South American, an Illyrian, a gipsy, a Cossack. But all things remote and foreign do not possess an equal degree of attraction for him. Indeed he is actually repelled by culture and polish. As Théophile Gautier preferred to visit each country at the season of year when its climate is most characteristic—Africa in summer, Russia in winter—so Mérimée preferred imaginary excursions to the regions whose inhabitants have the least regard for human life, the strongest passions, the wildest and most determined characters, and the most violent original prejudices. He does not confine himself to the present. He is keenly interested in the barbarities of the peasant wars of the Middle Ages; he conjures up the age of Charles IX., and writes a masterly account of the massacre of St. Bartholomew. He is as familiar with fourteenth-century Spain and seventeenth-century Russia as with ancient France and ancient Rome. As the archaeologist and historian he has examined inscriptions and monuments, buildings, ornaments, and weapons, and has studied documents and manuscripts in many languages of which the ordinary literary man knows nothing. This gives his descriptions a truthfulness which was uncommon in his day.

It is his passion for strength in its primitive nakedness which endows him with the historical sense. Hence the heroes of his historical works are always the wildest and most daring characters—Sulla, Catilina, Don Pedro the Cruel of Castile, the first pseudo-Demetrius, &c., &c. His conscientious accuracy and his distrust of the part played by imagination in science rob his historical works proper of life (he is most successful in *Don Pedro I.* and *Épisode de l'Histoire de la Russie*); but he at once imparts life to any period which he treats as the imaginative artist. After Vitet had shown, in his masterly *Scènes historiques*, how real history can be presented in a free dramatic rendering, Mérimée gave France, in *La Jaquerie*, the picture of a much earlier and more savage age than that which his forerunner and teacher had subjected to poetic treatment. He aptly indicates the spirit of his work in the ironically applied speech of Molière's Mascarille, which he affixes to it as motto: "C'est mon talent particulier, et je travaille à mettre en madrigaux toute l'histoire romaine." He has entered with wonderful understanding into the customs and follies, views and prejudices, which constituted the spirit of that far-off age. Let us take one character as an instance—Isabella, daughter of the Baron d'Apremont, a typical high-minded, amiable young girl of the feudal period. Her heart is pure, her morals are of the strictest, she is

merciful to the suffering and the vanquished. To the brave and faithful man-at-arms who goes through fire and water for her sake she is very gracious; she begs her father to give her this serf, and in gratitude to him for having saved her life she makes him her equerry; she even embroiders him a purse. But he dares to love her; and then everything is at an end. She overwhelms him with contemptuous reproaches, repulses him with scorn, and considers herself degraded by his having dared to lift up his eyes to her. Compare this lady with one of Ingemann's noble maidens; imagine how the latter, scorning all the prejudices of her day, would have valued the noble heart which beat under the simple jerkin; and note the difference between an idealistic and a bold, historically accurate representation of a coarse and vigorous age. One more example—the scene which takes place at night in front of a lonely hut in the forest, to which the brutal English freebooter-chief, Siward, has conveyed Isabella, whom he has carried off after the assault in which her father has been killed. The whole is nothing but the conversation of two troopers who are holding the saddled horses at the door, and pass the time in talking of the act of violence which is being committed within. But the impression produced is so vivid that it stamps on our minds a picture of the whole age. It is, however, a fault in this work, that the author, in his aversion for sentimentality, has crowded together so many cruel and horrible actions, that in the general savagery the differences which undoubtedly existed then, as now, between society as a whole and single individuals, are overlooked.

The separate personages in his *Chronique du Règne de Charles IX.* stand out much more clearly from the background. They have strongly marked characteristics without on that account being modern (except perhaps George Mergy); indeed Mérimée has bestowed such attention on details that each chapter in its graphic coherence forms a little whole, and the work in its entirety produces the effect of a mosaic design of character portraits and pictures of society. In the last of his semi-historical works, *Les Débuts d'un Aventurier*, we observe that what attracts him in the false Demetrius is the primitive cunning, the rough, vigorous Cossack character, and not those mental conflicts, ensuing on the fraud, which fascinated Schiller. Mérimée may be said to leave off where Schiller begins. The manners and customs of a definite group of human beings at a definite period are of far more interest to him than what these human beings have in common with universal humanity; hence here as elsewhere in his historical fiction, it is not the intellectual or emotional side of life which he shows us, but its character side—the results of strong, concentrated will-power. When he writes of modern times, he describes gipsy or brigand life, as in *Carmen*, a vendetta, as in *Colomba*, a horrible murder on the wedding-night, as in *La Vénus d'Ille* and *Lokis*. Or if he lays his plot within the pale of modern society proper, he either describes peculiarities of those classes which labour under social disadvantages—the bold language and irregular ideas of young ballet-dancers and actresses, the erotic temptations of Catholic priests; or contents himself with anything in the life of the upper classes that means character—a passionate love-affair terminated by a duel, a case of adultery which leads to the suicide of one of the parties concerned, any thoroughly scandalous story which it delights him to cast in the teeth of the effete, hypocritical society of the day. He feels himself in his element amidst merciless strokes of fate, terrible vicissitudes, violent passions which, when they are fortunate, override the conventions of society, and when unfortunate, are called crimes. Hence it was that modern Russian literature was so sympathetic to him. The works of Pushkin which he translated, *La dame de Pique* and *Les Bohémiens*, have themes closely akin to those which he treated himself.

Two characteristic feelings lie at the root of Mérimée's disinclination to apprehend and treat the trenchant catastrophes in human life as tragic catastrophes; the one is a kind of fear that the trenchancy which he loves will lose its edge by the introduction of a reconciling element; the other is his disbelief in a greater, comprehensive whole, of which the single incident forms a part. When he produces, as he at times does, a genuinely tragic effect, it happens almost against his will, and is the result of a more mature and profound understanding of the human soul, and of a sympathy, growing with his growing experience of life, for cases in which there is a necessary connection between character and destiny. In his romance of the days of Charles IX., when he makes the one brother fall by the hand of the other, he, the scorner of the symbolic, as a matter of fact represents all the folly and horror of the religious and civil war in one melodramatically tragic, symbolical picture. And when, in the little tale *La Partie de Trictrac*, the unfortunate officer who has cheated on one solitary occasion becomes so miserable in the consciousness of his shame that he is driven to commit suicide, the story imperceptibly assumes the character of a tragedy of honour.

In another little work of art, *La double Méprise*, Mérimée endeavours to represent the web of chance events, of conflicting and wrongly comprehended instincts, which make life so meaningless, and even what is saddest as foolish as it is sad and hideous; but as he unfolds the inner history of the painful incident, and as we by degrees learn that that which seemed foolish was inevitable, it ceases to be foolish. The gist of the story is that a young married woman, Julie de Chaverny, whose dissatisfaction with her married life is developing into actual unhappiness, is led by a chain of ideas and emotions, slight in themselves, but welded together like links of iron, to give herself to a man whom she in reality does not love, and then to take her own life. Mérimée's art displays itself in this case in the calm assurance with which he takes his reader's hand and leads him through the labyrinth of all these ideas and emotions to a climax which is as inevitable as it is illogical. Two inimitable passages are the conversation in which Darcy arouses Julie's enthusiastic admiration by the modesty and humour with which he unwillingly recounts his own gallant deeds, and the conversation in the carriage, during which every utterance of Julie's, her resistance even more than her confessions, brings her nearer to her fall. The situation is summed up in the following classic sentence, prepared for by everything that has gone before:

"The unfortunate woman believed at this moment in all sincerity that she had always loved Darcy; that she had felt the same ardent attachment to him during all the six years of his absence as she did at that instant." Mérimée understood what a power, what a tragic motive force in human life, inevitable illusion or self-deception is. It is the source to which not only half of human happiness, but a considerable proportion of human misery may be traced.

But Mérimée approaches nearer than this to tragedy proper, where the fateful element sinks deep into the character, mingling with it as a poison mingles with the blood. Think of *Carmen*. From the day of José's first meeting with Carmen, the gipsy girl, the course of his life is changed; and he, the honest, good-hearted man, becomes of inevitable necessity, for her sake, a robber and a murderer. Nay, the author, whose aim as a young Romanticist was to hold as far aloof as possible from the poets who wrote tragedy in the ancient Greek style, approaches, in *Colomba*, with his modern Corsican heroine, nearer to Greek tragedy than any of his fellow-countrymen who hymned the fate of one or other of "Agamemnon's imperishable race." Not without reason has Colomba been compared to Elektra. Like Elektra, she broods, to the exclusion of every other thought, on the unavenged death of her father; like Elektra, she incites her brother to take a bloody revenge; and she is even less of the stereotyped tragedy heroine than Sophocles' young girl, for, clad though she is in the steel panoply of appalling prejudices, she bears herself simply and lovably. She is at once bloodthirsty and childlike, hard-hearted and girlish; a fierce grace is her characteristic trait. It is easy for us now to see how much more nearly akin this fresh, vigorous daughter of a little southern island race is to the old Greek female characters than are all those princesses who walked the French stage in buskins, and borrowed the names of Elektra, Antigone, or Iphigenia. But she is perhaps still more nearly related to the heathen daughters of a far-away northern isle, the women of the Icelandic sagas, who brood with such passionate obstinacy over their family feuds, and force the unwilling men to take blood for blood.

In this same *Colomba*, which is Mérimée's most famous work, Romantic "local colouring" celebrates its most signal triumph. The story is pervaded by the genuine aroma of Bonaparte's native isle, and breathes the genuine Corsican spirit. As a proof of the fidelity with which Corsican customs are reproduced, as well as of the popularity of the book, it may be mentioned that when Mérimée was waiting in court to hear the verdict in the Libri case, a Corsican ex-bandit came forward from among the audience and quietly offered, in case of the verdict being given against him, to revenge him by assassinating the president of the court. Better evidence of the correctness of Mérimée's colouring could hardly be required. But Mérimée would not have been Mérimée if he had not (at the very time when he was publishing *Colomba*) saved his reputation as the enemy of all theories by making merry over this same much-talked-of "local colouring." In the preface, written in 1840, to the second edition of *La Guzla*, his collection of fictitious Illyrian popular songs and ballads, he tells that, "in the year of grace 1827," he was a Romanticist with an enthusiasm for local colour, nay, the firm belief that without it there was no salvation. By local colouring he and his comrades meant what in the seventeenth century went by the name of "manners" (*mœurs*); but they were very proud of their word, and imagined themselves to be the inventors of the thing as well as the word. His devotion to local colouring inspired him with the desire to visit Illyria; want of money was the chief obstacle to his carrying out his wish; the idea occurred to him to write a description of his travels in anticipation and pay for the tour with the profits of his book; but he gave up this bold plan, and instead manufactured, with the assistance of a guide-book and the knowledge "of five or six Slavonic words," a collection of "ballads translated from the Illyrian." Everyone was deceived.[2] A German savant of the name of Gerhardt actually translated *Guzla* (along with two other volumes of Slavonic poetry) into German, and this, moreover, in the original metre, which he had been able to trace in the French translator's prose. After Mérimée had thus discovered how easily "local colouring" may be obtained, he forgave Racine and the Classicists their lack of it.

We are conscious, under all this witty pleasantry, of the distinguished author's vexation with himself for having borne a banner, belonged to a party, even though it was only in literature and as a youth. And the preface, moreover, does not tell the exact truth; for Mérimée's Illyrian prose ballads, though by no means remarkably good in other respects, are distinctly the product of intelligent and careful study, and accurately reproduce the style of Slavonic popular poetry. But Mérimée could never write of himself without self-depreciation. His prefaces, when he on a rare occasion condescends to enter into direct relations with the public by means of a preface, are distinguished by a nonchalant, apathetic humility, a manner which isolates the man who assumes it more completely than the most exaggerated self-assertion.

---

[1] Guizot: *Shakespeare et son temps*, 294.

[2] Goethe alone publicly proclaimed Mérimée to be the author of the Illyrian poems. In one of his letters Mérimée makes some not unreasonably caustic remarks on the explanation given by the great poet of his divination of the personality concealed under the pseudonym *Hyacinth Maglanovitch*: "It occurred to us that the word Guzla lay concealed in the word Gazul." The fact was that Mérimée, who, like all the other young Romanticists, courted Goethe's favour, had sent him the book along with a letter confiding the secret of its authorship.

The stern or satirical reserve of Mérimée's style is most noticeable in the works which he wrote in his official capacity, in his brief descriptions of French historical monuments, crowded with technical expressions (*Notes sur le Midi de la France*, &c.) Not a word about himself, not a single personal impression of travel, not one remark addressed to the uninitiated! What a satisfaction there lay in disappointing all the critics who were lying in wait to detect the dilettante and novel-writer in the inspector of historical monuments!

Reserve is also apparent in the love of mystification displayed by the author of *Le Théâtre de Clara Gazul* and the Illyrian ballads. We are reminded of Beyle here, though the tendency took a somewhat different form in his case. Mérimée's pseudonymity was of short duration, but whilst it lasted it was impenetrable. Nothing gave him greater pleasure than to send his readers on a wild-goose chase. He neglected nothing that could give an appearance of authenticity to his pseudonyms. He supplied his works not only with biographies, but with portraits of their supposed authors. To complete the jest, he prefixed to the first edition of *Clara Gazul* an engraved portrait of himself dressed as a Spanish lady, in a low-necked dress, with a lace mantilla thrown over his head.

He who misleads by keeping silence is obliged sooner or later to speak, and the mystifier of the public is in the end compelled to admit it into his confidence and bear its criticism. But there is a more impenetrable kind of armour than either silence or mystification, namely irony, and in it Mérimée, like Beyle, clad himself.

There was a satirical vein in his writing from the first; for his ardent admiration for primitive strength of character naturally involved contempt for phrasemongers. Such a play as *Les Mécontents*, for instance, contains as bitter a satire as ever was penned upon drawing-room revolutionists. A set of Royalist provincial noblemen, old imbeciles whose one passion is to hear themselves speak, concoct a conspiracy against the First Empire; they determine to distribute inflammatory pamphlets, they arrange secret signals, draw up plans of procedure, and quarrel for the presidency at their meetings, but disperse incontinently at the mere sight of a gendarme. A play of much later date, *Les deux Héritages ou Don Quichotte* (which probably served Émile Augier as a model for some of his dramas), contains an analogous satire upon social and religious hypocrisy, political humbug, the cold, calculating, unchivalrous spirit of a youthful generation, comparing himself with which Mérimée must have been tempted to call himself an idealist and enthusiast.

But in these dramatic works, the faulty construction of which is apparent even to the reader, the irony peculiarly characteristic of Mérimée is absent. In them he lays on the colour too thickly; it is as the novelist that he really excels. Far more delicate than the irony of his dramas is, for instance, that of the charming little story *L'abbé Aubain*, a work which proves the versatility of Mérimée's talent, for in it he writes almost like Edmond About, only with much greater elegance. *L'abbé Aubain* is a short series of letters, some of them written by a lady who supposes herself to be beloved by a young abbé, the rest by the abbé, who jests constrainedly on the subject of the lady's attachment to him. We make the acquaintance of two weak, refined characters, who lie to each other, to themselves, and to the world, and whose little dainty, easy-going passions and counterfeit self-control are the subject of the silent satire of the author.

In a story of this kind there is no narrator; therefore we are no more conscious than in the plays that the author is suppressing himself. The form of irony peculiarly characteristic of Mérimée is most plainly observable where we have a narrator, but know nothing of him except that he has no share in the emotions he describes. Mérimée's method, which is determined by his natural reserve, is to increase the effect of the story he is telling by an irony betraying itself in minute traits; he either with a little curl of the lip allows the touching incidents to speak for themselves, or he exhibits the painful, the revolting, or the passionate, in a frame of cold, indifferent surroundings.

In that little masterpiece, *Le Vase étrusque*, the only one of his stories in which he treats a quite modern theme sympathetically, he tells the story of two young beings who love each other secretly. We hear the young man, who has just returned from a night rendezvous, talking to himself:

"How happy I am!" he keeps on saying to himself. "At last I have found the heart which understands mine! Yes, it is my ideal that I have found—friend and mistress in one.... What character! What passion! ... No, she has never loved before!" And as vanity intrudes itself into every earthly concern, his next thought is: "She is the most beautiful woman in Paris;" and in imagination he retraces all her charms.

The narrative continues in this strain for some time before Mérimée interrupts himself with the remark that a happy lover is almost as tedious as an unhappy one. Then, when the relation between the two lovers has reached its most perfect stage, when Saint-Clair's momentary but fatal fit of jealousy of his beloved's past has resolved itself into a mere nothing, a mere misunderstanding, and we have witnessed a love scene which the most subtly tender of writers could hardly surpass, a scene in which tears of repentance mingle with smiles and kisses, how do we learn, six lines farther on in the story, that everything is at an end, that Saint-Clair was killed the following morning in a duel? We hear of it as we hear of such things in real life:

"Well," said Roquantin to Colonel Beaujeu when he met him at Tartoni's in the evening; "is this news true?"

"Only too true," answered the Colonel, looking very sad.

"Tell me how it happened."

"Simply enough. Saint-Clair told me that he was wrong, but that he would rather be shot by Thémines than make an apology to him. I could not but approve. Thémines wanted to draw lots for the first shot, but Saint-Clair insisted upon his firing first. Thémines fired. I saw Saint-Clair wheel round and then fall, dead. I have more than once seen a soldier, after he had been mortally wounded, turn round in the same curious way before he fell."

"How extraordinary!" said Roquantin. "And Thémines, what did he do?"

"Oh! what every one does on such occasions. He threw his pistol on the ground with an exclamation of regret. He flung it with such force that the trigger broke. *It is an English pistol, a Manton. I don't believe he will find a gunsmith in the whole of Paris who can make him as good a one.*"

By describing the sympathy of friends, not in the manner of sentimental authors, but as it expresses itself in real life, Mérimée brings out the passionate sentiment of the relation between the lovers in full force; the neutral tint of the frame enhances the effect of the picture. If the art of icing champagne had not been known before Mérimée's day, he would have invented it.

Let me give one or two more examples of Mérimée's gift of keeping entirely aloof from the emotion which he portrays, and which he excites in the reader. Take the passage in *L'Enlèvement de la Redoute* which describes the main attack. "We were soon at the foot of the redoubt. The palisades had been shattered and the earth torn up by our balls. The soldiers rushed at these ruins with shouts of: 'Vive l'Empereur!' *which were louder than one would have expected from men who had been shouting so long*." The narrator in this case is not Mérimée himself, but an officer who is relating his first experience of a fight; this officer is, however, near of kin to his creator; he does not share the ardour of the fighting soldiers. Instead of praising their enthusiasm for Napoleon as patriotic or courage-inspiring, he coolly comments upon the strength of their lungs.

It is not at all surprising that this style, this tone, which adds so remarkably to the impression of the reality of the thing described, should have been again and again taken as a sign of the author's want of feeling. As a matter of fact it is no more so than his choice of horrible subjects is a proof of his cruelty. On the contrary, the irony of the style is often only the transparent veil covering compassion and indignation. Study this irony in the little tale *Tamango*, where to the superficial reader the mere choice of subject would be apt to suggest the author's love of the revolting—for what is more horrible than the slave trade and the ill-usage of slaves, or than shipwreck, starvation, and murder? And all this, moreover, told with an ironic smile!

But we feel what the irony signifies when we come upon such a passage as the following:

"The captain, to ratify the bargain, shook hands with the more than half-intoxicated negro chief; and the slaves were immediately delivered to the French sailors, who quickly exchanged the long wooden forks with which the negroes had fettered them, for collars and handcuffs of iron—*a proof of the superiority of European civilization*."

And its real quality is still more distinctly perceptible in the lines which tell of the captain's attempt to make the pretty negress obedient by flogging her:

"With these words the captain went below, sent for Aycha, and tried to console her; but neither caresses nor blows (*for a man loses patience at last*) made the beautiful negress amenable."

The cold composure with which the fact is recognised that such is human nature, and that such things happen, actually heightens the impression of indignation produced by the deed of violence. We do not lay the book aside unmoved. We perceive that what at first seemed coldness, is but the petrified eruption of the inward fire of the artist's soul. We comprehend that an emotion underlies the sober, severe style of these tales, and that it is this emotion which gives them their impressiveness.

Of all Mérimée's stories, *Arsène Guillot* is the one in which the ironical style of the narrative and a strength of feeling which has freed itself from the bonds of prejudice, are most perfectly fused together. The conventional virtue of the pious fashionable lady is contrasted with the absolute ignorance of the doctrines of Christianity and morality displayed by the poor girl whose own mother has sold her. In a moment of despair Arsène jumps out of the window and breaks her leg and several of her ribs. The action of the story passes in her sick-room. The usual irony in the relation of the events prevents compassion and emotion from overstepping the bounds of artistic moderation. Towards the close, however, in the description of Arsène's death, the heart is permitted to speak unrestrainedly, and its simple language communicates a charm to the dying grisette hardly inferior to that which transfigures De Musset's dying Bernerette. At the very end artistic irony again asserts itself. For the line: "Pauvre Arsène, elle prie *pour nous!*" traced in pencil in a woman's delicate handwriting on Arsène's gravestone, informs us in all its brevity that the austere lady has yielded to the same temptation as the ignorant child, that after Arsène died like a heroine, her patroness inherited her lover. Irony is in this case almost too coarse a word. Expressions are lacking to describe these delicate shades. That faintly ironical pencilled line contains in its six words a Mériméan, that is to say, a laconic, sermon on tolerance.

D'Haussonville has preserved for us some remarks made by Mérimée to Émile Augier on the subject of a little story, *La Chambre bleue*, which the former wrote specially for the Empress, in 1869. They show how this peculiar style of narration, which was originally an unconscious expression of the author's character, in time became a conscious mannerism. Mérimée said: "The

story has one great fault, which is due to the fact that in the course of writing it I altered the originally planned ending. As it was my first intention to make the tale end tragically, I *naturally* began it in a gay tone; then I changed my mind and brought about a cheerful dénouement. I ought to have re-written the first part in a tragic tone, but it was too much trouble; I left it as it was." The method which was originally the stylistic expression of a deeply emotional and very proud soul, became towards the end of the author's life a calculated, excessive use of contrast as a means of producing artistic effect.

XXVI

MÉRIMÉE AND GAUTIER

In a letter, dated 22nd November 1821, Mérimée the painter writes: "I have a big son of eighteen, of whom I should like to make a lawyer. He has such a gift for drawing that, though he has never copied anything, he sketches like a young student." Like many of the other notable French Romanticists, Prosper Mérimée never entirely gave up pictorial art. He painted in water-colours; but it was especially as the draughtsman that he was both indefatigable and gifted. His talent for drawing seems to have been near akin to his gift of literary style.

Prosper Mérimée and Théophile Gautier are the two authors of the generation of 1830 who supplement each other in the matter of style. Mérimée's strength lies in purity of line, Gautier's in glowing colour. Gautier seems to write with a brush rather than with a pen; he loves draperies and effects of light. His exuberant style is Venetian; it is velvet and brocade, which he bestrews with tinsel and spangles. Mérimée's simple, but extremely elegant presentment is in low-toned monochrome; it resembles an etching. His style, however, possesses a quality which no brilliancy of language can surpass—it is transparent; through it we see his vigorous, wild figures and characters as if they were alive. His defiant sharpness of outline reminds us of a painting or etching by Jacques Callot, an artist with whom he has much in common. One of Callot's youths, stepping out briskly with his long leather-sheathed sword dangling by his side, his plumed hat set jauntily on the side of his head, his buff coat fitting closely to his figure, his wide top-boots showing off his strong leg, his shining spurs clanking as he hastens to look on, with proud, defiant mien, at some deed of violence—such a figure would make an admirable frontispiece for a work like the *Chronique du Règne de Charles IX.*

The final evidence of Mérimée's discreet reserve is to be found in the classically elegant severity of his style. It is smooth and bright as polished steel—not an ornament, not a flower, not a fanciful decoration of any kind; every figure is of beaten metal, accurately proportioned, and as correctly attired as it is life-like. No contemporary French author displayed such aristocratic conservatism in the matter of new words and expressions as Mérimée, not even Charles Nodier. Mérimée used the language which he found ready to his hand, and set his mark upon every sentence he wrote, without employing a single out-of-the-way word, or a single ordinary word in an unusual manner. But he shunned conventional expressions, phrases which throw a veil over the thought, beneath which it looks larger and more important. What especially distinguishes him is his sure touch, his gift of producing with some simple, almost worn-out, word exactly the impression which he desires. Hugo's style is graphic and pathetic, Gautier's (and that of his followers) is sensuous and loaded with imagery—both tried to produce an effect by word-architecture. The masters were justified in the attempt; but the attempts of their imitators and pupils too often recall those magnificent aqueducts which the Romans built with a prodigious expenditure of money and labour to connect one height with another, because they did not know that the force of the water itself was sufficient to raise it from the valley. We admire these mighty erections, but our admiration would have been greater if instead of them we had found simple pipes carried along the ground. The artificial, high-flown expression is like the aqueduct, the simple word that goes straight to the point, like the humble pipe. Mérimée's style, like the pipe, keeps close to the ground, has no useless ornament and no unnecessary loftiness; there is no strength wasted. It is not on this account a style destitute of charm, but it has no other except that of exactly adequate strength. There is not a word too much, and every sentence is in the service of the whole. The old motto, *Ne quid nimis*, might have been the author's device.

Mérimée's aim in evolving such a style evidently was to make his small works of art, by the renunciation of everything superfluous, as invulnerable as possible to the tooth of time. His endeavour reminds us of what is told of Donatello. The characteristic position of that artist's incomparable St. George—arms and hands close to the body—is said to have been chosen after a careful investigation of the condition of the famous statues of antiquity with the view of ascertaining which parts of them had suffered most, and why. In much the same way, Mérimée has tried to insure his works against the change in taste which time brings about, by keeping them free from every ornamental projection, everything in the nature of a digression.

Yet it was not his style which prevailed and became that of the next generation of writers. It was not Mérimée but Gautier, who, as a stylist, was the founder of a school. And I am not of the number of those who regret that a more luxuriant and sensuous style was victorious, and that later French authors have aimed, not merely at making their periods distinct and faultlessly correct, but also at imparting to them, when possible, melody, colour, fragrance. The treatment of language introduced by Gautier, continued by Flaubert and the Goncourt brothers, and transmitted by them to Zola and Daudet, has undoubtedly its weak side; and this the most

prominent recent master of the descriptive style has not been slow to recognise and acknowledge. Zola himself writes:

"The worst of it is, that I have arrived at the conviction that the jargon of our period, that part of our style which is merely fashionable and must become antiquated, will be known as one of the most atrocious jargons of the French language. It is possible to predict this with almost mathematical certainty. What is most liable to become antiquated is imagery. As long as it is new, the metaphor or simile charms. When it has been employed by one or two generations it becomes a commonplace, a disgrace to the author who employs it. Look at Voltaire, with his dry style, his vigorous period, destitute of adjectives, which relates and does not paint; he remains eternally young. Look at Rousseau, who is our father—look at his imagery, his passionate rhetoric; he has written pages which are perfectly intolerable.... A cheerful fate awaits us who have outbidden Rousseau, us, who on the top of literature pile all the other arts—paint and sing our periods, chisel them as if they were blocks of marble, and require of words to reproduce the perfume of things. All this titillates our nerves: we think it exquisite, perfect. But what will our great-grandchildren say to it? Their ideas will undoubtedly be different, and I am convinced that certain of our works will fill them with astonishment; almost everything in them will be antiquated."

The writer of this melancholy, self-condemnatory criticism obviously goes too far. It is highly probable that our descendants will not think much of our books; but it is not the style in which they are written that will be most to blame for that. Zola's utterance is, however, remarkable as the evidence of a literary colourist in favour of the sober, unimaginative style of which Mérimée is undoubtedly one of the greatest masters in our own century. The best of his works are masterpieces of literature. Seldom, indeed, have short prose pieces been written in such a style. It is the thing itself that stands before us, in clear sunlight, un-obscured by even the faintest mist of sentimentality. It would be unreasonable to regard it as a fault in the author of picturesque prose that his imagery loses by repetition, that he does not stand the ordeal of repeated re-reading; one might just as well blame a composer because his melodies become intolerable by being played on all the street organs. One thing, however, is undeniable—that a severe, unadorned style like Mérimée's survives the works written in the florid style, as surely as the bronze statue survives the blossoming tree.

Curiously enough, Mérimée's contemporaries at first set him down as a naturalist. In some lines in which he naïvely classes him with Calderon, the young Alfred de Musset gives us an excellent idea of the original impression made by his writings. It appeared to his contemporaries that he simply produced casts:

> "L'un comme Calderon et comme Mérimée,
> Incruste un plomb brûlant sur la réalité,
> Découpe à son flambeau la silhouette humaine,
> En emporte le moule, et jette sur la scène
> Le plâtre de la vie avec sa nudité.
> Pas un coup de ciseau sur la sombre effigie,
> Rien qu'un masque d'airain, tel que Dieu l'a fondu."

"Not a stroke of the chisel" is comical, as applied to the work of the most energetic stylist of the period; but so much is clear—Alfred de Musset regarded Mérimée as above everything an imitator of nature. This conception was due to a fact which has already been alluded to, namely, that in Romanticism in its earliest stage there was an element of naturalism. The young Romanticists did not at once perceive the gulf between the two. The poetry of the plumed hat and the Toledo blade was undoubtedly more to their taste than the real life which they saw around them; but reality, too, might be represented poetically when there was colour and character in it, and passion and fire and exotic fragrance; and all this it had in Mérimée's books. The germs of naturalism are to be found in Mérimée as they are in the other Romanticists; but in them all the love of art was stronger than the inclination to imitate nature. Mérimée, nevertheless, with his partiality for brutal subjects and his artificial coldness, distinctly prognosticates the tendency of the succeeding literary generation. In Taine's *Vie et Opinions de M. Graindorge* (1867) we find a remark on the social life of the day, which applies equally to literature: "Depuis dix ans une nuance de brutalité complète l'élégance." We are conscious of it in almost all the most famous writers of the Second Empire—in the younger Dumas, in Flaubert, whom one might call the Mérimée of the next generation, and in Taine himself, who is delighted, like Mérimée, when he has "a fine murder" to describe, and who makes his Graindorge give the reader exact instructions in the most practical method of cutting the throat with a razor.[1]

To-day Mérimée passes for a Classicist. His perspicuous, transparent style, his determined avoidance of lyrical digressions, of metaphor and rhetoric, seem to insure him a place outside the Romantic School. But we have seen how, in a certain sense, all the French Romanticists are at the same time Classicists; and the fact that this is peculiarly observable in Mérimée's case does not give him a position altogether apart from theirs.

When we remember, moreover, that he, as well as Hugo and De Vigny, was influenced by Scott; that there is a distinct trace of Byronism, of the "Satanic," in some of his work; that, sober sceptic as he was, he wrote works (such as *La Vision de Charles XI.*) in Hoffmann's style; that he was Beyle's pupil; and that he almost always, in true Romantic fashion, chose foreign, unmodern subjects, we cannot but recognise in the author possessing so many features in common with the French Romanticists, a true child of the age.

Even if we deny him absolute artistic originality, his figure stands out sufficiently from among the

gifted literary group of 1830. The others gallop into the lists clad in gaudily-decorated coats of mail, with gilded helmets and waving pennons. He is the Black Knight in the great Romantic tourney.

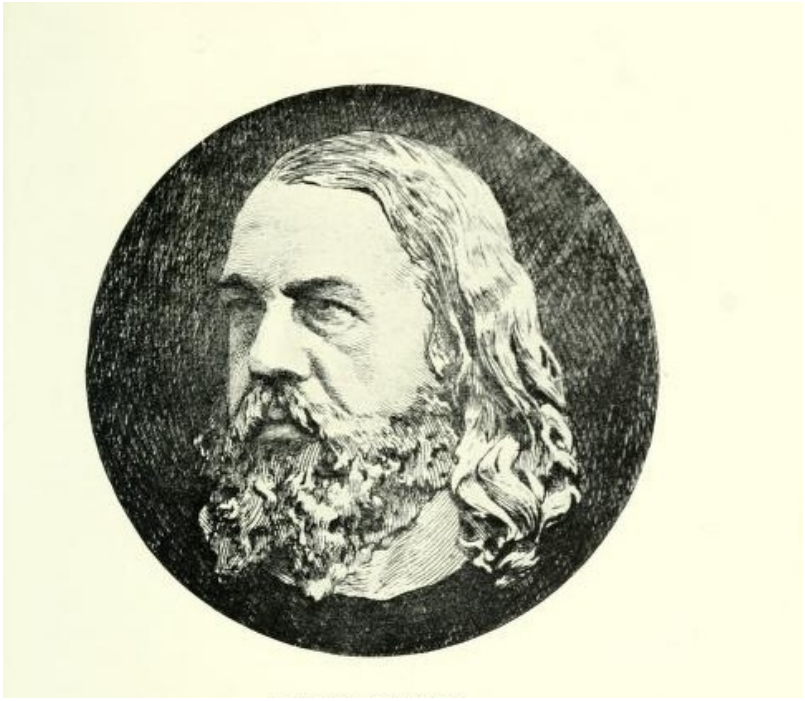
---

[1] "Quand Cromwell passe en Irlande, il marque le nombre et la qualité des gens massacrés, et puis c'est tout. Et cependant quels beaux massacres! Quelle occasion pour pénétrer le lecteur de la froide fureur qui poussait les épées des fanatiques!"—Taine: *Essay on Guizot*.

XXVII

THÉOPHILE GAUTIER

On a certain day in the beginning of January 1830, three young men might have been seen making their way along a newly paved road in the neighbourhood of the Champs Élysées in Paris, towards a solitary house, the first of a future street. One of them, a fair-haired youth of nineteen, with a slight stoop and a quick, bird-like walk, and with manuscripts sticking out of all his pockets, was the amiable, refined fantast, Gérard de Nerval, a poet whose chief occupation it was to run himself off his legs in the service of his friends. By his side walked, with stately bearing and Castilian gravity of countenance, the pale, black-bearded Petrus Borel, who as the eldest (already twenty-two) was the central figure of a group of young art enthusiasts. A little behind followed, with lagging steps and much inward perturbation, an olive-complexioned, regular-featured, handsome young fellow of eighteen, whom his two friends had promised to introduce to the master of the lonely house, Victor Hugo, in whose home they themselves were welcome guests, a piece of good fortune envied them by many.



THÉOPHILE GAUTIER

Twice did young Gautier mount the steps behind De Nerval and Borel as if his shoes were weighted with lead. He was hardly able to breathe; the cold sweat stood on his brow, and he could hear the beating of his heart. Each time they reached the door and one of the others was about to ring the bell, he turned and rushed down again, pursued by his shouting, laughing companions. The third attempt was successful, as in the fairy tales. The young man, feeling as if his legs would hardly bear him, had just sat down for an instant on the top step to recover himself, when the door opened, and in a stream of light like that which forms the halo round Phœbus Apollo, Victor Hugo himself in all his honour and glory stood revealed to their gaze against the dark background of the stair, attired in a very ordinary black coat and grey trousers, and as carefully shaved as any common philistine. He smiled at the sight of the agitated youth, but did not seem much surprised; for he was accustomed to seeing young poets and painters blush, and turn pale, and stammer on his threshold. He was evidently about to walk out into the street like an ordinary mortal, which was a greater surprise to Gautier than it would have been to see him drive through the town on a triumphal car drawn by five white horses, with a goddess of victory holding a golden crown over his head. But he turned back to his study with the young men, and Théophile Gautier listened in silence to the conversation which followed; he was too embarrassed to take part in it, but it marked an epoch in his existence; from that hour till the day of his death he was Hugo's sworn adherent, ardent admirer, grateful pupil, and unwearied

panegyrist. Never, not even momentarily, not even during separation lasting for years and the intellectual separation due to the difference in their political views, did he forget to be absolutely loyal to the man whom at this first meeting he in his heart called lord and master.

The young men's call was made in connection with the first performance of *Hernani* at the Théâtre Français. They came to fetch some packets of the little square red tickets, with "Hierro" printed on them. Gautier, who had read *Les Orientales*, was enthusiastic on the subject of the play, without having read it.

In the part of Paris where he lodged he had long been noted for his eccentricities. In every possible way he bade scornful defiance to the ordinary bourgeois, that personage detested above all others by the young Romanticists. He usually wore a black velvet jacket and yellow shoes, and went about bareheaded, with a parasol or an umbrella, his long, dark brown hair, which suited his olive complexion admirably, hanging down almost to his waist. Cigar in mouth, erect and youthfully dignified, he strolled along, utterly regardless of the contemptuous glances of the scandalised citizens or the jeers of the street boys.

But on the occasion of the first performance of *Hernani*, he felt it incumbent on him to prepare something more striking. He ordered "the red waistcoat," that waistcoat which was to become a historic garment. Its red was not the red which the revolutionists chose as their symbol, and which politicians think of when the colour is named; no, it was the flaming red which emblematised the hatred of the young artists of the period for grey. The colour tones of a particular piece of scarlet satin had fascinated the young painter and poet. He looked at it in the way we can imagine Veronese looking at a piece of silken stuff. When he had obtained possession of the treasure, he sent for his tailor and explained to him that of this material a waistcoat was to be made—yes, a waistcoat. It was to be shaped like a cuirass, to be full across the chest, and fasten at the back. "If," writes Gautier, "you were to pick out from a set of school drawing copies, representing the different expressions of the human countenance, one of those labelled *Amazement*, you would have an idea of the look upon the horror-stricken tailor's face." "But such a waistcoat is not fashionable, sir." "It will be—as soon as I have worn it." "But it is a style I know nothing about; it is more like a part of a theatrical costume than of a gentleman's ordinary dress; I am afraid of spoiling the stuff." "I shall give you a linen pattern, designed, cut out, and tacked together by myself." The waistcoat was made; and on that famous and stormy evening at the theatre, Gautier displayed perfect dignity and indifference when the philistines pointed him out to each other, and made him the target of all their opera-glasses. His name became inextricably connected with the legend of the red waistcoat, although he only wore it that one evening. For long little was known about him beyond the fact that he had worn it (I, myself, when in Paris in 1867, met people who believed that he wore it still); and it shines to this day in the history of French literature, a naïve symbol of the love of brightness and colour in life which distinguished that enthusiastic group of youths.

But the essentially luminous and flamboyant was art, pure art; and seldom has the boundless love of art as art taken such entire possession of a heart as it did of Gautier's. He was animated by it all his life, but in his youth he felt it with all the pleasures it brings, all the admiration it arouses, all the courage it imparts, and all the hatred it inspires.

It was this love which made the man who was himself a master, a sincerely, nobly modest admirer of other artists. He was Hugo's servant, Balzac's self-sacrificing friend. He was a poet, but admiration made him a critic; and to no one did a well-constructed line, a luminous word, a picturesque expression, or a bold flight of imagination give more pleasure. He was a painter before he became an author; and no one meted out such ample recognition as he to the powerful, if somewhat blundering, originality which produced that glory of colour in Delacroix's pictures, which blinds one to their deficiencies in the matter of drawing. With what passionate disapproval he fell upon Scribe's platitudes and Delavigne's cautious improvements, upon stupid vaudevilles and passionless tragedies—this man who worshipped style, and who infinitely preferred a performance at the circus to a bourgeois comedy at the Gymnase Theatre! At the circus, where they only shouted Hop! and Hé! they could not possibly commit all Scribe's sins against syntax and metre. With what fury he fell upon Delaroche when the latter (whose real talent developed late) charmed the half-educated with his laboured, highly finished representations of mediæval subjects, and taught them to prefer his Middle Ages to the Middle Ages of Hugo and Delacroix! To rank cautious talent above reckless, alarming genius was true sacrilege in Gautier's eyes; and the favour which these men of mere talent found in the eyes of the public roused in him a perfectly tiger-like fury. He confessed at a later period that he could have eaten Delaroche raw with the greatest of pleasure.

Art for art's sake! Art as its own end and aim! *L'art pour l'art!* This was Gautier's motto. And that he loved art for its own sake means (as it would mean in the case of anything else) that he loved it without any regard to its so-called morality or immorality, patriotic or unpatriotic tendency, utility or inutility.

Gautier's worship of art indicates an onward step in the development of Romanticism. In its first stage the literary renaissance was devotion to Catholicism and the old monarchy. When the movement, with Hugo at its head, made its second great advance, it undoubtedly entered upon the stage of enthusiasm for art as art; but in the case of the majority the step was an unconscious one; their enthusiasm for art concealed itself under enthusiasm for the Middle Ages, or for the sixteenth century, or for strength of passion, or for local colouring. Gautier alone was fully conscious of the principle which underlay all these manifestations; hence his name is synonymous with that phase of the Romantic movement during which poetry asserts its rights. If we were to judge by certain of Victor Hugo's prefaces (the preface to *Les Orientales*, for instance), it might

seem as if Hugo's poetry, neglecting every other ideal, had no aim but the attainment of perfect liberty for itself; but Hugo was far too much of the agitator by nature to regard this struggle, this endeavour, as more than a preliminary step. It was reserved for the disciple whom the master loved best, to regard this stage as the final one. To Gautier, as to the German Romanticists, the combat of Romanticism with utilitarianism was equivalent to a proclamation of the absolute independence of art.

Théophile Gautier was born at Tarbes, in the south of France, on the 30th of August 1811. He came of a family of good standing and pronounced Royalist principles. Like Hugo and Dumas, he was descended from a brave officer. Hugo's father, as major in Napoleon's army in Italy, fought with Fra Diavolo, and as general and governor of a Spanish province under Joseph, with the brave Spanish rebels. Dumas' father was an athlete, who, according to tradition (strictly speaking, according to the younger Dumas), could crush a horse to death between his legs and bite through a helmet, and who held the bridge of Brixen alone against an advanced guard of twenty men. Gautier's grandfather won renown by being the first in the attack on Bergen-op-Zoom. He was a man of colossal strength and gigantic proportions, who lived in the open air, hunted every day, and was never seen without his gun, which he would fire into the air again and again if anything put him into specially good spirits. He lived to be a hundred. Théophile's father, who also lived to a great age, displayed his inherited vigour chiefly in intellectual matters. He was a well-educated man of many and varied acquirements. It speaks well for his literary taste and his freedom from prejudice, that he greatly admired the preface to *Cromwell*, and that he approved of his son's poetic tendencies; indeed, he was so delighted with the latter's audacious novel, *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, that, whilst the book was being written, he often locked the young man into his room with the words: "You don't come out until you have written some pages of *Maupin*." Théophile's mother, a stately beauty, who is said to have had Bourbon blood in her veins, united with his father in spoiling and worshipping the son whom nature had so bountifully endowed. He was one of those beings who are created to be admired and beloved, not only by their relatives and friends, but by every one—one of those on whom a pet-name is bestowed by a whole generation; for he was a great artist and a great child. How significant is the abbreviation, Théo, by which he is alluded to hundreds of times in contemporary literature! It was the familiarity of admiration which thus shortened his name.

To the particulars of his pedigree which seem to explain his character, another must be added, namely, that there was undoubtedly some Eastern blood in the family. This is interesting because, like the negro strain which accounts for much of the violence and force in the writings of Dumas the elder and of Pushkin, it is a physiological explanation of the Oriental impress which became observable in Gautier's personality and works as years went on. He was intended by nature to wear a fez or a turban, and to move slowly and with dignity, and it was natural that he should end by displaying as little emotion as possible in his works.

Théophile Gautier left the south of France and came to live in Paris as quite a child. It is a sign of the early development of his character, that at school he preferred the authors who wrote before or after the so-called Golden Age of their literatures to the classic and correct writers. In French literature his favourite authors were Villon and Rabelais; Corneille and Racine made little impression on him. In Latin literature he read with eager enjoyment only the poets and prose authors of the decadence—Claudian, Martial, Petronius, and Apuleius; these he imitated in his Latin verses in every possible metre; upon Cicero and Quintilian he looked down with perfect indifference. This attitude was due in the first place to the artist's love of a picturesque, exuberant style, and in the second place to the youth's aversion for all the imposing general truths and fine sentiments inevitably met with in the writings of every author whom we call classic. A Frenchman who was as wild and mad as Villon, or as exuberant and rich in colour as Rabelais, had in Gautier's eyes the inestimable advantage of being unaffected by the general polish of the great century; a Roman who had African blood in his veins, like Apuleius, or was of Egyptian origin, like Claudius, was necessarily more to his liking than the more tasteful orators and poets of the Augustan age; for he loved the peculiar, the piquant, the disconcerting, and was not repelled by artificiality and mannerism if any charm accompanied them; he liked his literature, so to speak, a little "high." The mature man retained the love of the boy for the authors of the Silver Age. To it we owe the excellent collection of criticisms which he published under the title of *Les Grotesques*, the aim of which was the rehabilitation of the whole group of minor poets whom Boileau had disgraced and dismissed in his *L'Art poétique* in order to make more room for the great authors who had observed the rules of Aristotle and the laws of taste. The poor fellows lay unread in the charnel-house of literature with a line of Boileau's upon their foreheads. Gautier, as the sworn enemy of everything regular and commonplace, undertook their defence. His love of the plastic and picturesque found no satisfaction in the study of the dignified authors who had sat writing with periwigs on their heads and lace ruffles at their wrists; but it gave him real pleasure to seek out all those forgotten, curious poets with the strange countenances and grimaces, in whose pages, for the most part sadly remarkable for their bad taste, there are nevertheless to be found many an amusing oddity, many a gleam of originality, many a witty or picturesque line, nay, whole poems as full of life as are the best of François Villon's and Théophile de Viau's. Though their muse was no beauty, there might nevertheless be said of her what Gautier wrote of an attractive woman:

"Elle a dans sa laideur piquante
Un grain de sel de cette mer
D'où jaillit nue et provocante
L'âcre Vénus du gouffre amer."

And one of these poor poets of the fifteenth, sixteenth, or seventeenth century, who had lain drunk in the gutter, or hewn his way through the world with his rapier, or ended his life on the gallows, offered, with his mad humour and his verse, just such a silhouette, just such a characteristic, vivid profile as Gautier loved to sketch.

By his own wish young Théophile was taken from school and placed as a pupil in the studio of Rioult the painter. The youth himself, as well as his relatives, overestimated the talent he showed for drawing and painting, which was in reality merely the subordinate supplement to his absolutely unrivalled gift of picturesque writing. It was Victor Hugo who decided his career. When Hugo blew the horn of Hernani, Gautier answered to the call and forsook painting for literature. But he never lost the habit he had acquired of looking at things from the painter's point of view; and his conversation, and those parts of his writings (such as the preface to *Mademoiselle de Maupin*) where he expressed himself with the same freedom as in conversation, were always plentifully larded with that artistic slang for which the French studios are famous.

It was as a lyric poet that he made his first appearance. Five months after the famous first performance of *Hernani*, and unfortunately on the very day on which the Revolution of July broke out, he published his first book of poems. They were swept away and lost to sight in the stream of events; but even at a less troubled time they would hardly have attracted much attention. As a lyric poet Gautier is unpopular; his style is vigorous and faultless, but his is not the true lyric temperament; his attention is too much distracted by externals; he lacks intensity and soul. In his youthful poetry he is best when he is giving expression to his antique pagan, essentially Roman, epicureanism—when he tells of the three things that give happiness, "sunshine, a woman, a horse"; when (as in "La Débauche") he sings of the joy of life, and praises colour, song, and verse; or when (as in "Le premier rayon de mai") he reproduces the simple, almost sensual, at any rate perfectly incomplex, feeling of happiness produced by the close vicinity of the beloved one. Very fine, and quite typical of Gautier, is the little poem "Fatuité," the mocking title of which subtly wards off any attack upon its sentiments. It gives expression to the gay arrogance of youthful strength. The first two verses are as follows:

"Je suis jeune; la pourpre en mes veines abonde.
Mes cheveux sont de jais et mes regards de feu.
Et, sans gravier ni toux, ma poitrine profonde
Aspire à pleins poumons l'air du ciel, l'air de Dieu.

Aux vents capricieux qui soufflent de Bohême,
Sans les compter, je jette et mes nuits et mes jours,
Et, parmi les flacons, souvent l'aube au teint blême
M'a surpris dénouant un masque de velours.

It was not until much later in life that Théophile Gautier made his mark as a lyric poet. In *Émaux et Camées*, a collection of poems in short, eight-syllabled lines, which in their forms are sometimes faintly reminiscent of Goethe's *West-Oestlicher Divan* and Heine's *Buch der Lieder*, we have the most characteristic exemplification of his personal style. The various subjects are treated entirely in the spirit of plastic art. The author's aim was, by means of vividness and careful blending of colour, perfection and delicacy of form, severe purity and general harmony of rhyme, in short by means of a skill which neglected nothing, not even the minutest trifle, to produce poetic equivalents of the miniature masterpieces in agate or onyx bequeathed to us by the ancients, or of the Italian or French enamel painting on gold of the days of the Renaissance. In these poems, along with which should be named "Musée secret," a most admirable poem, suppressed as indecent (to be found in Bergerat's *Théophile Gautier*), he attained to a beauty of language which may justly be called ideal. The only thing at all comparable to it is the plasticity of some of Leconte de Lisle's later poems. The poem "L'Art," the last in the book and, as regards language, a truly monumental work of art, contains his view of art carved, as it were, in stone. He so loved that art which he understood so well, that he placed it above everything else in this world, and saw in it the one thing that would endure through all the changes of time. He was, doubtless, too much inclined to estimate the value of a work of art by the difficulties overcome in producing it, but only because he believed that it was the struggle with difficulties which gave the finished work its strength, and made it proof against moth and rust. Hear his own words:

"Tout passe.—L'art robuste
Seul a l'éternité.
Le buste
Survit à la cité.

Et la médaille austère
Que trouve un laboureur
Sous terre
Révèle un empereur.

Les dieux eux-mêmes meurent,
Mais les vers souverains
Demeurent
Plus forts que les airains."

—a saying, this last, which holds good of such verse as Gautier wrote.

XXVIII

THÉOPHILE GAUTIER

For a vivid, spirited picture of the young Bohemian Romanticist group which rallied round Hugo, a picture distinguished by its wanton self-caricature, we have only to turn to Théophile Gautier's *Les Jeunes-France*. The author intended his work to satirise Romanticism in much the same manner as *Les Précieuses Ridicules* had satirised the literary fantasticality of an earlier period; but unfortunately *Les Jeunes-France* is only the frolicsome effusion of a talented boy, whilst *Les Précieuses* is a mature work of enduring value. *Les Jeunes-France* was written almost immediately after Gautier's admission into the Romantic camp, and it, like the poetry of Petrus Borel and Philothée O'Neddy, gives us a good idea of the Bohemian camaraderie of the talented young men of the day. Gautier was the very man to write such a book; for not only then, but to the end of his life, he was the real artist—Bohemian; always more or less at variance with society and its notions of respectability; living in his youth, as painter, poet, journalist, and traveller, a Bohemian life in the general acceptation of the word, and in his later years settling down to live with his sisters and his children without a thought of marriage. Of his many liaisons, that with Ernesta Grisi, the mother of his daughters Judith and Estella, lasted longest. He was also for a long time passionately attached to her sister Carlotta. It was for Carlotta that he wrote his ballets. Though he was inconstant as a lover, he was an extremely affectionate brother and father. He gave his daughters a model education. One of his excellent ideas was to have them taught such languages as Japanese and Chinese, proficiency in which was so rare that it provided a woman who required to earn her living with the means of doing so. His daughter Judith reaped the benefit of his foresight.

But the book which gives us the best, completest impression of young Gautier's inner life is not *Les Jeunes-France*, but *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, the novel which he wrote immediately after that work (1836). In *Mademoiselle de Maupin* the champagne-froth of his youth seethes. It is a perfectly pagan and at times a perfectly indecent book—as indecent as a dialogue of Crébillon *fils*—but there is power in it; and though Swinburne exaggerates considerably when he calls it "the golden book of beauty," there is no doubt that it displays an extraordinary sense of beauty. It was an outlet for the young man's redundant vigour.

Théophile Gautier was originally very slightly built, and swimming was the only physical exercise in which he excelled; but he was bent on becoming an athlete, athletes and prize-fighters being above all other mortals the objects of his admiration. For several years he took fencing and boxing, riding and rowing lessons, until his physical condition was entirely changed, and he had the unutterable satisfaction on the day the Château Rouge was opened, of giving a perfectly new "Turk's head" a blow of 532 pounds weight, which has become historical. "This," he says with amiable vanity in his autobiographical sketch, "is the deed of my life of which I am proudest." And he is evidently quite sincere in his assertion; for even when he was an old man he used, when his friends were disputing his paradoxes and all contradicting him together, to command silence by shouting with his hoarse voice: "Moi, je suis fort; j'amène 530 sur une tête de Turc et je fais des métaphores qui se suivent. Tout est là." In *Mademoiselle de Maupin* we are conscious at one and the same time of the young dandy who can give the tremendous blow and the artist whose "metaphors hang together," that is to say, whose sentences shape themselves into pictures before our eyes. But what we are still more sensible of is the genuinely antique, plastic nature which distinguishes Gautier from all the other men of that gifted generation. He has painted himself in a passage in which he makes the hero describe his own character:

"I am a man of the Homeric age; the world in which I live is not my world, and I do not understand the society by which I am surrounded. Christ has not lived for me; I am as pagan as Alcibiades or Phidias. I have never gathered passion-flowers on Mount Golgotha, and the deep stream which flows from the side of the crucified one and encircles the world with a girdle of red has not laved me in its waves. My rebellious body refuses to recognise the supremacy of the soul; my flesh refuses to be mortified. To me this earth is as beautiful as heaven; and in my eyes perfection of form is virtue. Spirituality is not to my mind; I prefer a statue to a phantom, midday to twilight. Three things give me pleasure—gold, marble, and scarlet; brilliancy, solidity, colour. These are the things I dream of, and all my castles in the air are built of them.... I never imagine mist or vapour, or anything floating and uncertain. My sky has no clouds, or if it happen to have any, they are solid, chiselled out of the fragments of marble fallen from the statue of Jupiter ... for I love to be able to touch with my finger what I have seen, and to trace the contours into their most elusive folds.... This has always been my character. I look on women with the eyes of a sculptor and not of a lover. All my life the shape of the flask has interested me, not the quality of its contents. I believe that, if I had had Pandora's casket in my hands, I should not have opened it."

Théophile Gautier is one of the few French Romanticists who present a distinct parallel to the German. His story *Fortunio*, with its glorification of pleasure and idleness, is the French counterpart of Friedrich Schlegel's *Lucinde*; and he recalls the German Romanticists by his contempt for the distinctively poetic in poetry. He once said to Taine, who was comparing De Musset with Victor Hugo to the disadvantage of the latter: "Taine, I verily believe you are degenerating into bourgeois imbecility. Sentiment in poetry ... that is not the main thing. Radiant, resplendent words, rhythm, and melody—these are poetry. Poetry proves nothing and tells nothing. Take the beginning of Hugo's *Ratbert*, for instance; there is no poetry in the world like that; it is the very summit of the Himalayas. All Italy with its medieval heraldry is there—and

nothing but words." Gautier resembles Tieck in his love of the poetry of pure form, guiltless of ideas; but there is this marked difference between them, that whereas Tieck aimed at volatilising words into tones, at diluting poetry into simple mood, into music, Gautier, the good Latin, aimed at making words produce light and colour, at condensing poetry into word-painting, word-sculpture.

He harmonised completely with the German Romanticists in his hatred of utilitarianism. His watchword, *L'art pour l'art*, was the outcome of this aversion. And, regarded from a certain standpoint, this principle of his, so eloquently propounded in the preface to *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, is absolutely incontestable.

It is incontestable when taken in the sense that art is not subject to the same laws of propriety as those which justly rule life, much less to those which rule it unjustly. It is, for instance, perfectly proper that a statue should stand naked in a crowd, though it offends our sense of the proper that a man or woman should do so—life and art stand in entirely different relations to morality. It was Gautier's constant endeavour to free art from subjection to moralising criticism. In the youthfully violent preface to *Mademoiselle de Maupin* he bursts out, addressing the utilitarian critics: "Non, imbéciles, non, crétins et goîtreux que vous êtes, un livre ne fait pas de la soupe à la gélatine;—un roman n'est pas une paire de bottes sans couture; un sonnet une seringue à jet continu; un drame n'est pas un chemin de fer, toutes choses essentiellement civilisantes." Of the perpetually scandalised critics, he says: "If there is nudity anywhere in a book or a picture, they make as straight for it as a sow for the mire," ... and with an allusion to *Tartuffe*, he continues: "Dorine, the pretty waiting-woman, is at perfect liberty to display her charms as far as I am concerned; I shall certainly not take my handkerchief from my pocket to cover that bosom which ought not to be seen. I look at it as I look at her face, and if it is white and shapely it gives me pleasure." And, defending himself against his critics' reiterated accusations of immorality, he writes: "An extremely curious variety of the so-called moral journalist is the journalist with female relations.... To set up as a journalist of this species a man must provide himself with a certain number of necessary utensils, such as two or three legitimate wives, some mothers, as many sisters as possible, a complete assortment of daughters, and innumerable cousins. The next requisites are a play or novel, a pen, ink, paper, and a printer.... Then he writes: It is impossible to take one's wife to see this play; or: It is a book which a man could not possibly put into the hands of a woman whom he respects.... The wife hides her blushes behind her fan, the sister, the cousin, &c. (The titles of relationship may be varied; all that is necessary is that the relatives should be female.)" Though Gautier's practice is not always defensible, he was right in theory. Poetry has its own morality, the morality which springs from that love of beauty and of truth, which, however indistinctly and indirectly it may be expressed, is its very nature; but it refuses to be bound by the conventions of society. Poetry is in itself a moral power, exactly as science is—such a science, for example, as physiology, which certainly does not confine itself to subjects that are considered fit topics of conversation in polite society. There are immoral poets as there are immoral surgeons, but their immorality has no connection with that regardlessness of convention which the aim of both art and science entails, and which is inherent in the nature of both.

A man of a plastic and artistic temperament like Gautier, who could not have satisfied the demands made of poetry in the name of morality without sacrificing his special talent, was peculiarly fitted to enforce this truth. His special gift is the reproducing of sensuous impressions in words. He was the first to show in the grand style that the doctrine propounded in Lessing's *Laokoon* is not the whole truth, for he has described much that Lessing regarded as indescribable. There was nothing for which Gautier lacked words—the beauty of a woman, the appearance of a town, nay, the taste of a dish, or the sound of a voice—he was equal to them all. "Since we have him," said Sainte-Beuve once, "the word *inexpressible* no longer exists in the French language." He had the usual Romantic-Classic aversion for new words, but he enriched modern French with a store of fifteenth and sixteenth century words which had undeservedly fallen into disuse, and with a host of accurately suggestive technical expressions. French dictionaries were his favourite reading. Undoubtedly his was a mind entirely concentrated upon externals; but great intensity and much artistic fervour go to the making of such externality as Gautier's. It was certainly not the aim of his art to touch feeling hearts; but even Goethe had moods in which he wrote:

> "Ach, die zärtlichen Herzen! Ein Pfuscher vermag sie zu rühren;
> Sei es mein einziges Glück, dich zu berühren, Natur!"

Le Capitaine Fracasse, a novel which Gautier planned in his youth, but did not write until well on in life, gives the best idea of his prose. We see its personages as we see people in real life—their figures, their dress, their movements, their background of buildings or landscape.

The book begins with a chapter entitled *Le Château de la Misère*, which contains a description of the evening meal of a company of strolling players, which they are taking in one of the rooms of an impecunious young baron's dilapidated castle, a building of Louis XIII's time, by the light of two huge wooden stage candelabra, pasted over with gilt paper. It is a description which reminds us of the famous Rembrandt in Dresden known as "The Wedding of Esther." We see the light modelling the faces, and the shadows creeping up the walls. There is not a single emotional word in it, but such a subtle feeling of melancholy pervades the whole that we quite understand how Gautier said to Feydeau, who found him writing it: "It is an exact description of my state of mind."

Another chapter, entitled *Effet de Neige*, describes the players' waggon driving off at night through the deep snow. After a time the company miss one of their number, the Matamore (the bragging soldier), who had been following the waggon on foot. They search for him in vain, in

vain shout his name at the top of their voices across the great snow plain. No answer. One of them carries a lantern, the red light of which moves along the snow; and we see the long, shapeless shadows following the men upon the white ground. The black dog belonging to the company follows them, howling. Suddenly the howls stop, and we are conscious of the death-like stillness which prevails when falling snow stifles every sound. At last the actor who has the sharpest eyes thinks he sees a curious figure lying beneath a tree, strangely, ominously still. It is he, the luckless Matamore. He is lying with his back against the tree, and his long, outstretched legs are half covered with the driving snow. His gigantic rapier, without which he was never seen, stands at such an odd angle to his breast that under any other circumstances one would have laughed. The lantern-bearer holds the lantern to his poor comrade's face, and gets such a shock that he almost drops it. The face is of a waxy whiteness; the ridge of the nose, which is pinched at the nostrils by the bony fingers of death, shines like a piece of cuttle-bone; the skin is tightened across the temples; snow-flakes lie on the eyebrows and lashes; the dilated eyes have a glassy stare. At each end of the heavy, pointed moustache gleams a little icicle, the weight of which drags down the hair. The seal of eternal silence has closed the lips which have delighted so many an audience with their merry brag; and a death's-head shows beneath the pale, thin face, on which the habit of making grimaces has carved furrows, now terrible in their comicality. "Alas!" says one of his comrades, "our poor Matamore is dead. Exhausted and stupefied by the driving snow, he must have sought shelter for a moment under this tree, and as he has not two ounces of flesh upon his bones, he has been frozen to the marrow in no time. When we were in Paris he reduced his rations every day in order to produce more effect, and he had made himself leaner than a greyhound in the coursing season. Poor Matamore! you are safe now from all the kicks and slaps and drubbings which your part obliged you to submit to! You are as stiff now as if you had swallowed your own dagger." The pathos of the situation is here brought out indirectly by a conscientious plastic treatment of the subject.

It was natural that such a degree of feeling as this seldom revealed itself in an art like Gautier's, and that in time he became entirely addicted to a species of descriptive writing which, perfect as it was in its kind, was ever more soulless. He had a passion for travelling; he visited Spain in 1840, Africa (in the company of the Duc d'Aumale) in 1845, Italy in 1850, Constantinople in 1852, Russia (penetrating as far as Novgorod) in the following year; and all these journeys he described, thanks to his fabulous memory for the appearance of things, with incomparable accuracy, though the descriptions were often written long after his return. One disappointment awaits the reader, namely, that everything in the different countries is described except their inhabitants. We are told that when Madame de Girardin had read his *Tra los montes*, she said to him: "But, Théo, are there no Spaniards in Spain?"—a criticism which is applicable to all his books of this kind. The inner man gradually ceased to exist for him, and even the outer man was at last lost to sight in his clothes. In Gautier's conversations with Bergerat, his son-in-law, we come upon the following comical and characteristic speech: "A royal tiger is a more beautiful creature than a man; but if out of the tiger's skin the man cuts himself a magnificent costume, he becomes more beautiful than the tiger, and I begin to admire him. In the same way, a town interests me only by virtue of its public buildings. Why? Because they are the collective result of the genius of its population. Let the inhabitants be utterly vile and the town a habitation of crime, what does it signify to me so long as I am not assassinated whilst I am inspecting the buildings?" This is the worship of beauty and art carried to a characteristic extreme. The human, the emotional, the modern, life itself, at last lost all interest for Gautier the artist and art-lover. In dramatic art he became indifferent to everything but the style, the costumes, and the scenery. He often maintained that it ought to be possible for a dramatist to produce all his effects by employing four Pierrots in different situations—for all that was wanted was "an impression of life, not life itself." "Life itself is too ugly," he used to add.

Thus he finally, as it were, criticised himself, showing distinctly to all except his blind admirers where his limitations lay. He exhibited in himself the weak side of his axiom, *L'art pour l'art*; proved that an art which does nothing but revolve round the axis of art itself, inevitably becomes barren and empty. Art enthusiasm creates a Galatea out of marble, but the personal stream of thought is the divine breath which breathes life into the statue.

Nevertheless Gautier did a great and a good work by labouring with unexampled energy to free art from unwarrantable claims, and by developing it in as characteristic a manner as it lay in his power to do. Though this was not enough for art, it was enough for one man to have done. It cannot, however, be said that Gautier's talent was appreciated as it deserved during his lifetime; the artistic circles formed his public; merely literary people, not to speak of the reading world at large, did not understand him. How often have I myself heard from the lips of French scientific men the foolish assertion that Gautier wrote his books out of dictionaries, without caring for anything but the sound of his words and their singularity.

This want of understanding is to a certain degree explained by the fact that, in the mind of the general public, Gautier the journalist had gradually supplanted Gautier the poet. As early as 1836 the man who had told the journalists such bitter truths had joined their ranks to earn his daily bread; and his connection with the press lasted until his death—thirty-six years. His facility in writing was of great advantage to him, and the tasks he accomplished as art and dramatic critic were herculean. According to his own and Bergerat's calculations, which must, however, be exaggerated, his works, if all his articles were collected, would fill three hundred volumes. He wrote for Girardin's paper, *La Presse*, for nineteen years, and afterwards, under the Empire, chiefly in the *Moniteur officiel*. His dramatic criticism, which he undertook unwillingly, is only valuable for its fine style. As an art critic he confined himself more and more, as time went on, to describing pictures, an art in which he was unapproachable. Weariness of his profession,

disinclination to make enemies, compassion for beginners and the untalented, good-nature and indifference in equally large proportions, made him more and more indulgent. At last he praised everything and everyone with the same serene impassibility and in the same distinguished, ornate style. The general public knew him only as an art and literary critic.

But upon authors, both of poetry and prose, his influence was great. Paul de Saint-Victor, with his excellent prose, Leconte de Lisle, the most unemotional of modern poets, Baudelaire, the "Satanic" lyric poet, and the whole group of young poets who during the Second Empire formed themselves into a school under the name of "Les Parnassiens," are direct descendants of Théophile Gautier. Saint-Victor inherited his sense of form and colour, his devotion to plastic art, Leconte de Lisle his perfect comprehension of foreign civilisations and his Oriental serenity, Baudelaire his partiality for abnormal feelings and passions, and the Parnassians his faultless metre and rhyme.

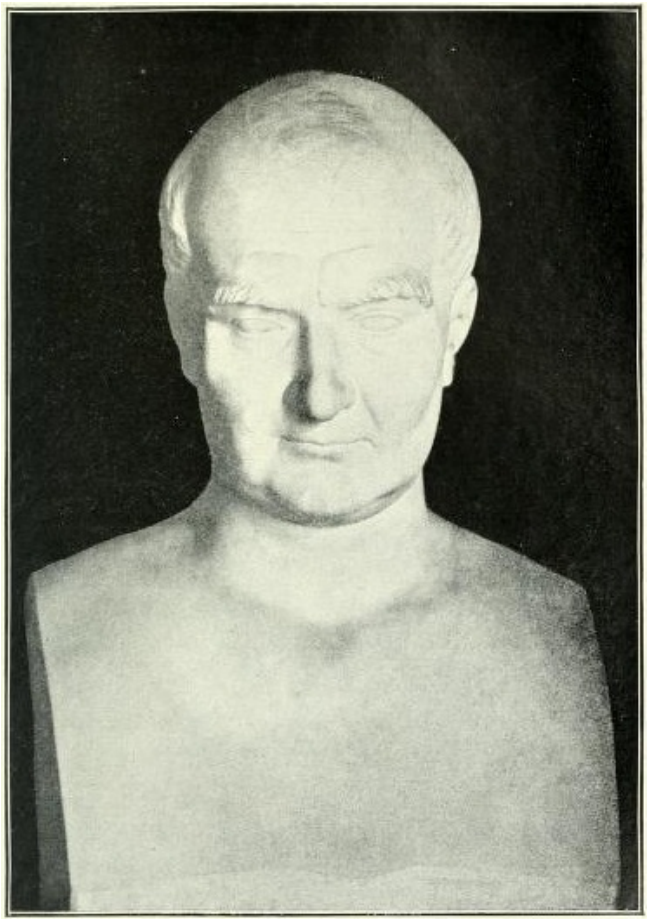
But although Gautier's influence has thus extended far beyond the 1830 period, and beyond the term of his own life, his is one of the names most inseparably connected with the early, the fighting, days of Romanticism. It is significant and touching that the last, uncompleted article he wrote was a description of the audience on the night of the first performance of Victor Hugo's *Hernani*.

XXIX

SAINTE-BEUVE

Gautier's critical writings, though they form such an enormous proportion of his total production, are already almost forgotten; he survives as the novelist and poet. But one of his contemporaries, who like him was both a poet and a critic, and whose name during their lifetime was frequently coupled with his, has had a different fate. The rank which Sainte-Beuve won for himself as a critic is so elevated as completely to overshadow his position as a poet, and as a historian in the usual sense of the word. As a poet he showed himself to be possessed of delicate and original talent; but he was an epoch-making critic, one of the men who inaugurate a system and found a new branch of art. In a certain sense it may be said that he was a greater innovator in his province than the other authors of the period in theirs; for there was modern lyric poetry before Victor Hugo, but modern criticism in the strict acceptation of the word did not exist before Sainte-Beuve. At any rate he remodelled criticism as completely as Balzac did fiction. During the last years of his life his authority was undisputed; nevertheless, it was not until some ten years after his death that the literary public beyond the frontiers of France awoke to a full sense of his preeminence. An excellent foreign critic of French literature, the German historian, Karl Hillebrand, has pronounced Sainte-Beuve's to be the master-mind of the period, an assertion which, though it may be an exaggeration, can only be called absurd if criticism be regarded as in itself a lower branch of art than the drama or lyric poetry. This, however, is surely now an antiquated standpoint. To the author that branch of art is the highest in which his nature finds fullest expression; and though there may be an order of precedence among intellects, it is extremely doubtful if there is an order of precedence among arts, and most doubtful of all when an art or branch of art has been remoulded by a productive intellect into its own special, almost personal, organ. So much is certain, that in reasoning power (not only in critical acumen) Sainte-Beuve holds the first place in the generation of 1830.

The peculiar quality of his mind was its capacity of understanding and interpreting an extraordinary number of other minds. If superiority to the other prominent individuals of the group cannot be claimed for him, the reason lies in the limitations of his gift. Amongst the minds he understood were not numbered the minds of fertile, unrefined geniuses like Balzac, and great but eccentric geniuses like Beyle. And, far-reaching as was his vision, he was seldom able to take a comprehensive view; few historians and thinkers have had such unsystematic minds. This defect had its good side; his freedom from all inclination to systematise kept him fresh to the last, enabled him perpetually, as it were, to slough his skin; so that the man who in 1827 attracted Goethe's attention by his first articles in the *Globe*, in 1869 was not only in complete, understanding sympathy with the group of young scientists and artists who at the moment gave France her claim to the consideration of Europe, but was in a manner their leader. To the very last year of his life he was regarded by all the best men as the natural general, under whose eye the "young guard" was specially anxious to distinguish itself. But his lack of system, his inability to grasp his subject as a whole, not only prevented Sainte-Beuve from distinguishing his name by any single great work, but even from ever attaining in his writings to grandeur of proportion, to the grand style. His eye was formed to see details, characteristic, important details, but no whole. He saw these details in constant, perpetually varying movement, the movement which is life, and by imitating all this movement in his brain and with his pen he gave his pictures a more exact resemblance to life than had ever been seen before. But he had not sufficient mastery over his details; he did not possess the gift of tracing apparent to deeper-lying causes, and these to a first cause.



SAINTE-BEUVE

As a critic he was only capable of describing the isolated individual, and even of the individual he only very occasionally gave a complete, final idea (Talleyrand, Proudhon); he showed him now from this side, now from that, now at one, now at another age, now in one, now in another relation to society. Even his short articles display a lack of the power of concentration; he hid his best ideas in subordinate clauses, his most suggestive thoughts in notes. He broke his bread of life into crumbs. He hid his gold, as peasants used to do, in dark corners, in holes in the floors and walls, at the bottom of chests and in stockings; he was incapable of moulding it into figures.

The freedom from system which was his strong point had this great advantage, that it preserved his writings from artificial symmetry. He never sacrificed for the sake of the inward equilibrium of his work a syllable of what he thought ought to be said; and much less would he have done so to make his description and his style graphic. He had no aversion for the complicate, the intricate, the unfinished. But the result of his lack of that philosophic spirit which largely consists in a tendency to summarise and the love of a whole as whole, is that one never receives powerful, simple impressions from his works. The important and the less important too often occupy the same plane. Regarded as an artist, he reminds us of those Japanese painters, the great artistic value of whose work began to be acknowledged in Europe about the year 1880. One reason why the pictures of these artists surprise and delight is, that there is not a trace of academic symmetry in them; they never completely satisfy us because they despise perspective, but they bring living things before us as if they were alive.

Charles Augustin de Sainte-Beuve was born at Boulogne-sur-Mer on the 23rd of December 1804. His father, a clever government official and cultured gentleman, was fifty-two before he made up his mind to marry; and his mother at the time of her marriage was nearly forty. Monsieur Sainte-Beuve died before they had been married a year, two months before the birth of his son, whose critically reflective turn of mind was plainly an inheritance from the father he never saw. Sainte-Beuve the elder was interested in all kinds of literature, but especially in poetry; he left his books with their margins crowded with annotations and remarks, the spirit of which curiously anticipates the tendency of his son's writings.[1] Madame Sainte-Beuve, whose mother was an Englishwoman, taught her son English at an early age, and to her is doubtless due his taste (a very uncommon taste in France in those days) for English lyric poetry, for Bowles, Crabbe, Cowper, and especially for Wordsworth and those other poets of the Lake School whom he so often translated and quoted. Something melancholy and prematurely old in his temperament is in all probability attributable partly to the advanced age of both his parents, and partly to the effect produced on his mother's mind, before he was born, by the illness and death of her husband.

Sainte-Beuve was a timid, melancholy child. At the age of twelve, home influence had developed in him an almost alarming degree of childish piety; he served as an acolyte at the mass with extraordinary fervour. The fever of Catholicism was short, but it left its traces, which at one time in later life showed very plainly; and during all the earlier years of his youth the lad not only retained his reverence for Christianity, but dwelt much on religious doubts and theological questions. This lasted until, as a student, he felt himself at once drawn to the philosophers of the

eighteenth century and to the living representatives of the sensationalistic philosophy, Tracy, Daunou, and Lamarck, with whose assistance he soon freed himself from the grasp of theology. His intellectual position on entering manhood was that of the pure empiricist; at a later period religious moods and tendencies reasserted themselves; but these again gave way to empiricism, which proved to be the final attitude of his mind. At school he had distinguished himself in history and languages; but, in spite of his strong literary tendencies, he determined, partly for the sake of his future, partly to counteract a too purely literary training, to study medicine. From 1823 to 1827, whilst by no means neglecting literature, he pursued the usual physiological and anatomical studies with ardour and interest. He was poor, but never in want; for he was frugal and extremely industrious.

The young medical student was anything but good-looking. His big round head, covered with fine and yet rough reddish hair, was almost too large for his body; and his figure was bad. But in the bright blue eyes, which seemed now large, now small, and which sometimes dilated strangely, there shone a thousand questions, smiled a mischievous wit, and dreamed a curiously ingratiating, half-poetic, half-sensual longing. As the poor, plain-looking student, his acquaintance with the fair sex was almost entirely limited to the frail sinners of the Quartier Latin. He had an ardently sensual, gross temperament, which demanded the immediate gratification of its desires; but with the gratification invariably came remorse and a strong feeling of humiliation. Quite as markedly developed as the sensuality was a dreamy, poetic imaginativeness, which, tinged as it was with a gentle melancholy, naturally took the direction of romanticism and mysticism. He had, perhaps, a little of the ugly man's involuntary jealous dislike of the men whose good looks capture feminine hearts at once, and yet he himself had something of their dangerously insinuating quality.

Early in 1827 Sainte-Beuve published in the *Globe* two articles on Victor Hugo's *Odes et Ballades*, which procured him admission to the Romanticist circle. Hugo came to thank him, but did not find him at home. A few days later Sainte-Beuve returned the call. He found Hugo and his wife at breakfast, and thus made at the same moment the acquaintance of the two persons who were to have most influence over his life for many years to come. He soon became the accredited critic of the Romantic School. His first important task was to prove the connection of the new school with the older French literature, to provide it, so to speak, with Gallic ancestors. This task he accomplished in his excellent critical work, *Tableau de la Poésie française au XVIe Siècle* (1827-28), the aim of which is to show plainly the thread which stretches across the classical age and connects the generation of 1830 with Ronsard, Du Bellay, Philippe des Portes, and those other authors of the Renaissance who had been so long and so unjustly despised. This book occupies the same position among Sainte-Beuve's works that *Les Grotesques* does among Théophile Gautier's. It was written before *Les Grotesques*, and is as thorough and critically discriminating as Gautier's work is plastic and eccentric.

In 1829 followed Sainte-Beuve's first lyric essay, *Poésies de Joseph Delorme*, a collection of curious, elaborate poems which made no small sensation. They purported to be written by a young medical student who had died of consumption; but in the preface, under the transparent pseudonym, Sainte-Beuve described himself and his own life. Joseph Delorme is of the race of Obermann—poor, gifted, full of compassion for the woes of humanity, a lustreless genius like the founder of the race, but of even a more complex character than he; for Joseph is a philosopher who is unhappy because of his scepticism, an idealist who with all his idealism is addicted to low dissipation. The hero is the usual despairing youth of the 1830 period, but there is more of the bourgeois in him than in the heroes of Saint-Beuve's contemporaries; his despair is less magnificent and more true to nature. As regards form, the poems are remarkable for their return to the charming old French metres of Ronsard and Charles d'Orléans, and also for the frequency with which the sonnet (beloved of Sainte-Beuve as of Wilhelm Schlegel) recurs. But they interest us chiefly because of the tendency to realism which their author already begins to display, a realism which, though it can sometimes be traced to the influence of the English poets of the Lake School, is yet as a rule, with its daring choice of subjects (in the poem "Rose" for example), original and essentially French. The ideal element is represented by the author's ecstatic effusions on the subject of the *Cénacle*, the little fraternal circle of poets and painters into which he had lately been admitted, and the members of which he panegyrises, now collectively, now singly. His admiration of his friends knows no bounds. Some of the poems at the time of their appearance were ridiculed for their affectation ("Les rayons jaunes" undoubtedly verges on the ridiculous) others were considered vulgar. Guizot characterised Joseph Delorme as "un Werther jacobin et carabin" (Werther as the Jacobin and "medical"). On the whole, however, the book may be said to have had the decided success which it deserved.

Sainte-Beuve's next collection of poems, *Les Consolations* (published in March 1830), his novel *Volupté* (published in 1834), and the first two volumes of *Port-Royal*, mark the emotional and somewhat pious period in the life of their author. *Les Consolations* is dedicated to Victor Hugo in terms of hysterical admiration coupled with expressions of Christian contrition, and Hugo's name occurs frequently in the book; but it was in reality quite as much an offering to Madame Hugo, who was the love of Sainte-Beuve's youth, and to whom the first poem and several others are addressed. Of his relations with her he wrote too openly in *Le Livre d'Amour*, a collection of poems which obviously treat of realities, and which, though printed, was never published.[2] And in the novel *Volupté*, too, we have no difficulty in recognising its author's relations with Victor Hugo and his household in Amaury's relations with the eminent politician, Monsieur de Couaën, and his wife.

Sainte-Beuve himself and many of his biographers have hinted that the works which he wrote

during the period of his enthusiasm for Madame Hugo, all of which have a faint Catholic tinge or varnish, were directly inspired by that lady, who was a devout Catholic in her youth, though an ardent freethinker in later life, in the days when she wrote her husband's life to his dictation. It has been asserted that Sainte-Beuve, in his lover's ardour, went the length of accustoming himself to speak in her language and even to share her feelings. This explanation, however, I refuse to accept, as I feel convinced that Sainte-Beuve in his old age deceived both himself and others by speaking as he did of his youthful works. In a letter dated July 1863, he writes to Hortense Allart de Méritens, the authoress (Madame Saman): "I tried a little Christian mythology in my youth; but it has evaporated. It was for me the swan of Leda, a means of obtaining access to the fair and producing tenderness in them. Youth has time and employs every means." I object to this, to say the least of it, frivolous manner of explaining away a phenomenon which is plainly attributable to the natural attraction possessed by Catholicism for a youthfully pliant and dependent character, an attraction in this case strengthened by the general tendency of the period, which, as usually happens, was becoming a fashionable tendency before disappearing altogether. The period was the period of the revival of philosophic spiritualism. In 1828 Sainte-Beuve attended the lectures which Jouffroy, after his dismissal, gave in his own house; and he was also, like almost all the young men of his day, strongly influenced by Cousin. The fashionable philosophers converted him temporarily from sensationalism. Romanticism was still regarded by many of the younger men in the light in which it was originally regarded by Hugo, namely, as a reaction against the pagan art and literature of the Classicists; and one branch of the Romantic School was, from its eager desire for the poetic revival of mediævalism, so closely associated with the young Catholic party which rallied round Lamennais and founded the newspaper *L'Avenir* (to which Sainte-Beuve contributed articles), that it was not at all surprising that a few drops from the aspergill of the Neo-Catholics lighted upon the young Romantic writers, and found their way into their works. The part of *Volupté* which describes conventual life, was actually written by Lacordaire. The piety which prevails throughout *Les Consolations*—and which annoyed many, amongst others Beyle, a sincere admirer of Sainte-Beuve—and the incense fumes which permeate the second part of *Volupté*, vividly recall corresponding phenomena in German Romanticism.

In spite of its diffuseness and heaviness, *Volupté* is a delicately profound psychological study. It consists of confessions of the nature of Rousseau's, but recorded in a style which is richer in imagery, more saturated with colour, and more delicately shaded than Rousseau's; the emotionally lyric tone reminds us of Lamartine's *Jocelyn*, a work which treats the same kind of theme more chastely. Sainte-Beuve's book presents us with the life-story of a pleasure-seeking, dissipated youth, interspersed with many a profound, sagacious reflection. It represents the sensual and the tender impulses of the soul as equally destructive of the vigour and energy of youth. It treats mainly of those enervating friendships with young women, especially with young married women, in cultivating which clever young men often squander so much time. The word "squander" seems to me to convey Sainte-Beuve's meaning better than the word "lose"; for he himself reproaches a gifted writer whose vigorous style is lacking in shades, with having worked too hard and lived too lonely a life, with having injured himself by too seldom seeking the society "which is the best of all, and leads one to lose most time in the pleasantest way, the society of women."

Amaury, the hero of the book, is on intimate terms with three women. One, who is the wife of his teacher and chief, he loves more than he ventures to let her understand; the second, to whom he is betrothed, he gives up for the sake of the first; and yet at the very same time he allows himself to drift into an intimate friendship with the third, whom he alternately adores passionately, and pains by his cruel indifference—a friendship which neither satisfies him, nor saves him from indulging in the lowest debauchery. Intelligent, ambitious, and obstinately industrious as Amaury is, his intellectual vigour is gradually paralysed by all these entanglements, and he at last feels that there is no hope for him except in submission to the severest discipline of the Roman Catholic Church. His account of his life as a young man is given in the form of the confession of an ecclesiastic, and the unction of parts of it is insufferable; the outbursts of remorse, the moral and religious admonitions, the prayers and homilies, which interrupt the flow of the tale, are tiresome; but the reader is sufficiently compensated for them.

Two things make the book a remarkable one—in the first place, the perfect understanding which it displays of the development process and the diseases of the soul, an understanding which speaks of persistent self-examination, and foreshadows the coming critic; in the second place, the insight into feminine character, which reveals the feminine element in Sainte-Beuve's own nature, and prognosticates his unique success in the critical interpretation of the personalities of notable women. I append a few specimens of his keen observation and impressive reflections: —"How ungrateful youth is by nature! It throws away with a contemptuous gesture everything that has not been given to it by itself. It will only be bound by ties which it has formed itself, demands friends of its own choice, for itself alone, being certain that in its soul are treasures sufficient to buy hearts with, and life sufficient to fructify them. Hence we see it bestow itself for life on friends whom it did not know yesterday, and swear eternal devotion to women who are almost strangers." "How contemptible human friendships are! How they exclude one another! How they follow one another and drive one another away like waves! Alas! this house to which you repair every morning and every evening, which seems like your home and better than your home, and for which you neglect everything that hitherto has been sweet to you, this house, you may be quite certain, will some day lose favour in your eyes; you will avoid it as a fatal place, and if by chance your business leads you into its neighbourhood, you will take a long round to avoid seeing it. The cleverer you are, the stronger will be the feeling." Every one of a truthful

disposition who has been under the painful necessity of concealing his or her real feeling, will understand the following sentence, and admire its brevity:—"I tried to express what I really felt, while apparently expressing what I did not feel—to be honest to myself and to mislead her." Here, again, is a mournful little picture of life:—"A brigade is marching slowly along a road. The enemy's troops, in ambush on both sides, make terrible havoc with their rifles, and in the end there is an open fight. The brigade succeeds in putting the enemy to flight, and when the general arrives in the evening at the nearest town with the lucky survivors of his force and the torn remnants of his flag, this is called a triumph. When some one part of our plans, our ambition, our love, has suffered less than the rest, we call this glory or success." And the following is an apt little simile. It is of jealous love Sainte-Beuve is writing;—"At this stage, when it desires absolute possession, when it is irritated and embittered by the slightest opposition, nay, even by the beloved object's affection for others, I can only compare it with those Asiatic despots who, in order to clear the way to the throne for themselves, assassinate all their nearest relations, even their own brothers."

With *Les Pensées d'Août* Sainte-Beuve closed his career as a poet. It is the only one of his poetical ventures which was quite unsuccessful, and the poems which the volume contains are certainly his coldest; yet it seems to me, though my opinion is unsupported by any other critic, that it is in this work he first displays marked originality. It is realistic to an extent which is quite unique in the lyric poetry of the Romantic School; no poet had yet ventured to make such free use of the language and the surroundings of daily life. In the North, where a poet even to-day would hardly have the courage to give an omnibus or a railway platform a place in a lyric poem, such a work as *Les Pensées d'Août* would still almost be regarded in the light of a specimen of the poetry of the future.

In it, as in *Les Poésies de Joseph Delorme*, we find several of the characteristics of the English Lake School transplanted to French soil. Sainte-Beuve, like the Englishmen, presents us with simple, sober pictures of real life, and his style, like theirs, is founded upon the conviction that there ought not to be any essential difference between the language of prose and of metrical compositions. But in Sainte-Beuve's poems we have, instead of the strange want of crispness and point of the English poems, a genuinely French dramatic tension. Each of them is a little drama developed within the limits of a short lyric narrative.

Take, as a good specimen, the poem entitled *À Madame la Comtesse de T*. The Countess to whom it is dedicated relates the story. She is travelling by steamer from Cologne to Mainz. To see the scenery better, she has seated herself in her carriage, which is in the fore part of the ship, and she is consequently beside the steerage passengers—servants, workmen and their wives, poor people of all descriptions. One of her children exclaims: "Mother, there is Count Paul!" She looks round and recognises the acquaintance named, a Polish political refugee (the year is 1831). His features are refined and his hands are white, but he is dressed in the old, shabby clothes of a working-man. He is in the company of a family of plain English workpeople. The husband is a coarse-looking man, who is always eating or smoking; his wife is, at the first glance, insignificant; they have a daughter with them, a pretty girl of about fourteen. The Countess's first idea is that the young Pole has been attracted by the girl; then she sees that it is the mother, whose eyes follow him wherever he goes. And this mother is no longer a young woman, though she must, not so long ago, have been very pretty; her figure, in spite of the poverty of her dress, is elegant, and her hair is beautiful. With a solicitude, which is not that of love, but of tenderness towards the being by whom one is beloved, the young man puts her cloak round her and holds the umbrella over her when it rains. He buys expensive grapes for her little boys. The Countess divines that in the distant town where he sought refuge he has found friends in this poor family. But he, like herself, is to go on shore at Mainz, and his friends are to continue their journey in the steamer.

"Montant sur le bateau, je suivis la détresse,
Le départ jusqu'au bout! Il baise avec tendresse
Les deux petits garçons, embrasse le mari,
Prend la main à la fille (et l'enfant a souri,
Maligne, curieuse, Ève déjà dans l'âme);
Il prend, il serre aussi les deux mains à la femme,
Évitant son regard.—C'est le dernier signal
De la cloche! Il s'élance! O le moment final!
Quand on ôte le pont et pendant qu'on démarre,
Quand le cable encor crie, ô minute barbare!
Au rivage mouvant, alors il fallait voir,
De ce groupe vers lui, gestes, coups de mouchoir;
Et les petits enfants, chez qui tout devient joie,
Couraient le long du bord d'où leur cri se renvoie.
Mais la femme, oh! la femme, immobile en son lieu,
Le bras levé, tenant un mouchoir rouge-bleu
Qu'elle n'agitait pas, je la vois là sans vie,
Digne que, par pitié, le Ciel la pétrifie!
. . . . . .
Je pensai: Pauvre cœur, veuf d'insensés amours,
Que sera-ce demain, et ce soir, et toujours?
Mari commun, grossier, enfants sales, rebelles;
La misère; une fille aux couleurs déjà belles,
Et qui le sait tout bas, et dont l'œil peu clément
A, dans tout ce voyage, épié ton tourment:

Quel destin!—Lui pourtant, sur qui mon regard plonge,
Et qu'embarrasse aussi l'adieu qui se prolonge,
Descendit.—Nous voguions. En passant près de lui,
Une heure après: 'Monsieur, vous êtes aujourd'hui
Bien seul,' dis-je.—'Oui,' fit-il en paroles froissées,
'Depuis Londres, voilà six semaines passées,
J'ai voyagé toujours avec *ces braves gens*.'
L'accent hautain notait les mots plus indulgents.
—'Et les reverrez-vous bientôt?' osai-je dire.
—'Jamais!' répliqua-t-il d'un singulier sourire;
'Je ne les reverrai certainement jamais;
Je vais en Suisse; après, plus loin encor, je vais!'"

I would also call attention to a little poem which is a real work of genius, *Monsieur Jean, Maître d'école*. It is the story of a poor country schoolmaster, who, brought up in a foundling hospital, has known nothing of his parents until he one day suddenly finds out who his father is—no less a man than the famous Jean Jacques Rousseau, who, as his readers know, deposited the children of his wife Theresa (of whom he had no absolute certainty of being the father) in the Paris foundling hospital. The schoolmaster has not read Rousseau, but he begins now, and studies *Émile, La nouvelle Héloïse*, and all the other works with the deepest interest. He is more intensely conscious than other readers both of their fertile geniality and of the very slight feeling of personal responsibility displayed by their author. At last he can no longer resist the desire to make the acquaintance of his parents.

"Il part donc, il accourt au Paris embrumé;
Il cherche au plein milieu, dans sa rue enfermé,
Celui qu'il veut ravir; il a trouvé l'allée,
Il monte;... à chaque pas son audace troublée
L'abandonnait—Faut-il redescendre?—Il entend,
Près d'une porte ouverte, et d'un cri mécontent,
Une voix qui gourmande et dont l'accent lésine:
C'était là! Le projet que son âme dessine
Se déconcerte; il entre, il essaie un propos.
Le vieillard écoutait sans tourner le dos,
Penché sur une table et tout à sa musique.
Le fils balbutiait; mais, avant qu'il s'explique,
D'un regard soupçonneux, sans nulle question,
Et comme saisissant sur le fait l'espion:
'Jeune homme, ce métier ne sied pas à ton âge;
Epargne un solitaire en son pauvre ménage;
Retourne d'où tu viens! ta rougeur te dément!
'Le jeune homme, muet, dans l'étourdissement,
S'enfuit, comme perdu sous ces mots de mystère,
Et se sentant deux fois répudié d'un père.
Et c'était là celui qu'il voudrait à genoux
Racheter devant Dieu, confesser devant tous!
C'était celle.... O douleur! impossible espérance!"

And he hastens back to the country to practise in life as a poor schoolmaster some of the great precepts which are to be found in his father's works, but are set at naught by his practice. The good seed in Rousseau's *Émile* germinates in the education which the children entrusted to this schoolmaster receive.

Les Pensées d'Août was published in 1837. Thenceforward Sainte-Beuve was exclusively the critic.

---

[1] Some of the father's aphorisms are given as an appendix to Morand's edition of Sainte-Beuve's letters to the Abbé Barbe.

[2] The most important poems of this collection are printed in Pons's low-minded book, *Sainte-Beuve et ses inconnues*.

XXX

SAINTE-BEUVE

It was to follow his own peculiar, undoubted vocation that Sainte-Beuve gave up the practice of the art of poetry. It was only the art he forsook; for poetry, like an underground spring, communicated life and freshness to his critical investigations of even the driest and most serious subjects.

It is interesting to observe all the steps of the somewhat intricate process by which the first great modern critic was prepared for the exercise of his vocation. At the time when the Romantic circle was broken up by the Revolution of July, Sainte-Beuve stood on such good terms with the Legitimist leaders that Polignac was on the point of offering him the post of secretary to

Lamartine, who was then about to proceed as ambassador to Greece. It was a post which the young poet would have had no objection to accept from them; hence he involuntarily cherished a certain feeling of resentment against the new government, under which almost all his literary friends received political preferment. The democratic element which lay latent in his character (he gave up the *de* which he was entitled to prefix to his name), proclaimed itself; he became a species of interpreter of the naïvely ardent socialistic philosopher, Pierre Leroux, and continued to write in the *Globe* even after it had passed from the hands of the Romantic dogmatists into those of the Saint-Simonists, and was appearing as their organ, with the motto: *À chacun selon sa vocation à chaque vocation selon ses œuvres*. Like Heine, he had an enthusiastic admiration for Père Enfantin; and in an article written in 1831 he ranks the religious writings of Saint-Simon high above Lessing's *Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts*.

Hardly had he separated from the Saint-Simonists, after the break-up of their "family" in 1832, than he entered into relations with Armand Carrel, the literary chief of Republican France. Although Sainte-Beuve, in the article he wrote on Carrel in 1852, ignores his own close connection with him, it is quite certain that he wrote in Carrel's paper, the *National*, for three years, and on political as well as literary subjects. He enrolled himself among the Republicans, and made acquaintance with them, as he had previously done with the Saint-Simonists, the Romanticists, and the Legitimists. And it was about this same time that his friend, Ampère, procured him admission to the circle of the Abbaye des Bois, where the venerable Madame Récamier reigned and Chateaubriand was worshipped. After a quarrel with Carrel on the subject of an article on Ballanche, which Carrel considered too favourable to Legitimacy, Sainte-Beuve allied himself with Lamennais, who had made overtures of friendship. What attracted him to Lamennais, whose confidant and adviser he soon became, was partly that great churchman's sincere and ardent devotion to the people, partly sympathy with his main theory, that it was necessary, in order to keep the steadily rising stream of democracy within its banks, to oppose to its powerful, and to a certain extent irrefutable, principle one still more powerful, namely, the religious principle, which addressed itself with authority to the people, and with no less authority to their kings. So strongly did Lamennais' attitude before his defection from the Church of Rome appeal to Sainte-Beuve, that he in one of his articles addressed a public, though qualified, reproach to his friend on the subject of this defection, maintaining that a man who had so lately striven to submit other men's minds to the authority of the church had no right to figure as an anti-papal demagogue.

The years 1834-37 were the most painful of Sainte-Beuve's life. In 1837 the sudden termination of his relations with Madame Hugo simultaneously severed his connection with the Romantic circle and obliterated his religious tendencies. He retired to Lausanne, where, in 1837-38, he began the course of lectures which formed the basis of his great work, *Port-Royal*. They had been planned and partly written before; the fact that they were delivered to an audience which, though Protestant, was orthodox, to a certain extent determined their tone. It was also influenced by Sainte-Beuve's intimacy with the eminent Swiss pastor, Vinet, one of the few men whom he all his life continued to revere. Vinet's character and intellect were equally interesting to Sainte-Beuve; he was a strictly and sincerely religious man, and an exceedingly acute and subtle critic of French literature. His representation and vindication of Christianity as *spirituality* made an impression on Sainte-Beuve's mind, for which theological problems had a natural attraction! Vinet, seeing his friend such an attentive listener, thought that he had converted him, but Sainte-Beuve left Lausanne an unbeliever. After a tour in Italy he returned to Paris, where he resumed his occupation of critic, writing better than he had ever done before, and with this difference, that his criticism, instead of being as heretofore polemical, was now interpretative and instructive.

He became the highly esteemed literary critic of the *Revue des deux Mondes*, an influential man of the world, a welcome guest in aristocratic houses. He was regarded as a somewhat independent, but refined and dignified author; his politics were, generally speaking, those of the Right Centre. A lady, with whom he stood on terms of the closest friendship, ensured his position in the social world. This was Madame d'Arbouville, the authoress of some sad but pleasing stories; she was the widow of a General, and niece of Comte Molé, the Prime Minister. In winter Sainte-Beuve spent his leisure hours in her house or the houses of her friends, and in summer he paid visits to her relations in the country. He became Count Molé's friend and literary adviser, taking the part of this cultured nobleman and adherent of the Classic School against his own old Romantic allies, when these latter showed themselves wanting in taste and tact.[1] Supported by all the Monarchists and Classicists, he was elected a member of the French Academy in 1844, without having to submit to any preliminary defeat. (In one of the letters of Madame de Girardin, his clever enemy, a bitter attack is made on him apropos of this election.)[2] Particular piquancy was lent to the reception of the ex-Romanticist by the fact that it fell to the lot of Victor Hugo, who had been rejected three times before he was elected, to make the installation speech.

Sainte-Beuve, however, felt himself no more bound by his new social ties than by any previous ones. The circle was broken up by the Revolution of 1848; and as the victorious Republicans offended him mortally by publishing a perfectly imbecile charge against him, he felt more isolated than ever before.[3] He left France for the second time, and, settling in Liège, gave there the course of lectures out of which his book, *Chateaubriand et son Groupe littéraire*, was evolved, lectures the tone of which must have been very offensive to the Monarchical and Church party, and which point to the loss of cherished illusions.

Madame d'Arbouville died in 1830, and with her death the private ties which connected him with the old parties were severed. The democratic and socialistic instincts which had drawn him to

Armand Carrel and the Saint-Simonists now drew him to the Second Empire. Like all the other men of 1830, with the solitary exception of Auguste Barbier, a poet of high principles but mediocre talent, Sainte-Beuve shared to a certain extent the popular enthusiasm for Napoleon; to him the Empire was an imperialism which had its support in the people and was inimical to the domination of the bourgeoisie; and now, in his famous and much abused article, *Les Regrets*, he not merely proclaimed his allegiance to Napoleon III., but wrote of Orleanists and Legitimists with a strangely oblivious scorn. He was a regular contributor to the *Constitutionnel*, then for a time wrote in the *Moniteur officiel*, afterwards resuming his connection with the *Constitutionnel*. During the last years of his life he wrote for the Opposition newspaper, the *Temps*. He was evidently perfectly honest; it was not for the sake of any advantage to himself that he changed his opinions; he simply now, as always, involuntarily allowed himself to be influenced—with the result of a clear gain of insight and understanding for his future criticism. He came very little into personal contact with the Emperor; in politics he was an adherent of the "Left"; Princess Mathilde and Prince Napoleon treated him as an honoured friend, and he turned the Princess's friendship to account in the most disinterested manner, namely, in the furtherance of unobtrusive, genuinely benevolent schemes.

It was not till the last stage of his career that Sainte-Beuve's talent attained to its full development. The chances are that an uncritical author will deteriorate as he grows older, but that a critic will improve; Sainte-Beuve improved year by year, to the very end of his life. The absolute truthfulness, which was naturally as marked a feature of his character as his industry, but which had often been held in check by one consideration or another, allowed itself ever freer play; and the capacity for work remained as great as in his youth. Sainte-Beuve's writings fill fifty volumes, and in all these volumes there is not a careless line, and inaccuracies are of the rarest occurrence. But it was not until the last stage of his career that he was courageous enough to give perfectly free expression to his real opinions on religious and philosophical subjects. He now eased his mind of everything that he had repressed since the youthful days when he studied the philosophers of the eighteenth century. His want of appreciation of Balzac and Beyle, the one a man of a much coarser, the other of a much more eccentric nature than his own, must not render us oblivious of the courage and determination with which he championed the rising generation of French authors, even such writers as Flaubert and the Goncourt brothers, whom he did not altogether understand. Nor ought it to be forgotten that he refused to write an article on Napoleon's *Vie de César*, and that in the Senate he distinguished himself as the solitary but determined opponent of clericalism.

In March 1867 he defended Renan and his *Vie de Jésus*. In June of the same year, when it was proposed (apropos of a complaint from the magnates of the town of Saint-Etienne) to exclude from the public libraries accessible to the people all literature objectionable to the clergy, including the works of Voltaire, Rabelais, &c., he was the solitary member of the servile, priest-ridden Senate who boldly championed intellectual liberty and warmly defended the honour of French literature. The students, who in 1855 had hissed him as an Imperialist, now honoured him with a deputation and a banquet. The lying rumours spread by the clerical press on the subject of a small dinner-party which he inadvertently happened to give on Good Friday, 1868, represented him in the light of an antichrist, of a reincarnated Voltaire; and when in May 1869 he made a last effort, and with a weak voice but stout heart spoke in the Senate in defence of liberty of the press and against the Catholic Universities Bill, his name became a war-cry, became the symbol of free thought. In January 1869 he renounced his allegiance to Imperialism. In October of the same year he died, after five years of illness and a long period of terrible suffering, borne with stoic fortitude.

Sainte-Beuve, with his exceptionally impressionable nature, underwent a whole series of religious, literary, and political transformations. These constituted the school he had to pass through to become the founder of modern criticism. Despite all his changes of opinion, we are safe in asserting that he was honest. Private interest can have had little power in great things over a man with a nature as truthful as that which reveals itself in his writings. Truth and honesty are, as Franklin says, like fire and flame; they have a certain natural brightness which cannot be counterfeited.

---

[1] See Sainte-Beuve's article on Alfred de Vigny's reception into the Academy, and also the letter, published by himself, which was written to him by a lady (Madame Hugo) on the occasion of the same event.

[2] _Lettres parisiennes_, i v. 170.

[3] He was accused of having accepted bribes from the secret fund of Louis Philippe's government. What lay at the foundation of the charge proved to have been a grant of a sum of—one hundred francs—for the repairing of a stove in the Mazarin Library, of which Sainte-Beuve was librarian.

XXXI

SAINTE-BEUVE AND MODERN CRITICISM

Port-Royal (1840-59), Sainte-Beuve's longest piece of connected writing, is a unique work of its kind. Disinclination to tread the beaten track, and the Romanticist's sympathy with religious

enthusiasm, two characteristics which early distinguished him, influenced him in choosing the history of Jansenism in France as his subject. Jansenism was an enthusiastic, intelligent, intense form of piety, which, though evolved and retained within the pale of Catholicism, was nevertheless distinguished by a personal, that is to say, heretical, passion for truth, which appeals to our understanding by its independence and to our sympathies by its heroically courageous defiance of persecution and coercion. Like its history, *Port-Royal*, it reaches its highest level in Pascal, whose frail, emaciated figure as its embodiment presents a curious contrast to that of the plethoric, more healthy-minded German who, in a neighbouring country a century earlier, had carried on a very similar, though more successful struggle against ecclesiastical attempts at compromise.

Sainte-Beuve possessed all the qualifications required of the historian of Jansenism. He was not a believer, but he had been, or believed that he had been one. A man is seldom capable of criticising the views he holds himself, and as seldom of understanding those which he has never held; what we all understand best are the views we once shared, but share no longer. If any one doubts Sainte-Beuve's ability to understand these medieval emotions, that impulse to forsake the world, that strife of the awakened soul with nature, and its repentant, anxious recourse to grace; if any one doubts his comprehension of the real spirit inspiring these sermons and theological pamphlets, of the hearts beating under these nuns' habits, of the devotion, the hopes, and the longings, the mystical ecstasies and the sacred enthusiasm, which flourished on that little spot of holy ground, let that doubter read the first two volumes of *Port-Royal*, as far as the chapter on Pascal, who was easier of comprehension because he was a figure of more magnitude and was already better known. Let him study the masterly portraits of St. François de Sales and St. Cyran, and observe how with the help of letters, reported conversations, and a few pamphlets and sermons, Sainte-Beuve succeeds in placing before us two figures which are so true to nature, so human, that we seem to be living with them. We are frequently reminded of the fact that Sainte-Beuve was originally a novelist. The scenes among the innocent dwellers in that dovecote, the convent, for instance, have all the vividness of well-written fiction. And Sainte-Beuve employs his imagination only in describing; he never invents or misrepresents.

It is a defect in the book that its first parts, though they are much the best reading, are not conceived in the historical style. We are too vividly reminded that the *feuilleton* has hitherto been their author's vehicle of expression. In these earlier volumes Sainte-Beuve simply takes Port-Royal as his starting-point. The old monastery is not much more than his citadel, from which he makes one sortie after another; he hunts out parallels, discovers analogies, now in literature, now in real life—interesting, but often far-fetched, and leading to disquisitions not only upon such writers as Corneille, Racine, Molière, Voltaire, and Vauvenargues, but upon modern authors, such as Lamartine and George Sand. The later volumes, on the other hand, the style of which is more soberly historical, lack the attraction of these interpolations; and the subject is too much of a special subject to interest long, in spite of the loving care which has been bestowed on it.

Though *Port-Royal* is supposed to be his chief work, Sainte-Beuve reaches a far higher level in the long series of volumes known as *Causeries du Lundi* and *Nouveaux Lundis*, which contain the shorter articles written during his most perfect period. It will be long before these articles are forgotten. At the time of their author's death, Ulbach wrote: "I cannot tell how much of the literature of which we are now so proud will be preserved by time. Some of Lamartine's and Victor Hugo's verses? some of Balzac's novels? One thing, however, is certain—that it will be impossible to write history without having recourse to Sainte-Beuve and reading him from beginning to end."

Sainte-Beuve has two styles, the youthful and the mature. At the time of his study of sixteenth century literature (from the vocabulary of which he, like the other young Romanticists, adopted various expressions) he got into the habit of picking and choosing his words and polishing and refining his periods to such an extent that he drew down upon himself some justifiably severe criticism—though he hardly deserved the violent reproaches showered on him by Balzac, whom he had annoyed by some sarcastic articles. But when he took to journalism this ultra-refinement of style disappeared. As Littré remarked, "After he had bound himself to send in a *feuilleton* every week, he had no time to spoil his articles." A style like Sainte-Beuve's second—keen and flexible as a sword-blade—is not easy to characterise. In the first place, it is by no means a striking style. The reader who is not particularly well versed in French literature will not be aware of anything that can be called style. The periods succeed one another unrhythmically; they are not grouped, but proceed carelessly, as Zouaves march; we never come upon a pompous and seldom on a passionate one; occasionally there is an interjection—"Ô poet!" or the like. The language flows like gently rippling water. But the observant reader is charmed by its noble Atticism. The tone is not assertive, but calmly and quietly sceptic. I give a few examples, taken from different works. "Is there stability or instability at the basis of his character? You think instability. But under that instability is there not something more stable? You believe that there is. But under this again is there not something less stable than ever?" How often in their study of character must psychologists query thus, but how few of them could put the question with such delicate precision! What has been called the eccentricity of Sainte-Beuve's style is often only something surprising in his imagery; yet the metaphor itself is always surprisingly correct. In describing a great, austere sixteenth-century preacher of repentance, he tells that this ecclesiastic's contemporaries compared him, because of his dry severity, to a thorn-bush. Later, after giving an account of a vigorous outburst of noble indignation on the part of this man, he adds: "Si j'ai pu dire de M. de Saint-Cyran qu'il était parfois un buisson et un buisson sans jamais de rieurs, il faut ajouter qu'il est souvent aussi un buisson ardent." Observe how the pliant style lends itself to irony and satire. Sainte-Beuve is criticising the style of a literary rival, Nisard;

amongst much bitter-sweet praise he insinuates the little remark: "Un académicien lui a trouvé du nerf; les savants lui trouvent de la grâce." Of Cousin he says: "He is a hare with the eye of an eagle." For an example of the power of characterisation latent in the style, take the following sentence from a criticism of De Musset: "Ce n'était pas des couleurs combinées, surajoutées par un procédé successif, mais bien le réel se dorant ça et là comme un atôme à un rayon du matin, et s'envolant tout d'un coup au regard dans une transfiguration divinisée." And for an example of its capacity, equable as it is, to express indignation, take the following passage, which also throws light on the character of the man. He is writing on the subject of a work to which the Academy in full conclave had refused to give the prize adjudged it by a committee of experts, because the "atheistical" principles on which the work was based were at variance with the eclectic philosophy then officially recognised. "There really does exist a small class of sober, unassuming philosophers, who live upon very little, do not intrigue, and are entirely occupied in conscientiously seeking after truth and cultivating their intellects. They refrain from the indulgence of every other passion, and fix their whole attention upon the laws which govern the universe, listening and investigating wherever in the realm of nature the world-soul, the world-thought reveals itself to them. These are men who at heart are stoics, who try to do good and to think as accurately and rightly as they can, even without the hope of any personal reward in the future, content to feel at harmony with themselves and in accord with the harmony of the universe. Is it fitting, I ask, to stamp these men with an odious name on this account, to ostracise them, or at best only to tolerate them with such tolerance as we show to the erring and guilty? Have they not even yet won for themselves in our country a place on which the sunlight falls? Have they not, O ye noble Eclectics, with whom it gives me pleasure to compare them, ye whose invariable and absolute disinterestedness and whose unalterable high-mindedness are known to God and man, have they not the right to be placed at least on an equal footing with you, in virtue of the purity of their doctrine, the uprightness of their motives, and the innocence of their lives? This last great progressive step, worthy of the nineteenth century, I would fain see taken before I die." Sainte-Beuve made various reforms in the art of criticism. In the first place, he put solid ground beneath its feet, gave it the firm foothold of history and science. The old, so-called philosophic criticism treated the literary document as if it had fallen from the clouds, judged it without taking its author into account at all, and placed it under some particular heading in a historical or aesthetic chart. Sainte-Beuve found the author in his work; behind the paper he discovered the man. He taught his own generation and the generations to come, that no book, no document of the past, can be understood before we have gained an understanding of the psychical conditions which produced it, and formed an idea of the personality of the man who wrote it. Not until then does the document live. Not until then does a soul animate history. Not until then does the work of art become transparently intelligible.

Sainte-Beuve's most marked characteristic was an insatiable thirst for knowledge, a quality which he possessed in the form that may be called scientific inquisitiveness. This directed his life even before it expressed itself in his criticism. At first it is only faintly perceptible in his works, because he began with unlimited praise of his contemporaries, Chateaubriand, Lamartine, Victor Hugo, Alfred de Vigny, and others, a good deal of which he was obliged subsequently to retract—thus progressing in the opposite direction from Théophile Gautier, who began with severity and gradually declined into a nerveless leniency. But it is possible to trace even Sainte-Beuve's first uncritical praise to his critical instincts. Its exaggeratedness was due to the fact that he stood, as a young man, too near to the personages he criticised; but this circumstance was itself attributable to his curiosity. Before he knew, he dimly divined the difference between books and life, and was less apt than others to accept the author's own account of himself, the image of himself which he desired, by means of his book, to imprint on his readers' minds; and it was the unconscious instinct of investigation, the keen interest of the born psychologist, the longing to see for himself and close at hand, the inclination to pass by all that was official and conventional and make straight for the truth that is concealed, the small facts which explain—that led him to seek personal acquaintance; though he himself believed that it was his enthusiasm for ideas which attracted him irresistibly to their originators.

And here the critic is confronted by one of his greatest difficulties—he knows the truth only about the living, but may speak it only of the dead. And there is no doubt that it makes a disagreeable impression when the death of an author entirely changes the tone of criticism, as Sainte-Beuve's criticism of Chateaubriand, for example, was altered by the latter's death. His earliest article on Chateaubriand was incense pure and simple. We are conscious of the social pressure under which it was written, of the awe and veneration, the personal sympathies and relations, the fear of angry glances from lovely eyes, the impossibility of hurting the feelings of so charming a lady as Madame Récamier by criticising her domestic idol, in short, of all the influences which combined to make the first sketch of Chateaubriand simply an adulatory narrative. The long work and the later articles are, on the contrary, inspired by a perfect rage for saying "No," for tearing off masks.

But when he is at his best, Sainte-Beuve succeeds in finding the golden mean. He does not admire everything and attribute everything to noble motives, but neither does he search for base ones. He neither praises nor depreciates human nature. He understands it. And intercourse with men and women of every description, constant critical observation, French delicacy of perception, and a Parisian training, have given him an extraordinary power of discernment. At his best, the many-sidedness of his mind actually reminds us of Goethe. We are at times tempted to call him "wise"; and few indeed are the critics who tempt us to apply this adjective to them. He very seldom allows himself to be confused or influenced by the popular sentiment connected with a name, no matter whether it is lofty, or pathetic, or depreciatory. He inquires into the pedigree

of his author, his constitution and health, his economic position; he snaps up some involuntary confession he has made, and shows that it is supported by other utterances, and that it throws light on, and explains the actions of the man. He describes him in his bright and noble moments; he surprises him in déshabille; with his marvellous capacity for "finding a needle in a haystack," he discovers what the dead man concealed in the inmost recesses of his heart. With the judicial calm of the scientific investigator, he enumerates his tendencies towards good and his tendencies towards evil, and weighs them in the balance. And by such means he produces a trustworthy portrait—or rather, a series of portraits, each one of which is trustworthy, though some of them contradict each other. For, notable critic as Sainte-Beuve is, he invariably shirks one of the greatest difficulties with which the critic has to contend. A conscientious critic has, as a rule, read the work which he undertakes to interpret and criticise, many times and at various stages of his development; each time he has been struck by something different; and in the end he has seen the work from so many different points of view that it is impossible for him, without doing a sort of inward violence to himself, to maintain one single standpoint, one attitude of feeling. And if he happens to be dealing, not with a single work, but with a highly productive author who has passed through many stages of development, or possibly even with a whole school of literature, the difficulty of making one comprehensive picture out of the many different impressions received under totally different psychical conditions, becomes proportionately greater. A building which we have seen only once, half of it in sunlight, half in the shadow of a heavy cloud, stands out distinctly in our memory in a certain light against a particular sky; but a building we have seen at every hour of day, in the dusk and in moonlight, from all sides, from various elevations, and as often from the inside as the outside, a building in which we have lived, and the size of which has dwindled in our eyes as we grew—of such a building we find it difficult to give a single, fully descriptive picture. This difficulty Sainte-Beuve avoids by constantly producing fresh descriptions and fresh criticisms of the same men and their works, leaving it to the reader to draw his own conclusions. It was with good reason that he chose as the motto for a series of his works the saying of Sénac de Meilhan: "Nous sommes mobiles et nous jugeons des êtres mobiles."

The latter of these propositions, namely, that every human being whom we judge has altered, has developed steadily, Sainte-Beuve understood better than it had ever been understood before. He not only changes his tone every time he changes his theme, but changes it every time there is a change in the man or woman who is his theme for the time being; his agile talent imitates all the movements of the individual human soul during its development process.[1] Hence his manner is as changeable as his subject; he is now the biographer, now the critic; he packs as many limiting and defining parentheses into his periods as possible; connects sentences which modify one another; uses technical words which introduce a whole train of ideas and memories; and vague expressions which may mean much more than they say. For though he moves through the dim depths of a man's life with the certainty of the diver who sees the submarine growths through the water, he nevertheless, for many reasons, prefers to write with a certain amount of vagueness of what he has seen. When he is writing of the living it is, of course, only permissible to make vague allusions to their private life; and the dead have, as a rule, descendants or relatives who keep jealous guard over their reputation. Sainte-Beuve, therefore, generally contents himself with showing that he divines or knows much on which he does not choose to dwell.

With the course of years he became bolder and more scientific in his psychological analysis. In the following passage he defends his right to be so. It is taken from a letter written on the 9th of May 1863 to a critic who had blamed him for certain disparaging remarks in one of his articles: "Art—and especially a purely intellectual art like that of criticism—is an instrument which is difficult to handle, and its worth is dependent upon the worth of the artist. Granted this, is it not absolutely necessary to have done with that foolish conventionality, that cant, which compels us to judge an author not only by his intentions, but also by his pretensions? Am I, for example, to be obliged to see in Fontanes only the great master, polished, noble, elegant, religious, and not the hasty, brusque, sensual man that he really was? ... Or to come to our own day.... I have had the opportunity for thirty years and more of observing Villemain, a man of distinguished intellect and talent, who is actually brimming over with generous, liberal, philanthropic, Christian, civilising sentiment, but who is, nevertheless, the most sordid, malicious ape in existence. What is to be done in such a case? Are we to go on to all eternity praising his noble, elevated sentiments, as those by whom he is surrounded do? Are we to dupe ourselves and dupe others? Are men of letters, historians, and moralists merely actors, whom we have no right to study except in the rôles which they have chosen and defined for themselves? Are we only permitted to see them on the stage? Or is it allowable, when our knowledge is sufficient, boldly and yet gently to insert the scalpel and show the weak points of the armour, the faulty joints between the talent and the soul? allowable to praise the talent whilst indicating the defects in the soul which actually affect the talent and any permanent influence it may exercise. Will literature lose by such a proceeding? It is possible that it may; but the science of psychology will gain."

This, then, is the first advance—firm ground beneath our feet; no deceptive idealisation! The next is, that criticism, which had hitherto been a disintegrating, separating process, becomes in Saint-Beuve's hands, and with the limitations entailed by his character, an organising, constructive process. His criticism produces an organism, a life, as poetry does. It does not break up the given material into road-metal and gravel, but erects a building with it. It does not break up the human soul into its component parts, so that we only gain an understanding of it as a piece of dead mechanism, without having any idea what it is like when it is in movement. No, he shows us the machine at work; we see the fire that drives it and hear the noise it makes, whilst we are learning the secrets of its construction.

Thanks to these reforms of Sainte-Beuve's, the history of literature, which used to be a kind of secondary, inferior branch of the science of history, has become the guide of history proper, its most interesting and most living part; for the literature of nations is the most attractive and most instructive material with which history has to deal.

We began by asserting that Sainte-Beuve's critical activity did not lead him to forsake poetry. We are now in a position to prove that the art of the critic, as practised by him in the last years of his life, in the highest stage of his development, had entered into the closest relationship with modern poetry. For poetry became synthetic simultaneously with criticism; and the cause of the movement was the same in both cases, namely, the gradual conquest by science of the whole domain of modern intellectual life. At the beginning of the century imagination was considered the essential quality in poetry; it was his capacity of invention which made the poet a poet; he was not tied down to nature and reality, but was as much at home in the supernatural as in the actual world. In the generation of 1830 such authors as Nodier and Alexandre Dumas express this view of the matter, each in his own way. But as Romanticism by degrees developed into realism, creative literature by degrees gave up its fantastic excursions into space. It exerted itself even more to understand than to invent; and this produced a close connection with criticism. Fiction became psychological. The point of departure of the novelist and of the critic in their respective descriptions is now the same, namely, the spiritual atmosphere of a period. In it the real or invented characters appear to us; the novelist's aim is to represent and interpret the actions of a human being, the critic's, to represent and interpret a work, in such a manner that the reader may see both the actions and the work to be results produced with real or apparent inevitability, when certain inward qualities or tendencies are acted upon by suggestions from without. The only fundamental difference is that the creative author makes the speech and the actions of his characters, who, fictitious though they are, are generally drawn from life, the probable consequences of given circumstances; whereas the critic's imagination, fettered by facts, necessarily restricts itself to the representation of the psychical condition which led to or influenced the utterances and actions he describes. The novelist deduces a man's probable actions from what he has observed of his character. The critic deduces a man's character from his works.

Criticism, understood as the capacity of overcoming one's natural narrow-mindedness by the wideness and many-sidedness of one's sympathies, has been a distinguishing faculty of all the greatest authors of this century. It was from this point of view that Émile Montégut regarded it when he called it the youngest genius, the Cinderella among the intelligences. "Criticism," he wrote, "is the tenth Muse. It was she who was Goethe's mystic bride; it was she who made twenty poets of him. What but criticism is the basis of German literature? What are the English poets of our own day? Inspired critics. What was Italy's noble Leopardi? A fiery critic. Amongst all the modern poets only two, Byron and Lamartine, have not been critics; and for this reason these two have lacked many-sidedness and variety and have become as monotonous as they are." When criticism is taken in a wider sense, in the full meaning of the word, this last limitation falls away. For in its signification of the power of passing judgment on the existing state of things, it was an inspiring force in all the great Romantic lyric writers of the period, Byron as well as Hugo, Lamartine as well as George Sand. From the moment when their poetry ceases to exclude all important contemporary life and thought, from the moment when the Romantic lyric poets transform themselves into the organs of great ideas, criticism becomes an inspiring principle in their works also. It inspired Hugo's *Les Châtiments*; it inspired Byron's *Don Juan*. It is a finger-post on the path of the human mind. It plants hedges and lights torches along that path. It cuts and clears new tracks. For it is criticism which removes mountains—the mountains of belief in authority, of prejudice, of idealess power and dead tradition.

---

[1] The two following sentences from *Port-Royal* exemplify my meaning. In the first we have him calmly and frankly giving up the attempt to produce resemblance between his character portraits of the same person; in the second we see him determined to include every side of the character: "C'est le M. Saint-Cyran tout-à-fait définitif et mûr que j'envisage désormais; c'est de lui qu'est vrai ce qui va suivre; si quelque chose dans ce qui précède ne cadre plus, qu'on le rejette, comme en avançant il l'a rejeté lui-même."—"Certes on peut tailler dans M. de Saint-Cyran un calviniste, mais c'est à condition d'en retrancher mainte parte vitale."

XXXII

THE DRAMA: VITET, DUMAS, DE VIGNY, HUGO

The success of the Romantic School in lyric poetry, fiction, and criticism was indisputable; but there was one branch of literature in which it failed to realise the bold expectations with which it started on its career; and this was the branch which, according to the old principles of æsthetics, was (and curiously enough, as a rule, still is) regarded as the highest, namely, the drama. As the art stood in such high estimation, the comparative slightness of their success in it was painfully felt by the Romanticists. Their plays never found real favour with the public, never became part of the permanent repertory of any theatre. Victor Hugo's were only popular as librettos for Italian operas; Mérimée's were never played at all; George Sand's and Balzac's had generally only a *succès d'estime*; and it was long before a few of Alfred de Musset's short pieces found their way

on to the stage; whereas Scribe and his collaborators drew full houses, not only in France but abroad.

And yet the school did much admirable work in the domain of drama. The first essay was made by Vitet, who between 1826 and 1829 wrote a succession of *Scènes dramatiques*, subsequently published in a collected form under the title of *La Ligue*. The original idea had suggested itself to him of dramatising episodes in French history without adding anything fictitious whatever; his imagination was allowed to do nothing but vitalise history, and it succeeded most admirably in doing so. The atmosphere of Vitet's works is the atmosphere of long-past days, and the talk of his sixteenth-century characters conveys such an impression of authenticity that we feel when we are reading his dramas as if we were living history, hour by hour.

Ludovic Vitet was born in Paris in 1802, received his education at the Ecole Normale, took part as a Liberal in the political movements of the day, was a member of the society *Aide toi—le ciel t'aidera*, and wrote (as already mentioned) in the *Globe* as an ardent champion of Romanticism. His poetico-historical works were all produced in this youthful period, with the exception of a series of dramatic scenes, distinctly inferior to the rest, which he published in 1849 under the title of *Les États d'Orléans*.

His career was uneventful. As a young man he was an inseparable friend of Count Duchâtel. When the Revolution of July placed his friends in power and Duchâtel became a member of the Guizot ministry, Vitet was made Inspector of Historical Monuments, a post which Guizot devised specially for him. Henceforth he was a politician; in 1834 he became a member of the Chamber of Deputies, in 1836 a member of the Council of State, in 1846 a Member of the Academy.

He was a consistent Monarchist and Conservative. From 1851 to 1871 he held aloof from public affairs altogether. After the war he again took a prominent position, under Thiers. He died in 1873.

Vitet furnishes a good example of the power of the first impetus of a strong artistic movement to inspire even minds which are not productive and artistic by nature. After 1830 he was eminent only as a learned historian of art. He wrote a biography of Count Duchâtel. His literary and historical essays are as dry and tedious as Mérimée's.

To his youthful works we always return with pleasure—to *Les Barricades, Les États de Blois*, and *La Mort de Henri III*. The principal characters in them, Henri II, Henri III., and the Dukes of Guise of several successive generations, are portrayed in such masterly style as to bear comparison with the heroes of Shakespeare's great historical plays (Henry IV. and Richard III. certainly excepted). The manners and ideas of the age are so clearly placed before us that we feel as if they cannot have been better known or understood by contemporaries. *Les États de Blois* is unmistakably the finest of these works. Let any one who wishes to make acquaintance with Vitet at his best, read the scenes which describe the murder of the Duke of Guise. Seldom has an author ventured to set aside poetic convention to such an extent in a historical play. The event is much more vividly and realistically brought before us than even in Delaroche's fine painting, which shows us Henri III. cautiously opening the door and peeping at the body of his great enemy lying on the floor. Vitet first shows us the King in his room at four o'clock in the morning, dipping Spanish poniards into holy water and tremblingly handing them to his minions without even daring to utter his enemy's name. Then comes the scene in the Duke's room, in which his mother and his mistress in vain beseech him not to imperil his life, but to keep away from the Council to be held next morning. We next see him in the Council-chamber; an uncomfortable feeling comes over him; his nose begins to bleed; he has forgotten his handkerchief, and sends a messenger to fetch it. The Scottish guards stupidly bar this messenger's way; but they quickly perceive their mistake, and the Duke gets the handkerchief. But he is uneasy, this great soldier who has faced drawn blades so often without turning pale, and he begins to feel faint. It is because he is still fasting; the feeling will pass off if he eats something; he opens the little *bonbonnière* which hangs at his belt; it is empty. Some one is despatched to fetch him sweetmeats or fruit. At this moment Révol comes out of the King's apartment and says: "The King wishes to speak with you, Monseigneur!" The other lords of the Council stop their conversation and exchange glances. The Duke rises; he takes a little time to fasten his mantle, which slips first off one shoulder, then off the other; he is unconsciously trying to delay his departure—too proud not to be ready to go, even if it be to death, and yet human enough to hesitate a moment on the fatal threshold. He must have another handkerchief, as the first is stained with blood; again one of the conspirators goes, leaving the others in anxious suspense. It is a masterly representation, this of Vitet's, of the restlessness, impatience, and foolish feeling of shame which at times overcome us and impel us to rush blindly into the most hazardous situations, merely to escape from painfully ridiculous ones. The messenger sent for the handkerchief again delays. Then the proud Guise loses patience. With the words, "I cannot keep the King waiting longer," he goes out at the door; as it closes behind him, a dozen officers thrust their long poniards into his body.

We observe that Vitet enters into details which would be unsuitable for the stage. His *Scènes dramatiques* are only intended to be read. Therefore they are not genuine dramas. And the explanation of this is, that Vitet, with all his historical insight, lacked both poetic passion and the artistic gift of organisation. Because he is never capable of developing pathos, of rising to a climax, from the height of which all the rest would be felt to be preparation and result, he never attains to really artistic construction. He was evidently haunted by a species of artistic anxiety, a fear of making the slightest alteration in the historical facts, a fear of obtruding his own personality. He had not a strong enough individuality to dare to issue an artistic coinage stamped with his own image. His productivity ceased as early as it did, because the imagination which inspired his works, though vigorous, was not free, not independent, either in its observation or in

its reproduction; it was hampered and weighted by scholarship, by the dust of the record office. This beautiful and fiery Pegasus stood tethered in a library.

It would be a shame to employ the same metaphor in writing of the Romantic author who, following in Vitet's steps, set himself to dramatise historical episodes, and who in February 1829, a year before Victor Hugo, achieved popularity with a historical drama, *Henri III. et sa Cour*. This writer was Alexandre Dumas (born in 1803), a man of brilliant, spontaneous talent and Titanic constitution, who displayed the same aptitude for Herculean tasks in literature as his father had done in war. For forty years he continued without a pause to produce tragedies, comedies, novels, short stories, books of travel, and memoirs. It would be foolish to write contemptuously of such prodigious inventiveness, such incredible productivity. We can trace in these works the French-African blood; there is something in them of the easy-going Creole disposition, something of the ardent sensuality of the negro race. Assisted by numerous collaborators, all much inferior to himself, Dumas peopled the stages, crowded the booksellers' shelves, filled the *feuilleton* columns of the newspapers with the creations of his brain; the printing-presses creaked and groaned in their efforts to keep pace with his incessant production. What one cannot but regret is the easy-going worldliness which prevented any real process of development taking place. Dumas was an artist only in his first period. Beginning in a romantic age, he began romantically; continuing in a commercial age, he continued commercially.

In *Henri III et sa Cour* he did what Vitet had not succeeded in doing with the same historical material, namely, produced a spirited and playable drama; but it was a drama in which the defiance of classic theatrical convention was of the most superficial kind. He ventured to reproduce in externals the court customs of the period. On the boards where for a couple of centuries the hero and his confidant had conversed either with both arms hanging by their sides or with their left hands on their sword-hilts, a whole troop of King Henry's courtiers appeared with cups and balls (the game of cup-and-ball was an invention of that day); and in the pauses these same gentlemen amused themselves by blowing small darts out of blow-pipes. Nevertheless they felt and spoke like the young men of 1828.

The psychology of the other historical plays of Dumas' youth (*Napoléon Bonaparte, Charles VII chez ses grands Vassaux*, &c.) is equally superficial. It was not until he lit upon an age the spirit of which he understood and could master, that he succeeded in giving such excellent representations of past days as we have in the interesting and effective dramas, *Un Mariage sous Louis XV* and *Gabrielle de Belle-Isle*, both of which (and especially the latter, with its slightly idealised picture of the manners and customs of the Regency) possess real literary value. But before this, in 1831, it had fallen to Dumas' lot to present the young Romantic generation with one of the typical figures which it recognised as representative of itself. He wrote *Antony*.

With all its faults, there is something in this play which makes it better than even the best of Dumas' other works. There is warmer blood, more human nature in it than in the others. And the reason why, with all its naïveté, it makes a really powerful impression on us is, that in it Dumas has flung his own ego, himself, with his wild passion, his youthful enthusiasm, and chivalrous instincts, on to the stage. Antony is an 1830 hero, of the same type as all of Hugo's—broad-shouldered, lion-maned, enthusiastic and despairing, capable of living without food or sleep, ready at any moment to blow out his own or any one else's brains. But the sensation produced by *Antony* was due to the fact that Dumas had done what Hugo never would or could do, namely, laid the action of his play in 1830, and put his hero on the stage dressed in the fashion of the day, in the very same black coat as the male members of the audience wore. Hitherto Romanticism had voluntarily restricted itself on the stage to the Middle Ages. Now it revealed itself in undisguised modernity.

We come upon a vindication of this step in the play itself. A conversation on the subject of the literary disputes of the day is introduced into the fourth act. During the course of it a poet, who is defending the Romanticists' practice of going back to the Middle Ages for their themes, says:

"The drama of passion must necessarily be historical drama. History bequeaths to us the passionate deeds which were really done. If in the midst of our modern society we were to attempt to lay bare the heart which beats under our ugly short black coats, the resemblance between the hero and the public would be too great; the spectator who was following the development of a passion would desire to have it arrested exactly where it would have stopped in his own case. He would cry: 'Stop! that is wrong; that is not how I feel. When the woman whom I love deceives me I suffer, certainly, but I neither kill her nor myself.' And the outcry against exaggeration and melodrama would drown the applause of the few who feel that the passions of the nineteenth century are the same as those of the sixteenth, and that the blood can course as hotly beneath a cloth coat as beneath a steel corselet."

We can imagine the applause which followed this speech. All wished to show that they belonged to these few. Passion was the order of the day, and they proved themselves to be passionate by applauding. And *Antony* truly is a symphony of raging passions, the like of which it would be difficult to find. After several years of travel the hero returns to Paris and finds that the woman he loves is married. He saves her life at the risk of his own by stopping her runaway horses; the shaft of the carriage has pierced his breast; he is carried into her house. Antony is an illegitimate child and a foundling; hence as a lover he is a rebel against the laws of society. "Other men," he says to the woman he loves, "have a father, a mother, a brother—arms which open for them when they are in trouble; I have not so much as a tombstone upon which I can read my name and weep. Other men have a country; I have none, for I belong to no family. One name meant to me everything that I possessed, and that name, your name, I am forbidden to pronounce." The lady reminds him of social obligations: "Call them duties or call them prejudices; such as they are,

they exist." "Why," he replies, "should I submit to these laws? Not one among those by whom they were made has spared me a suffering or done me a service. I have received nothing but injustice, and I owe nothing but hatred. My unfortunate mother's shame has been branded on my forehead."

Adèle loves Antony, but avoids him. In the course of a journey she takes, she has to spend a night at an inn; he surprises her there and takes possession of her with violence. In spite of this dastardly act she continues to love him. We meet the couple again in Paris. Their story is known. We hear hypocritical women, who manage to combine secret leanings to the forbidden with irreproachable outward behaviour, destroying Adèle's reputation. Their attacks on her evoke outbursts of indignation from the really worthy, indignation against society and its hypocrisies. But the drama is drawing to a close. The husband, Colonel d'Hervey, returns from a journey; Antony tries in vain to persuade Adèle to escape with him; the step of the injured husband is heard in the anteroom; the lover draws his Romantic dagger and plunges it into Adèle's breast; to save her honour he meets d'Hervey with the cry: "Elle me résistait; je l'ai assassinée!"

What chiefly strikes us now on reading the play is its preposterous absurdity. We feel that if we were to see it acted, as a new play, we should not be able to refrain from smiling at the parts intended to touch us. We can hardly understand to-day how it happened that on the night of its first performance in 1831 a select audience were excited by it to the wildest enthusiasm. They applauded, shed tears, sobbed, shouted Bravo! The effect of the play was heightened by the splendid acting of Bocage and Marie Dorval. Dumas tells that a handsome green coat he was wearing was positively torn off his back and into scraps, which were preserved as relics by the enthusiastic youths who formed a large proportion of the audience; and even if we do not take this anecdote quite literally, there is no doubt of the unboundedness of the enthusiasm. The explanation is, that men never laugh at a work which gives expression to their own moods and feelings. Antony was not merely the impersonation of passion verging on savagery, in combination with a tenderness so great that it would rather take upon itself the responsibility of a murder than expose the beloved one to insult and scorn; he was also the Byronic, mysterious young hero, who is predestined to struggle against the injustice of fate, and is greater than his fate. But even in those days there were not wanting critics who saw the weaknesses of the play. Bocage, who acted Antony, considered the closing speech so foolish, that he would have omitted it if he could. He did omit it one evening, and the curtain fell without it, but only with the result that the audience began to shout and scream as if possessed. They would not be defrauded of their speech. Bocage had gone; but Madame Dorval, who was still lying dead upon the stage, had the presence of mind to order the curtain to be raised again, upon which, holding up her head, she said with a smile and a transposition of the pronouns, "Je lui résistais, il m'a assassinée!"[1] One sharply satirical voice was raised within the precincts of the Romantic camp. Let any one interested turn up the long and excellent criticism of *Antony* in Jules Janin's *Histoire de la littérature dramatique*, undoubtedly the best piece of criticism its author ever wrote, and he will have the pleasure of beholding delirious Romanticism overwhelmed with ridicule.

Whilst *Antony* may be described as the Romantic fit of hysterics, *Chatterton*, the one play of Alfred de Vigny's which was a success on the stage, may be designated the Romantic dirge. These two favourite dramas of the generation of 1830 complement each other; the one represents the cult of genius, the other the cult of passion; the one sympathy with the suffering, the other admiration for energetic action; or, to go deeper, the one the Teutonic, the other the Latin side of Romanticism.

Alfred de Vigny (born 1799) had failed to win the approbation of the theatre-going public by his excellent historical drama, *La Maréchale d'Ancre*, which was put on the stage in 1834. The reason probably was, that in everything essential its characters belonged to those types with which the public had already become familiar in other Romantic historical tragedies. Borgia, the lover, for instance, is of exactly the same species as Victor Hugo's lovers, and is not even very different from the lover of Dumas' plays, in spite of the widely different characters of the two authors. This shows us the power of a school to set its stamp upon writers of the most varied individualities.[2]

Chatterton, on the other hand, is a work peculiarly characteristic of De Vigny. This play, which was performed in 1835, is based on an idea to which its author had already given expression, in three different forms, in a volume of tales entitled *Stello*, published two years previously—the idea of the true poet's unhappy and neglected position in modern society. De Vigny, to begin with, regarded the poet from the Romantic standpoint, regarded him, that is to say, as a superior being, nay, as the noblest of all beings (the idea with which the German Romanticists, too, were so thoroughly impregnated); and a feeling of strong compassion had been aroused in him by the poet's fate, especially the fate of the young poet who, when he stands most in need of help and appreciation, so seldom finds hearts that understand him and patrons who prevent his life being a struggle for existence. What lent a certain charm to De Vigny's constant appeal to the public on behalf of the poet, was the fact that he was not pleading his own cause; for he was a man of good family, who had always been in comfortable circumstances. According to his idea, the poet is a poor unfortunate who is entirely in the power of his own imagination. He is "incapable of everything except fulfilling his divine mission," and especially incapable of earning money; it is possible for him, indeed, to make a living by writing, but if he does so it is probably at the cost of his noblest gifts; he develops his critical faculty at the expense of his imagination; and the divine spark which burns in him is extinguished. Therefore this heavenly messenger ought not to be allowed to degrade himself by common work; his brain is a volcano, from which the "harmonious lava" (*laves harmonieuses*) can only issue when he is in a position to be idle as long as he pleases.

[3]

There is, as the modern reader sees at once, some truth in this idea, but more exaggeration. The play which was based on it, and which produced floods of tears, appeals so exclusively to the instinct of compassion, that it has no properly tragic effect; and it has too strong a lyric bias in favour of its hero to possess the inward equilibrium without which a drama lacks stability. Chatterton and the young Quakeress whom he loves have appropriated every single noble quality of mind and soul; around them there is nothing but coarseness, cold-heartedness, prose, and stupidity. What we are shown is the cruel treatment of the intellectual genius by the coarse, earth-bound world around him. The view of life is not unlike what we find in Germany in the writings of Novalis, in Denmark in those of Andersen and Ingemann; for authors such as these Goethe has written his *Tasso* in vain. We in our day are tired of the dramas with artist heroes which were ushered in by Oehlenschläger's *Correggio*, and are represented in Germany by Holtei's *Lorbeerbaum und Bettelstab*, &c. We no longer indignantly sympathise with Chatterton, "the man who has been created to descry in the stars the way pointed out by the finger of the Lord," when he chooses rather to poison himself than accept an unpoetical appointment which would bring him in a hundred a year. In this case also, what touched every heart in an audience of the year 1835, now only elicits a smile and a shrug of the shoulders.

Romanticism was too essentially lyric to produce dramatic works of enduring value. This fact is perhaps most strongly borne in upon us when we consider the plays of the greatest of the Romantic lyric poets. Victor Hugo's dramas have many points of resemblance with Oehlenschläger's tragedies. We frequently observe that both authors have been influenced by their reading. In Hugo's *Marie Tudor* we trace the influence of Dumas' *Christine à Fontainebleau*, and the last scene of *Lucrèce Borgia* owes something to Webster's *Duchess of Malfi*. The characters in the plays of both authors are merely outlined; in neither are they real, complete human beings; and yet the power of genuine enthusiasm and lyric pathos inspires them with life. Hugo's characters certainly approach nearer to real life, and for this reason, that events such as those represented in his plays had occurred in France in much more recent times than in Denmark. Hernani reminds us of the rebel leaders who defied the Government in La Vendée; Gilbert, who goes to the scaffold of his own free will to avenge the woman he loves, does no more than many a noble victim of the guillotine had done; and Ruy Blas' elevation from the position of a footman to that of a minister of state is not much more remarkable than Rousseau's rise from the same position to that of one of the world's most famous authors. This, however, practically makes little difference; for the author's love of the unusual, nay, of the monstrous, represses everything which might remind us of the reality with which we are familiar, and gives prominence to unnatural phenomena which, though sublime in his eyes, are merely absurd in the eyes of readers of a later day.

The conception of human nature which reveals itself in Hugo's plays is purely lyric; it reminds us in all essentials of the psychology of his rival, Lamartine, an author who was such a contrast to him in other respects. The only difference is that, whilst Lamartine, with his harmonious nature, loves to represent a pure and beautiful character which yields to some sudden temptation and then expiates the one weak moment with years of repentance and penance (Jocelyn, Cèdar in *La Chute d'un Ange*), Hugo, in his dramas, loves to represent a human soul debased by bad passions, by all kinds of misery and humiliations, by vice, by slavery, by infirmity, yet so constituted that, under given circumstances, it is irresistibly attracted by the good and beautiful, in alliance with which it fights against the horrible past which it has forsworn. This soul aspires; it understands even the most delicate refinements of the good and beautiful; but it feels unworthy of the noble emotions which it experiences; it cannot mount into these unfamiliar regions, and so it falls back, exhausted and defeated, into its former degraded condition.

Let me illustrate my meaning by a few examples. Triboulet (*Le Roi s'amuse*) has been corrupted by his position as the unscrupulous mouthpiece and butt of mockery, yet he loves his daughter with the purest tenderness. She is stolen from him, and he gives himself up entirely to hatred and projects of revenge.—Marion (*Marion Delorme*) has sold herself hundreds of times; but she falls in love with a young, brave man, and this passion completely purifies her. Didier is condemned to death, and in the dread hour of trial she becomes Marion again. She gives herself to the judge in order to save the man she loves, not understanding that Didier would far rather die than be saved thus.—Lucrèce Borgia was begotten in crime and has lived a life of crime. But this licentious woman, this poisoner, has a son whom she loves, and for his sake she is prepared to renounce the life she has hitherto led. But a mortal insult is offered her, and in her fury she has recourse to her old weapons; she invites her enemies to a repast, gives them poison, and unwittingly murders her son along with the others.—Ruy Blas, compelled by poverty, has become a nobleman's lackey. The love of a queen makes of this lackey a minister of state. He is fit for the position; he evolves and carries out great and noble plans; he is on the point of becoming the saviour of his country, when his past rises up against him. The disappointment of all his hopes is too much for him; he revenges himself like the man he was; he will not fight a duel with his master, but gets possession of his sword and kills the defenceless man with it.[4]

The conception of the tragic is, we observe, always the same. But of chief significance in all these dramas, as far as Hugo is concerned, is the fountain of lyric pathos which wells forth when the degraded human soul is raised by noble passion from the mire. The real kernel of the drama is in every case the hymn of strong emotion with which the guilt-stained soul sings itself pure.

One of Hugo's most famous poems (*Les Chants du Crépuscule*, xxxii.) contains an allegory of which we are reminded when considering his dramas. High in a church tower—so he writes—hangs an old bell. Long ago its metal was clean and bright. The only inscription it bore was the

word God, with a crown below it. But the tower has had many visitors, and each of them, one with his blunt knife, another with a rusty nail, has scratched his own mean name, or a foul word, or a silly witticism, or a platitude on the bell. It is covered with dust and cobwebs; rust has found its way into the scratches, marring and corroding it.

"Mais qu'importe à la cloche et qu'importe à mon âme!
Qu'à son heure, à son jour, l'esprit saint les réclame,
Les touche, l'une et l'autre, et leur dise: chantez!
Soudain, par toute voie et de tous les côtés,
De leur sein ébranlé, rempli d'ombres obscures,
À travers leur surface, à travers leurs souillures,
Et la cendre et la rouille, amas injurieux,
Quelque chose de grand s'épandra dans les cieux."

The poet was only attempting to describe the condition of his own soul when he sang thus, but he did more; for the allegory strikingly depicts the outbursts of lyric pathos which escape from the lips of the unhappy and guilt-stained characters who give his dramas their interest.

But pathos and lyric sonority, in however ample measure, are not materials out of which alone a dramatic edifice can be constructed. A strong foundation of accurate reasoning is demanded, or, failing this, at least of sound common-sense and correct taste.

Such foundations Hugo could not supply. And his failings as a dramatist increased with time. There happened in his case what happens with so many artists: his style degenerated into mannerism. He became, as it were, his own best pupil; as a dramatist he ended by parodying himself—the most cruelly effective kind of parody.

He had always been wanting in a sense of the comic, and had always been inclined to confuse the sublime with the colossal. To this inclination he yielded more unrestrainedly than ever before in writing *Les Burgraves*. The very list of characters evokes a smile: Job, Burgrave of Heppenheff, aged 100; Magnus, son of Job, aged 80; Hatto, son of Magnus, aged 60; Gorlois, son of Hatto, aged 30. A Parisian caricature of the Burgraves, of about the same date as the play, represents them standing in a row, decreasing in height and quantity of beard according to age.

The centenarian is the most energetic of them all; he represents the good old days. He calls his son of eighty: "Young man!" but Hugo does not smile. All these old gentlemen vie in declamation with a beggar of ninety, who turns out to be no less a personage than Frederick Barbarossa, who has lived in concealment for twenty years, but has come to execute vengeance upon the eldest of the Burgraves, who as a youth had plotted against his life. The play teems with improbabilities and Romantic absurdities. For instance, in order to bring about a recognition scene, Hugo makes a soldier fight with a piece of red-hot iron, with which he sets a mark upon an opponent whom he wishes to be able to recognise again, and whom he cannot see rightly because it is dark.

When this monstrous production of an overstrained imagination was put upon the stage, in 1843, it proved a complete failure. On the first night, in the middle of the play, hissing began. One of Hugo's faithful henchmen rushed to tell him. Hugo who, like Napoleon, relied upon his guard, answered as usual: "Get hold of some young men!" It is said that the messenger answered despondently, with downcast eyes: "There are no more young men." The generation to which Romanticism had appealed thirteen years before was no longer young, and, what was worse, it had grown weary; more than one of its poets had made too heavy demands upon it.

A reaction was inevitable, and it set in that very year. It found its author and its histrionic genius.

A young man as yet unknown to fame had left the provincial town in which he had been brought up, and come to Paris with a manuscript in his pocket. He was a thoroughly high-principled young man, with no great gift of imagination, but with much refinement and taste, and of a nobly serious turn of mind. His name was François Ponsard, and the title of the manuscript was *Lucrèce*. It was a tragedy on an antique theme—the rape and death of the chaste Lucretia. The style was sober and severe; it recalled Racine's. The public was tired of the Romantic style. For long the quiet citizen had shaken his head over such phrases of Hugo's as "the tones purled from the organ like water from a sponge," or "the table-linen was white as pale grief's winding-sheet," or "the old woman walked with bent, slow back." But until now there had been no one capable of competing with Hugo. Here at last seemed to be a possible rival. At the first glance Ponsard's play appeared to be exactly on the lines of the old classical tragedy. In their eagerness its welcomers did not notice in what a modern manner the antique theme was treated, how much Ponsard had learned from the Romanticists, how much of its warm colouring his drama owed to Victor Hugo, and how small an amount of originality the new-comer really possessed.

All the public saw was that this drama was sane and simple. They saw that its heroine was Lucretia—not Hugo's horrible Lucrèce, that monster of bloodthirstiness and sensuality, but Rome's Lucretia, the emblem of chastity, another name for feminine purity. She represented marriage, the family, the poetry of home, as Antony and his kin had represented the morality of the foundling, and lawlessness. All Catholic and Classic France, all orthodox Switzerland, hymned the praises of the new dramatist and his play. At last Hugo had found his superior, Racine his equal. Even the critical Vinet joined in the great Hallelujah. He went into ecstasies over Ponsard's style: "This author spins gold as his Lucretia does wool &c."

Les Burgraves was hissed on the 7th of March 1843. On the 22nd of April of the same year *Lucrèce* was received on its first night with thunders of applause. So closely as this did the short-lived triumph of what went by the name of *l'école du bon sens* follow on the defeat of Romantic dramaticism. If the worthy Ponsard relied upon the verdict of his critics, Janin and the others

(Théophile Gautier and Théophile Dondey alone protested), he must have believed that his fame was established for all time.

The Classic reaction had found its actress as well as its dramatist. In 1838 a young Jewess had made her début in the Theatre Français. She was then eighteen, an ignorant child who had played the harp and sung in the cafés and in the streets; but time proved *Rachel* to be a genius, the greatest actress France had ever known. And this great actress, as it happened, had a thorough distaste for the rôles with which the Romantic drama provided her, whilst she studied and played those of the old Classic repertory with such zeal and passion that she actually succeeded in doing what no one had believed possible namely, restoring their power of attraction to the tragedies which the Romantic School had disdainfully driven from the stage. Of what avail was it that Gautier wrung his hands! Iphigénie, Mérope, Émilia, Chimène, Phèdre, again trod the boards. And so nobly and naturally were they personated that an impressionable public was at times actually roused to a kind of fury with the authors and critics who had dared to throw contempt on these sacred national treasures. A nation is naturally rejoiced to learn that it has not been mistaken in the eminence of the men and works it has reverenced for centuries.

Although the title-rôle of *Lucrèce* had been written for her, Rachel at first refused to play it; but after the success of the drama at the Odéon she consented. The mood of the audience the first time she appeared in it has been described to me by an eye-witness. "We sat waiting in breathless expectation for the curtain to rise. It rose, and we saw Rachel as Lucretia sitting at her spinning-wheel among her maidens. The silence had been complete enough before; but when she raised her head and opened her lips to say the first words (to one of the slaves): *Lève-toi, Laodice!* there was such utter stillness that the fruit-sellers were heard crying their oranges in the market-place."

In their enthusiasm for Rachel the public did not realise that the Classic style in art was not really alive because a single genius for a time breathed life into the great works of a bygone age; and in their rejoicing over Ponsard they failed to understand how short his triumph must inevitably be. The Common-sense School, as its name prognosticates, never developed any vigorous originality. Ponsard himself was a writer of only second-rate talent. The youthful dramas of his gifted follower, Émile Augier (who dedicated his poems to him), imitate his sober spirit and style; but Augier's style changed as time went on.[5] Though the school, most praiseworthy in its intentions, by no means deserved the contemptuous attacks made on it by some of the irreconcilable younger Romanticists, including Vacquerie and Théodore de Banville, yet its historical significance is no more than this—it indicates the period when Romantic drama had outlived itself.

---

[1] Told me by an eye-witness of the scene, Philarète Chasles.

[2] In the list of personages we find the following directions to the actor for the rendering of the part of Borgia. Observe how all the qualities beloved of Romanticism are enumerated as if in a catalogue, and how in all essentials the directions might serve for Victor Hugo's young heroes, or indeed for Antony: "Montagnard brusque et bon. Vindicatif et animé par la vendetta comme par une seconde âme: conduit par elle *comme par la destinée*. Caractère vigoureux, triste et profondément sensible. Haïssant et aimant avec violence. Sauvage par nature, et civilisé comme malgré lui par la cour et la politesse de son temps."

[3] See the characteristic introduction to *Chatterton*, "Dernière nuit de travail, du 29 au 30 Juin 1834."

[4] *Cf*. Madame de Girardin: *Lettres parisiennes*, ii 31.

[5] Augier's *Gabrielle* is perhaps the prettiest play which the Common-sense School produced. His dramas, *La Jeunesse* and *La Pierre de Touche*, were evidently inspired by Ponsard's *L'Honneur et l'Argent*.

XXXIII

LITERATURE IN ITS RELATION TO THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL MOVEMENTS OF THE DAY

Meanwhile Saint-Simonism had been thoroughly leavening literature.

Lamartine, the most gifted of the authors who, after the restoration of the hereditary monarchy, lent their support to the Conservative party, began to waver early in the Thirties. In his versified novel, *Jocelyn* (1836), mild and pious though its tone is, we are conscious of his new sympathies and of new developments in his convictions. In the preface he evades the question of his religious belief, merely remarking that, let it be what it may, he has not forgotten his youthful reverence for the Church. The most careless reader, however, cannot fail to observe that the story itself is a protest against the celibacy of the clergy, one of the fundamental principles of the Church. And in Jocelyn's diary we find the following significant passage, in the entry for 21st September 1800:—

"La caravane humaine un jour était campée
Dans les forêts bordant une rive escarpée,
Et ne pouvant pousser sa route plus avant.
Les chênes l'abritaient du soleil et du vent,

Les tentes, aux rameaux enlaçant leurs cordages,
Formaient autour des troncs des cités, des villages,
Et les hommes épars sur des gazons épais
Mangeaient leur pain à l'ombre et conversaient en paix.
Tout à coup comme atteints d'une rage insensée
Ces hommes se levant à la même pensée,
Portant la hache aux troncs, font crouler à leur piés
Ces dômes où les nids s'étaient multipliés;
Et les brutes des bois sortant de leurs repaires
Et les oiseaux fuyant les cimes séculaires
Contemplaient la ruine avec un œil d'horreur,
Ne comprenaient pas l'œuvre et maudissaient du cœur
Cette race stupide acharnée à sa perte,
Qui détruit jusqu'au ciel l'ombre qui l'a couverte!
Or, pendant qu'en leur nuit les brutes des forêts
Avaient pitié de l'homme et séchaient de regrets,
L'homme continuant son ravage sublime
Avait jeté les troncs en arche sur l'abîme;
Sur l'arbre de ses bords gisant et renversé
La fleuve était partout couvert et traversé,
Et poursuivant en paix son éternel voyage
La caravane avait conquis l'autre rivage."

But this was only the beginning. *La Chute d'un Ange* showed, in spite of all its faults, that Lamartine had discarded his earlier, "seraphic" style; and his first parliamentary speeches showed that Saint-Simonistic ideas had gradually supplanted his orthodox beliefs. The born aristocrat proclaimed himself a *démocrate conservateur*, desirous of the realisation, under a constitutional monarchy, of all the modern liberal and progressive ideas. And he did not stop even here. His famous *Histoire des Girondins*, published in 1846 (a work valueless as history, but written in a most poetical, persuasively eloquent style), was the book which more than any other attuned men's minds to revolution and prepared for the coming upheaval. And in 1848 we find the man who had been the court poet of the Restoration period, standing—the real chief of the Republic—on the balcony of the Hôtel de Ville, displaying the proud indifference of the aristocrat to the muskets levelled at his breast while addressing the crowd with the authoritative eloquence of the tribune. That was a great, an immortal moment in his life, when he saved the lives of his colleagues and averted civil war with a few unhesitating words, as beautiful as they were manly.

It was Pierre Leroux who initiated George Sand into the new, fermenting social ideas which with feminine impulsiveness she at once adopted. In his capacity of social reformer, Pierre Leroux, a metaphysician with a noble heart and a confused brain, who thought in triads in the manner of Schelling, championed equality and progress. To him progress meant approach towards equality. He was instigated to his attempts at reform by his indignation with the existing condition of society, with the equality as regarded the law, which permitted the rich man to escape the hardship of military service and the punishment due to his crime, with the liberty which consisted in the right of free competition, that is to say, the legal right of the rich to oppress the poor. Society as reorganised by Leroux was to be based on the triple nature of man. Man is constituted of perception, intuition, and cognition. To these three elements were to correspond three classes, the artisan or industrial, the artist, and the scientist class; but these three classes were not, as in Saint-Simon's imaginary society, to be castes, but were to act in unison. Three individuals or units, one from each class, were to constitute a society individual or unit; and these same three, working together, would constitute an "atelier." The "ateliers" also were to be divided into three classes, according to the activity which predominated in them, &c.

When we think of all these Utopias, we cannot but admire the sane and wise attitude maintained towards them by the authors who allowed themselves to be carried away by some of the ideas inspiring the different systems. They held aloof from everything, or almost everything, that was artificial, fantastic, or absurd. They contented themselves with kindling their poetic torches at the altar fire kept alight by the pure-hearted enthusiasts; they drew inspiration from the philanthropy of these men, from their ardent championship of the poor and the oppressed, from their fervent faith in the people and in progress.

It is quite evident, whatever may be said to the contrary, that Saint-Simonism was a beneficent influence in George Sand's life. It produced tranquillity after the fit of despair which dictated *Lelia*; it gave her a faith which was never afterwards disturbed, and a cause to work and fight for. She had an observant eye for all that was going on around her; and towards the close of the Thirties it was evident that the French working classes were in a state of violent ferment. At that period the slow transformation of France from an almost exclusively agricultural country to one of the chief manufacturing countries was already an accomplished fact. It was now no longer only the poverty of the peasants which called for a remedy, but also, and even more urgently, the poverty and discontent of the ever-increasing proletariat population of the great manufacturing and commercial towns. Like almost all the other French democratic writers, George Sand turned her attention to the working people of the towns, their hard struggle for existence, their remarkable intelligence, their social and political ideas. Saint-Simonism had originally appealed to her and aroused her enthusiasm by its condemnation of the relations between the sexes upheld by the conventions of existing society; it denned as truths to be proclaimed and championed the ideas which were most precious to her—that there is no beauty or value in marriage except when it is a voluntary union; and that mayor, witnesses, and priest cannot invest it with greater

sacredness than do love and conscience. Now Saint-Simonism gave a more thoughtful and more definite character to her love of the people. Among the men of the working classes she discovered more unselfishness and manliness than among those of the middle classes; it began to seem to her as if the vices of the male sex which she had condemned with such severity in her first novels were in reality more the vices of a class than of the whole sex; and her love of the working class in conjunction with the innate idealism of her nature led her to see and represent the working man from an ideal point of view. She produced a series of novels in which the old contrast between two men of the same class, one unselfish and the other a hardened egotist, was superseded by the contrast between the idealised representative of the working classes and a more or less egotistical and slavishly conventional representative of the upper or middle classes.

The most interesting books of this series are the two written about 1840—*Horace*, the refusal to accept which produced a temporary disagreement between George Sand and the *Revue des deux Mondes*, and *Le Compagnon du Tour de France*, a genuine labour-question novel, which in its innocence and simple purity presents a striking contrast to the glaringly coloured stories of a socialistic and democratic tendency published a few years later by Eugène Sue.

In my opinion *Horace* is one of George Sand's best books. In its hero she represents with more shrewdness and profundity than ever before or after the young bourgeois of the reign of Louis Philippe. The acuteness and insight she in this case displays are in no way inferior to Balzac's. She is inspired by a strong antipathy, which, however, does not preclude a good-humouredly tolerant treatment. With Horace is contrasted the noble proletarian, Arsène. This man, originally a painter, has been compelled by poverty to take a place as waiter in a *café*; but the dependent position has not degraded him. The simple goodness and beauty of his character make him most attractive. We believe in him.

Arsène has friends among the *Bousingots*, the circle of young students who in the Thirties transferred the style and deportment of the Romantic School to the domain of politics. They figure in many of the lithographs of the period with their Robespierre waistcoats, thick sticks, and glazed hats or red velvet caps. In outward appearance they somewhat resembled German *corps* students; and they took part in all riots which were demonstrations of discontent with the *Juste-milieu* government. George Sand defends them warmly. "None of the men," she says, "who at that time caused a slight disturbance of public order need blush now at the thought of having displayed a little youthful ardour. If the only use which youth can make of such nobility and courage as it possesses, is to attack society with it, the condition of society must be very bad." Arsène fights like a hero and is badly wounded in the working-men's revolt of the 5th of June 1832, which is sympathetically described; and in the course of a few years he becomes an experienced, able politician. The story of his political education is peculiarly interesting to us, because, in telling it, the authoress gives unambiguous expression to her own feelings. Arsène's hero is Godefroy Cavaignac; George Sand describes him and his friends, the society *Les amis du people*. "Their ideas," she writes, "at any rate indicated a great advance upon the liberalism of the Restoration period. The other Republicans were a little too much taken up with the idea of overthrowing monarchy, and did not give sufficient thought to the laying of the foundations of the republic; Godefroy Cavaignac's thoughts were of the emancipation of the people, of free education, of universal suffrage, of the gradual modification of the rights of property, &c." Horace's cold-heartedness and narrow-mindedness display themselves in his contemptuously sweeping condemnation of Saint-Simonism, which to him is pure charlatanism. He is incapable of appreciating its conception of the mutual relations of the sexes, and is obliged to submit to being reproved with the calmness of conscious superiority by a young dressmaker who lives with her friend, a clever young doctor, and regards this life of theirs as "the truly religious marriage."[1] The authoress undoubtedly attacks in this novel more problems than she is capable of solving, but the very fact of its dealing largely with the ideas and aims of the day gives it a vivid and attractive historical colouring. Besides, it was not her business, as a novelist, to solve social problems, but to show how they moved hearts and set brains to work, even the hearts and brains of enamoured young women and self-satisfied young men.

What I specially admire in *Le Compagnon du Tour de France*, a book which, as a novel, is inferior to *Horace*, is the impulsive strength of the feeling which inspired it. To feel the heart swell and burn with compassion for the unfortunates of society, to feel burdened by the favours which Fortune has bestowed on us and not on all, are sensations with which many a youth and maiden are familiar. But it is a rare thing indeed for the man or woman of forty still to hunger and thirst after justice for others, to be unable to sit still and see the yoke weighing down the innocent neck, unable to refrain from planning and striving after a different order of things, a different morality from that which seems to satisfy society in general, nay, to be actually ashamed to sleep or to take pleasure or to be happy for a few moments, as long as things are as they are. And these were the feelings which compelled George Sand to write this book. What a love for "the people" lies at the foundation of it! And it is a love for the people as they are—for the drinking, brawling people, as well as for the working, aspiring people—a love so great that the authoress cannot bear to describe or dwell upon the vices she sees and names. See the conversations in chapter xxv. The best definition of the idea which dominates the book is to be found in the book itself. A nobleman asserts that he holds the old opinion that everything possible ought to be done for the people, but that they ought not to be consulted, because that would make them both appealing party and judge. His daughter answers: "And is not that just what we are?"

Soon after writing this work George Sand began to take a vigorous share in the practical politics of the day. After her quarrel with the *Revue des deux Mondes* she had, in collaboration with Pierre Leroux, Viardot, Lamennais, and the Polish author Mickiewiez, started the *Revue*

Indépendante; now (in 1843) she and some friends started a republican provincial newspaper in her own part of the country. In this paper, *L'Éclaireur de l'Indre*, to which Lamartine also contributed, she defended the cause, now of the town artisan, now of the peasant (article on the Paris journeymen bakers, letters from a Black Forest peasant). In 1844, in her long essay, *Questions politiques et sociales*, she distinctly declared herself a socialist. When the Revolution broke out in 1848 she was ripe to take part in it. For a short time she published a weekly paper, *La Cause du Peuple*; she wrote *A Word to the Middle Classes*, and the famous *Letters to the People*, and composed the bulletins of the Provisional Government. Towards the close of the year, in face of threatening danger, her republican socialism assumed an almost fanatical form. The article *La Majorité et l'Unanimité*, in which, immediately before the elections for the Constituent National Assembly, she exhorts the electors to show their liberal principles by their votes, ends with the threat, expressed with much circumlocution, but yet plain enough, that if the assembly presently to be elected by universal suffrage does not prove to be such an assembly as popular interests demand, mere still remains the appeal to arms.[2] It is curious to see the champion of the sovereignty of the people having recourse to a threat of despotically violent measures; it shows what a vigorous, ardent, manly spirit dwelt in the bosom of this gifted woman. The same indomitable energy which produced hundreds of novels displayed itself in her alliance with Ledru-Rollin and Louis Blanc, men who were content with thinking what she gave expression to in words.

It was chiefly through Lamennais that the current of democratic ideas reached Victor Hugo. In Lamennais' principal work, *Essai sur l'Indifférence*, there were already signs indicating the possibility of a rejection of that principle of authority which he had championed so ardently in his youth. In August 1832 his theories were condemned by the Pope. The intimate relations between Lamennais and Hugo began in the latter's youth; Lamennais congratulated Hugo on the occasion of his marriage, and Hugo's first odes were dedicated to Lamennais. In 1822, persuaded by the Abbé de Rohan, Hugo determined to unburden his mind to a father confessor. The first he went to was Frayssinous, once the intrepid, self-sacrificing curé, now the fashionable Paris clergyman, a bishop, and head of the University. Hugo was repelled by Frayssinous' worldly ideas and counsels, and the Abbé then sent him to the little, frail, slender man with the yellow face, hooked nose, and beautiful, restless eyes, who walked the streets of Paris in a shabby cassock, blue woollen stockings, and hobnailed shoes—the famous Lamennais, whom he already knew so well.

The ideas of both confessor and penitent underwent a change in the course of the years preceding the Revolution of July, and the one was not long after the other in going over to the Liberal and anti-clerical party. One evening in September 1830 Lamennais, entering Hugo's room, found him writing. "I am disturbing you," said Lamennais. "No. But you will not approve of what I am writing." "Never mind; let me hear it." And Hugo read the following lines from his *Journal d'un Révolutionnaire de 1830*:

"The republic, which is not yet ripe, but which in a century will embrace the whole of Europe, signifies that society is its own sovereign. It protects itself by means of its citizen-soldiers; judges itself, by trial by jury; administers its own affairs, by local government; rules itself, by popular representation. The four limbs of monarchy—the standing army, the courts, the bureaucracy, the peerage—are for the republic only four troublesome excrescences which are withering up and will soon die."

"You have one clause too many," said Lamennais; "that which asserts that the republic is not ripe. You speak of it in the future tense, I in the present."

A few years later, Lamennais' connection with the Roman Catholic Church was at an end. It was in order to show that his defection was not the result of unbelief but of a new conviction, that he entitled his famous manifesto *Paroles d'un Croyant* (1833).

It has been averred that no book since the invention of printing had created such a stir as this did. In the course of a few years a hundred editions of it were printed; it was published in foreign countries and translated into many languages. It is an imitation of a work which appeared not long before it, Mickiewiez's *Book of the Polish Pilgrim*. Half in Old Testament, half in Christian style, it denounces monarchy in Europe, the Pope and the priesthood, those to whom the fall of Poland and the serfdom of Italy were due, and the self-interested bourgeois government of France. The eloquence is of the genuine sacerdotal type; the book is strong in pathos, but weak in psychology; it only condemns and praises, knows no shade between black and white—the blackness of hell, the whiteness of heaven; nevertheless its author's warm-heartedness, purity of motive, and beauty of soul have imparted to it a rare charm.

In 1837 followed *Livre du Peuple*, a work written in the same spirit. The bold Abbé was imprisoned, but from his prison he sent book after book out into the world. *Une Voix du Prison, Du Passé et de l'Avenir du Peuple, De l'Esclavage modern*, were all written in Sainte-Pélagie.

Lamennais died three years before the Revolution of February, at a time of violent political and social agitation.

I give a few fragments from *Paroles d'un Croyant* as specimens of his style:

> "Ne vous laissez pas tromper par de vaines paroles. Plusieurs chercheront à vous persuader que vous êtes vraiment libres, parce qu'ils auront écrit sur une feuille de papier le mot de liberté, et l'auront affiché à tous les carrefours.
>
> La liberté n'est pas un placard qu'on lit au coin de la rue. Elle est une puissance vivante qu'on sent en soi et autour de soi, le génie protecteur du foyer domestique, la garantie

des droits sociaux, et le premier de ces droits.

L'oppresseur qui se couvre de son nom est le pire des oppresseurs. Il joint le mensonge à la tyrannie, et à l'injustice la profanation; car le nom de la liberté est saint.

Gardez-vous de ceux qui disent: Liberté, Liberté, et qui la détruisent par leurs œuvres."

"Le laboureur porte le poids du jour, s'expose à la pluie, au soleil, aux vents, pour préparer par son travail la moisson qui remplira ses greniers à l'automne.

La justice est la moisson des peuples.

L'artisan se lève avant l'aube, allume sa petite lampe, et fatigue sans relâche pour gagner un peu de pain qui le nourrisse, lui et ses enfants.

La justice est le pain des peuples.

Le marchand ne refuse aucun labeur, ne se plaint d'aucunes peines; il use son corps et oublie le sommeil, afin d'amasser des richesses.

La liberté est la richesse des peuples.

Le matelot traverse les mers, se livre aux flots et aux tempêtes, se hasarde entre les écueils, souffre le froid et le chaud, afin de s'assurer quelque repos dans ses vieux ans.

La liberté est le repos des peuples.

Le soldat se soumet aux plus dures privations, il veille et combat, et donne son sang, pour ce qu'il appelle la gloire.

La liberté est la gloire des peuples.

S'il est un peuple qui estime moins la justice et la liberté que le laboureur sa moisson, l'artisan un peu de pain, le marchand les richesses, le matelot le repos et le soldat la gloire; élevez autour de ce peuple une haute muraille, afin que son haleine n'infecte pas le reste de la terre."

"Jeune soldat, où vas-tu?

Je vais combattre pour la justice, pour la sainte cause des peuples, pour les droits sacrés du genre humain.

Que tes armes soient bénies, jeune soldat!

Jeune soldat, où vas-tu?

Je vais combattre contre les hommes iniques pour ceux qu'ils renversent et foulent aux pieds, contre les maîtres pour les esclaves, contre les tyrans pour la liberté.

Que tes armes soient bénies, jeune soldat!

Jeune soldat, où vas-tu?

Je vais combattre pour renverser les barrières qui séparent les peuples, et les empêchent de s'embrasser comme les fils du même père, destinés à vivre unis dans un même amour.

Que tes armes soient bénies, jeune soldat!

Jeune soldat, où vas-tu!

Je vais combattre pour affranchir de la tyrannie de l'homme la pensée, la parole, la conscience.

Que tes armes soient bénies, sept fois bénies, jeune soldat!"

Idealistic and monotonous as these utterances and refrains are, they possess the kind of eloquence which makes a powerful impression upon the common people.

Lamennais' outbursts of revolutionary sentiment come very near to being pure poetry. Hugo's are pure poetry. In reading his verses written in the Forties we feel how his poet's ear hears the dull underground rumbling of the approaching Revolution, and how he foresees that its crater will open in Paris. As far back as in the preface to the *Feuilles d'Automne* he reproaches England with having turned Ireland into a graveyard, the sovereigns of Europe with having made Italy a prison for galley-slaves, the Czar with having populated Siberia with Poles. In it, too, he already writes of the old religions which are sloughing their skins, and (alluding to Saint-Simonism) of the new, which are stammeringly enunciating their half-reasonable, half-false principles. And from this time onward he is in all his works the champion of the liberty of the people, of their right to self-government, and of the religion of humanity. As a dramatist he began by rebelling merely against the accepted laws of style; but ere long he was, like Voltaire a century earlier, making the drama the organ of his ideas. One of his plays (*Le Roi s'amuse*) is an attack upon absolute monarchy as represented by Francis I, the most brutal of the royal debauchees of France. Another (*Angelo*), the preface to which is an affirmation of genuine Saint-Simonistic principles, contrasts woman within the pale of society with her sister beyond it, endows the strolling actress with virtues which the great lady lacks, and gives each of them her own ideality. A third (*Ruy Blas*) symbolises the elevation of the lowest class to supreme power. In Molière's *Les Précieuses* the lackey was treated like some animal which, however clever it might be, was liable to be thrashed, even when it had only carried out its master's orders; shortly before the great Revolution Scapin is transformed into Figaro, who, though still in livery, openly manages his masters; in *Ruy Blas* the servant, that is to say, the born plebeian, throws off his livery, assumes authority, and rules.

While fully conscious of the great improbabilities and weaknesses of these dramas, we are also sensible of the atmosphere of new ideas which pervades them.

Hugo's was so dogmatic a mind that each new world of ideas which he entered in the course of his life crystallised itself, for him, into a code of doctrines. From the moment he became a democrat he was the opponent of capital punishment. He protested against it as an author in *Le dernier Jour d'un Condamné*, and also in *Claude Gueux*, where a very unpleasant real incident is turned topsy-turvy, and an execrable bandit is transformed into a hero and victim; he protested against it as a private individual; he made personal appeals for the remittance of sentences of death, both to French kings and foreign juries. Though opinion is still, and with good reason, divided as to the advisability of abolishing capital punishment for murder, Hugo's endeavours to save the lives of political offenders have a claim to our undivided sympathy. In 1839 he interceded in behalf of the noble revolutionary, Armand Barbès; Louis Philippe had, however, in this case remitted the sentence of death before Hugo's verses reached him.

But the most beautiful and the only perfectly accurate expression of the mental attitude of France's greatest lyric poet is, naturally, to be found in his poetry. The dramas of his first period, the novels of his second (which do not fall within the scope of this volume), are of small significance in comparison with the poems of the Thirties and Forties, which are contained in the two volumes entitled *Les Contemplations*. In these his faith in progress, his political convictions, his social hopes, his religious feelings, are expressed in the only artistic form which suits them. It is a form which cannot be dissolved, a style which cannot be paraphrased; it must be enjoyed in the original.

Hugo had every right to exclaim, as he did in one of the poems of this collection:

"J'ai, dans le livre, avec le drame, en prose, en vers.
Plaidé pour les petits et les misérables;
Suppliant les heureux et les inexorables;
J'ai réhabilité le bouffon, l'histrion,
Tous les damnés humains, Triboulet, Marion,
Le laquais, le forçat et la prostituée;
. . . . . .
J'ai réclamé des droits pour la femme et l'enfant;
J'ai tâché d'éclairer l'homme en le réchauffant;
J'allais criant: Science! Écriture! Parole!
Je voulais résorber le bagne par l'école."

But, he complains:

"Le passé ne veut pas s'en aller. Il revient
Sans cesse sur ses pas, reveut, reprend, retient.
. . . . . .
L'immense renégat d'Hier, marquis, se nomme
Demain; mai tourne bride et plante là l'hiver;
Use à tout ressaisir ses ongles noirs; fait rage;
Il gonfle son vieux flot, souffle son vieil orage,
Vomit sa vieille nuit, crie: À bas! crie: À mort!
Pleure, tonne, tempête, éclate, hurle, mord."

But the onward movement would not be checked. The cleansing thunderstorm of 1848 broke over Europe. It came, that year of earthquakes, that year of emancipation, of heroic struggles, and, alas! of romantic childishness—when the helm of France was in the hands, not of statesmen, but of poets and enthusiasts; when Saint-Simonistic, neo-Christian, and poetical, instead of practical political ideas prevailed in the councils of the State. How eloquent is such a little fact as this, that one of the first proceedings of the Provisional Government was (at Lamartine's suggestion) to declare negro-slavery abolished! The ideas of Romantic France find their realisation in the Revolution of 1848.

---

[1] See chapters vi., x., xiv., xx.

[2] The femininely naïve hypocrisy of the following passage is amusing: "Elle se sent, elle se connaît maintenant, la voix unanime du peuple. *Elle vous rééauira tous au silence*, elle passera sur vos têtes comme le souffle de Dieu; elle ira entourer votre représentation nationale, et voici ce qu'elle lui dira: 'Jusqu'ici tu n'étais pas inviolable, mais nous voici avec des armes *parées de fleurs* et nous te déclarons inviolable. Travaille, fonctionne, nous t'entourons de 400 mille baïonnettes, d'un million de volontés. Aucun parti, aucune intrigue arrivera jusqu'à toi. Recueille-toi et agis!'"

XXXIV

THE OVERLOOKED AND FORGOTTEN

If we take a survey of any literature some ten or twelve years after the beginning of a great new movement in it, at the moment when the army of the new era has proved successful in the conflict, we feel as if we were inspecting a battlefield. Through the victors' shouts of triumph we

hear subdued sounds of lamentation. I do not mean the cries of woe that proceed from the vanquished, retreating forces; these have deserved their defeat, and their sufferings inspire no compassion in me; the men I have in my mind are the wounded and the forgotten of the victorious army. For literary warfare, too, has its lists of "killed and missing." It is interesting to walk over the battlefield and cast a glance at the writers of the generation of 1830 who were cut off in their youth and strength, or were so severely wounded that, maimed and dumb, they thenceforth only dragged out a disabled existence.

The conditions of the literary career are such that, out of hundreds who enter for the race, only two or three reach the goal. The rest are left lying exhausted along the course. The first to give in are the unfortunates whose powers are undoubtedly inadequate, the men of fragmentary talent who have been enticed by the hope of fortune and fame, and who run on in an atmosphere of dazzling illusion until they sink exhausted and fainting, to awake in the hospital. Next fall those who, though really highly gifted, lack the peculiar combination of qualities indispensable to success in the society in which they live, those who have not the power of adapting themselves to circumstances, much less of moulding society to suit their requirements, and who are outrun by the more or less nimble mediocrities in whom the great public recognises its own flesh and blood.

The very character of the work is fatal to many. It is work that knows nothing of days of rest, that exhausts the nervous system, that cannot be done leisurely, because only that which the author produces at white heat has the power of affecting the reader with any of the emotion felt by the writer. It is work which is, as a rule, very badly paid. It is work which, being entirely intellectual, refines the senses of the workman and heightens his susceptibilities to a degree incompatible with his position and surroundings, yet which at the same time ties him to, incorporates him with, these surroundings, in which he must observe the same rules and conventions as his neighbours. Hence, in the case of many, a thirst for life, for variety, for beauty, for experience, which, remaining unslaked, preys upon the vitals, and is called by the world decline, or consumption, or madness.

Others, again, succumb to the difficulties inseparable from the author's position. The equilibrium of society depends at any given moment upon a tacit agreement that the whole truth shall not be openly proclaimed. Yet in every society there exist exceptional individuals whose only task, whose mission, is to speak the whole truth. These are its poets, its authors. Unless these speak the truth they degenerate into mere sycophantic formalists. Hence the author is perpetually on the horns of a dilemma. He must choose between ignoring what he ought to proclaim—a proceeding which dulls his intellect and renders him useless—and the dangerous step of speaking out plainly, which makes him the object of such hostility as is only possible in literature. It is a hostility which has at its disposal a thousand tongues if it desires to speak, but also a thousand gags if it desires to impose silence concerning an author and his works; and in the case of a man whose very life depends upon publicity this is the greatest of all dangers, that he may be quietly and treacherously slain with the air-gun of silence.

All the fatigues, dangers, and difficulties of the author's life were necessarily doubly great in such a period as that of 1830, when, as if at the stroke of an enchanter's wand, a whole group of talented writers appeared on the scene at the same moment; when every youth with any gift of intellect or imagination felt himself drawn to the profession of literature or art; when the renown to be won in these professions seemed as glorious as did military fame in the days of Napoleon; when it was more difficult than ever before to come to the front; and when, moreover, enmity to all conventionality and to the quiet regularity of middle-class life was supposed to be an essential condition of success in art, and the ideal of the literary aspirant was to love and be beloved with a consuming passion, to produce a masterpiece, to scorn or save mankind, and die.

When we let our eyes wander over the battlefield where the unrenowned fell, we see them lying in serried rows. There are men of richly gifted, well-developed minds, like Eusèbe de Salles (born in Marseilles in 1801), count, doctor, traveller in the East, professor of Arabic, whose *Sakontala à Paris* (1833) is one of the most talented and original psychological novels of the day, but none of whose books reached a second edition, much less brought him fame, and this though he could remember a Sunday evening at Nodier's in his youth when he and Hugo, on equal footing, were the heroes of the day.—There is Régnier-Destourbet, whose novel, *Louise*, which is dedicated to Janin and perhaps owes something to him, treats a painful subject with discrimination and good taste.—There is Charles Dovalle, killed in a duel at the age of twenty, whose collection of poems, *Le Sylphe*, showed talent to which Victor Hugo paid a warm tribute after the author's death.—There is the melancholy Eugène Hugo, Victor's elder brother and faithful comrade and friend, who, equipped with a similar though inferior lyric talent to Victor's, fought at his side in the first Romantic campaign, but died insane in 1837.—There is a man of as remarkable and noble gifts as Fontaney, another of Hugo's faithful adherents. Fontaney was for a time secretary of legation at Madrid. A proud, refined, reserved man, he has told in his novel, *Adieu* (*Revue des deux Mondes*_ 1832), the story of one of the romantically sad adventures of his own life. In the life of George Sand there is an allusion to the unfortunate love affair which was the cause of his death in 1837.—There are men with a refined, delicate poetic talent, like Félix Arvers, whose name now only recalls a single beautiful sonnet, or Labenski, who is remembered by a single ode, or Ernest Fouinet, who wrote the sonnet *A deux heureux* on the margin of a leaf of the edition of Ronsard which was presented at Sainte-Beuve's suggestion to Victor Hugo by all the authors of the Romantic School, each contributing something to its poetic equipment. Though Fouinet himself is forgotten, one line of his at least:

"Pour que l'encens parfume il faut que l'encens brûle,"

should be safe from oblivion, for it conveys in a single metaphor, a single phrase, the whole

Romantic theory of poetry.—There are luckless Saint-Simonist poets like Poyat; there are satirists like Théophile Ferrière, who ridiculed the extravagances of the young Romanticists in works in the style of Gautier's *Les Jeunes-France*, and whose *Lord Chatterton* is a farcical sequel to De Vigny's drama; and, lastly, there are men like Ulric Guttinger, who is remembered only because of a poem full of enthusiastic admiration addressed to him by the youthful De Musset.

To give a somewhat more life-like impression of these stepchildren of fortune, I shall dwell a little longer on the personality and career of one or two of them, thereby also throwing additional light on the character of the age; for the character of a period often sets its most distinct stamp on the individuals whose peculiarity or extravagance prevents their attaining lasting fame.

I take Ymbert Galloix first, not because he is greater than the rest, but because he is a typical figure. The son of a Geneva schoolmaster, Ymbert displayed remarkable gifts and received an excellent education. He left his native town for Paris without money enough to keep him even for a month, irresistibly attracted by the accounts of the victories of Romanticism, determined to see the men whom he admired so enthusiastically, and if possible to take his place among them as their equal.

He soon found his way to the houses of Charles Nodier, the patriarch, Hugo, the chief, and Sainte-Beuve, the standard-bearer of the new school. Hugo has given a description of his first visit, which I shall condense:

"It was on a cold October morning in 1827 that a tall young man entered my room. He had on a white, comparatively new overcoat, and carried an old hat in his hand. He talked to me of poetry. He had a roll of paper under his arm. I noticed that he kept his feet carefully concealed under his chair. He coughed a little. Next day it rained in torrents, but the young man came back again. He stayed three hours, talking eagerly about the English poets, of whose works he knew more than I did; he specially admired the Lake School. He coughed a great deal, and again I noticed that he always kept his feet under the chair. At last I saw that his boots were in holes, and that his feet were soaking. I could not venture to say anything about it. He left without having spoken of anything but the English poets."

Galloix thus, as we see, went straight to the most famous authors of the day. His words, his verses showed that there was something in him; he was well received, he was even assisted, and his letters to Geneva betray a naïvely vain satisfaction in being able to tell what men have received him as their equal and what famous friends he has made. Yet at the same time he was a prey to melancholy. His lot had been cast by destiny in uncongenial surroundings. The great grief of his life was the seemingly fantastic, and yet real one, that he had not been born an Englishman. His mind dwelt on this till it became a kind of mania. He felt that English literature, not French, was his natural element; he read English from morning to night, and his one aim was to make enough money to be able to live in London and become a writer in the English language. When, a year after his arrival in Paris, he was found lying dead on the bed in his miserable room, dead of despair and want, there was an English grammar in his hand.

Listen to the tone of his letters. "Oh, my only friend I how unhappy are they who are born unhappy I ... I had an attack of fever last night.... Since I came here my unhappiness has taken five or six different forms, but the root of all my misery is that I was not born in England. Do not laugh at me, I beg of you; I am so unhappy. I am on terms of friendship with the most famous authors, and have had in their society, when my verses have met with approval, occasional moments of superficial pleasure; but though I can be intoxicated with these little triumphs of an evening, of a moment, my inner life is not only pure wretchedness, it is a cancer. Molten lead flows in my veins. If men could see into my soul they would pity me. England has everything—fifty authors, at least, who have led a life of adventure and whose books are full of imagination; in France there are not three. There I should have had a country whose very prejudices I could have loved, for there is so much poetry in the old English customs.... An English lady who is giving me lessons says that in two years I shall be able to write perfectly well in English."

It is a touching illusion. The poor youth who was not yet completely master of his own language, whose odes were often broken-winded, whose verses, artistically polished as they were, lacked life—dreamt of being able in a couple of years to write a foreign language brilliantly. He soon lost confidence in his powers and judged his own poetry much more harshly than it was judged by others, and much more harshly than it deserved. He withdrew into himself; would see no one, and take no interest in what was going on in the outside world. He had come from Geneva interested in everything and every one, and full of enthusiastic self-confidence. In Paris he squandered his talent in talk and argument (always a dangerous thing to do) until there was not a virgin, not an untampered-with, idea left in his head. Then he became a publisher's hack, and wrote notices of books and biographies until he was completely nauseated. By the time he died, which he did at the age of twenty-two, he had long been utterly indifferent to all general interests and devoid of belief in his own ability. He simply allowed himself to die.[1]

I pass on to men of more remarkable and sterling talent, and of them I choose three—Louis Bertrand, Petrus Borel, and Théophile Dondey. These are names which, while their owners were alive, were almost unknown, but which are now familiar to many a lover of literature in France and beyond its borders. In their lifetime the poor young authors, in the course of a very few years, found it impossible to get their works published; now (especially since the revival of interest in them due to Charles Asselineau) they are published in *éditions de luxe*; and even the frontispieces and title-pages of their first books are carefully imitated, and the books themselves are marked in sale catalogues, "valuable and rare."

Louis Bertrand, born in 1807 in that town of Dijon the praises of which he has so charmingly sung, is better known by his pseudonym of Gaspard de la Nuit. He represents more perfectly than any other Romanticist one of the main aims of the Romantic endeavour—namely, the renovation of prose style. Whilst his contemporaries were trying to take the world by storm and passionate violence, he was developing in his native town the sculptor's and the goldsmith's artistic qualities in his treatment of language. No one had such an antipathy as he to the conventional phrase, the trite expression. Before he wrote he, as it were, passed the language through a sieve, which cleansed it of all the dull, faded, worn-out words, leaving to be employed in the service of his art only those possessed of picturesque and musical value. In a poem there must always be some words which are really only there for the sake of the rhyme or rhythm; the essence of Bertrand's art is that every parasitic word, every scrap of padding, is rigidly excluded. His work belongs to a branch of literature which he himself originated and which others (Baudelaire, for example) cultivated afterwards; he wrote short descriptions, never occupying more than a page or two, now in Rembrandt's, now in Callot's, now in Velvet-Breughel's, now in Gerard Dow's, now in Salvator Rosa's manner; the best of them are as perfect as pictures by these masters.

In 1828, during the first, entirely unpolitical period of the Romantic movement, Bertrand assisted in founding a literary organ of its ideas in his native town. His contributions to *Le Provincial* attracted the attention of the famous Parisians, Chateaubriand, Nodier, and Victor Hugo; and ere long the capital had such an attraction for the young author that he was constantly finding his way there. He made his début in its literary society one Sunday evening at Charles Nodier's, where he was permitted to read a ballad aloud. In Nodier's house he made acquaintance with the whole circle. He threw himself specially on the protection of Sainte-Beuve, who became his mentor, showed him hospitality during his short stays in Paris, and was entrusted with his manuscripts. Bertrand had all the awkwardness of the provincial and the extravagances of the dilettante; but to see the fire of the small, shyly restless, black eyes was to divine the poet.

Immediately after the Revolution of July he threw himself ardently into politics, attaching himself to the extreme Opposition party. The true son of an old soldier of the Republic and the Empire, he gave vent to the warlike instinct which had hitherto slumbered in his breast in attacks upon the citizen rulers. He was only twenty-three, and a newspaper of the opposite party had treated him with peculiar contempt because of his youth. He compelled the editor of the paper to insert a reply to the offensive article, in which he writes: "I prefer your disdain to your praise. And your approbation would in any case be of little consequence after that with which Victor Hugo, Sainte-Beuve, Ferdinand Denis, and others have encouraged my literary talent. Your insults oblige me to quote the encomiums with which genius itself has deigned to honour me. Monsieur Victor Hugo writes to me: 'I read your verses aloud to my friends as I read André Chénier's, Lamartine's, or Alfred de Vigny's; it is impossible to be possessed in a higher degree than you are of the secrets of form, &c., &c.' This is how Victor Hugo writes to the man you call a clerk. It is true that I have not the honour of being descended from any noble toad-eater, and that I cannot present myself as a candidate at the elections (*i.e.* am not on the list of the most heavily assessed citizens). My father was only a captain of gendarmerie, only a patriot of 1789, a soldier of fortune who at the age of eighteen hastened to the Rhine to shed his blood there, and at the age of fifty could count thirty years of service, nine campaigns, and six wounds. It is true that he left me nothing but honour and his sword, which you, sir, would shrink from seeing drawn."

This is French journalistic style of 1832—not modest, certainly, but also not spiritless. Bertrand was one of the company of young men sympathetically alluded to by George Sand in *Horace*, who looked on Godfrey Cavaignac as their political leader, and went by the name of *les bousingots* (sailor-hats). In Bertrand himself, republican bluntness was curiously combined with the artistic ultra-refinement of the Romanticist. He never won fame. He put too much ardour into his first efforts, did not husband his strength. He overworked himself to support his mother and sister, and died in poverty in 1841 in a Paris hospital. David d'Angers, the great Romantic sculptor, who had faithfully watched by the bedside of the dying man, sent to Bertrand's home for a fine white sheet to wrap the body in, and was the solitary mourner who followed him to his grave. (See David d'Angers' touching letter on the subject of Bertrand's death in Charles Asselineau's *Mélanges tirés d'une petite bibliothèque romantique*, p. 18l, &c. -Author's footnote.) He erected a monument to him; and Sainte-Beuve and Victor Pavie published his *Gaspard de la Nuit*. In 1842 twenty copies of this book were sold with difficulty, but in 1868 the Romanticist bibliophile, Charles Asselineau, brought out an *édition de luxe*.

As an example of Bertrand's manner I give in the original the sketch entitled *Madame de Montbazon*, with its motto, taken from Saint-Simon's Memoirs:

> Madame de Montbazon était une fort belle créature qui mourut d'amour, cela pris à la lettre, l'autre siècle, pour le chevalier de la Rue qui ne l'aimait point.
>
> —*Mémoires de Saint-Simon*.

La suivante rangea sur la table de laque un vase de fleurs et les flambeaux de cire, dont les reflets moiraient de rouge et de jaune les rideaux de soie bleue au chevet du lit de la malade.

"Crois-tu, Mariette, qu'il viendra?—Oh! dormez, dormez un peu, madame!—Oui, je dormirai bientôt, pour rêver à lui toute l'éternité!"

"On entendit quelqu'un monter l'escalier: "Ah! si c'était lui!" murmura la mourante, en souriant, le papillon du tombeau déjà sur les lèvres.

C'était un petit page qui apportait de la part de la reine, à madame la duchesse, des confitures, des biscuits et des elixirs, sur un plateau d'argent.

"Ah! il ne vient pas," dit-elle d'une voix défaillante; "il ne viendra pas! Mariette, donne-moi une de ces fleurs, que je la respire et la baise pour l'amour de lui!"

Alors Madame de Montbazon, fermant les yeux, demeura immobile. Elle était morte d'amour, rendant son âme dans le parfum d'une jacinthe.

It often seems as if the place of those who disappear too early from the field of literature were, a little sooner or a little later, filled by others. But, strictly speaking, no individual ever exactly fills another's place. The pen which fell from Louis Bertrand's hand was, undoubtedly, seized by Théophile Gautier; and Gautier's far more comprehensive talent caused Bertrand's to be forgotten; but no connoisseur can fail to see that in Bertrand's writing there is an exquisite, a marvellously touching quality, to the possession of which Gautier with his colder plastic gift never attained.

Frequent mention has already been made of Petrus Borel, whose simple home was long the headquarters of Victor Hugo's young friends. Borel was both artist and author; he painted in Dévéria's studio and wrote defiant poems under the *nom de plume* of "Le Lycanthrope." He inspired the others with great respect. In appearance he resembled a Spaniard or Arab of the fifteenth century; and when his comrades returned from the theatre after seeing Firmin (an actor accustomed to the rôles in Delavigne's and Scribe's plays) play Hernani, they always lamented that the part of that ideal bandit could not be given to Petrus. He would have swooped down on the stage like a falcon; and how magnificent he would have looked in the red head-covering and the leather jerkin with the green sleeves. Naturally he would, for he and such as he were the spiritual prototypes of Hernani.

Rapsodies, Borel's volume of poems, is a very youthful and immature work; it contains some really fine poetry mixed up with childish protests and imprecations. One thing it proves, that no prouder heart than its author's beat in the whole Romantic group. His verses breathe the despair engendered by poverty, the loneliness, the ardent love of liberty and consuming thirst for justice, which fill the poet's heart. Read such a verse as the following, taken from the poem "Désespoir":

"Comme une louve ayant fait chasse vaine,
Grinçant les dents, s'en va par le chemin;
Je vais, hagard, tout chargé de ma peine,
Seul avec moi, nulle main dans ma main;
Pas une voix qui me dise: À demain."

and you have the reality of the emotional life which Dumas put on the stage in *Antony*. Even the get-up of the book is significant. The frontispiece represents Borel himself sitting at his table with bared neck and arms, a Phrygian cap on his head, and in his hands a broad-bladed dagger, at which he is gazing, deep in thought. The preface gives us a vivid impression of the tone prevailing in the republican group of young Romanticists in 1832. In it Borel writes:

"I answer the question before it is asked, and say frankly: Yes, I am a Republican! Ask the Duke of Orleans (the King) if he remembers the voice that pursued him on the 9th of August, when he was on his way to take the oath to the ex-Chamber, shouting into his face: Liberté et Republique! while the deceived populace was cheering loudly?... But if I speak of Republic it is only because this word represents to me the greatest possible degree of independence which society and civilisation permit. I am a Republican because I cannot be a Caribbean. I require an immense amount of liberty ... and a man with a lot like mine, a man irritated by numberless evils, would deserve only approbation if he dreamed of absolute equality, if he demanded an agrarian law.... To those who say that there is something offensively vulgar about the book I reply that its author is certainly not the King's bedmaker. Is he not, nevertheless, on the level of an age in which the country is governed by stupid bankers and by a monarch whose motto is: 'Dieu soit loué et mes boutiques aussi?'"

It is hardly necessary to mention that rapid promotion did not come the way of a young man who wrote in this style. Borel lived in great poverty; he knew what starvation meant, and more than once, without a roof to cover his head, was driven to seek shelter for the night in some half-finished building. His youthful hatred of wrong was also detrimental to him as an author. In his two-volume novel, *Madame Putiphar*, the character of the heroine, Madame Pompadour, is distorted by the writer's republican indignation and aversion. The dissolute, art-loving Muse of the rococo period, who had a frivolous little leaning to free thought, who patronised the Encyclopedists, and took lessons in etching from Boucher, is transformed into a Megæra, who throws herself at the head of a strange man, and when he refuses to have anything to do with her, punishes him for his indifference with imprisonment in an underground cell of the Bastille. Towards the end the book improves. The storming of the Bastille, a subject which suited Borel's pen, is described in a vivid, fiery style which reeks of gunpowder.

His third book, *Champavert, Contes immoraux*, was published in 1833. It attracted no attention, and he made nothing by it—an injustice of fate which is not altogether incomprehensible, seeing that several of the stories are written in their author's earliest, unpleasantly ferocious style. But in the best of them the indignation is mastered, is treated artistically, as lava is treated by the cameo-cutter. All the tales deal with horrors, with deeds which, precisely because they are so frightful and unmentionable, are possible, since no criminal escapes punishment so easily as he who has committed a crime in which no one will believe. And they are such horrors as fiction seldom deals with, since one of the author's main aims generally is to produce a saleable book, if

possible one suited for reading aloud in the family circle.

The scene of the tale entitled *Dina, la belle Juive*, is laid in Lyons, in 1661. A manly, unprejudiced young nobleman has fallen in love with a beautiful young Jewess, and goes off to his country home to try and obtain his father's consent to their marriage. The father curses his son, and, in his fury, actually tries to shoot him, but misses him. One day, during Aymar's absence, Dina takes a walk by the banks of the Saône. Seized with a desire to go on the river, she hails a boat, steps on board, and lies down to dream under the awning as the boat glides down the stream. The boatman robs the beautiful Jewess of her rings and other ornaments, ties her arms, gags her, violates her, throws her into the river, and after the gag slips out of her mouth plunges his spear into her body every time it comes to the surface. Then he fishes up the corpse, and takes it to the *hôtel de ville* to claim the two ducats which are given as a reward to any one who recovers a body from the river. The magistrate asks:

> "—Le cadavre a-t-il été reconnu?
>
> —Oui, messire, c'est une jeune fille, nommée Dina, enfant d'un nommé Israël Judas, un lapidaire.
>
> —Une juive?
>
> —Oui, messire, une hérétique, une huguenotte ... une juive....
>
> —Une juive!... Tu vas pêcher des juifs, marsoufle! et tu as le front, après cela, de venir demander récompense? Holà! valet! Holà! Martin! holà! Lefabre! mettez-moi ce butor à la porte! ce paltoquet!"

The scenes in the Jewish quarter and the scene in the boat are unsurpassable in their cruel realism. Borel's picture of Jewish life in the Middle Ages is equal to anything Heine has given us.

In 1846 Théophile Gautier, with the assistance of that influential lady, Madame de Girardin, brought about a temporary improvement in Borel's circumstances. They procured him the post of Colonial Inspector in the interior of Algiers, near Mostaganem. Though it was a wretched little appointment, it exactly suited a man like Borel, with his were-wolfish shrinking from contact with human beings; but he was soon dismissed from it, his strong sense of justice having led him, unfortunately for himself, to accuse a superior official of defrauding the government. He never saw France again; he died in Africa, of sunstroke, some say; according to others, of starvation.

Mérimée, as we have already observed, took up Borel's special department of literature, and in his admirable short stories treated revolting subjects with a surer hand. But in Mérimée's writing the irony of the man of the world and the elegance of the courtier stifled the passion which was Petrus Borel's strong point. In Mérimée's works we find some of the challenges which Borel flung in the face of society paraphrased in language which made them fit to lie on a drawing-room table. There was no inheritor of the fire which burned in the inmost sanctuary of Petrus Borel's soul.[2]

The last of these early paralysed authors whom I shall name is Théophile Dondey, better known as Philothée O'Neddy.

O'Neddy, born in 1811, made his literary début in 1833 with a volume of poems entitled *Feu et Flamme*, which the public, revelling at the moment in a superabundance of excellent poetry, would have nothing to say to. The author, who was extremely poor, and was obliged, for the sake of supporting his mother, to attend to the duties of a small Civil Service appointment, lost courage, and never published another poem. Of his book, which he had brought out at his own expense, hardly a copy was sold. He withdrew like some wounded animal into its lair. When Gautier met him, a grey-haired man, thirty years later, and greeted him with the question: "When is the next collection of poems to appear?" Old O'Neddy answered, with a sigh: "Oh! quand il n'y aura pas de bourgeois!" It might have been supposed that his powers of production were exhausted. After his death, however, whole reams of beautiful lyric poetry were found among his papers. The market value of his first book is now 300 francs, which is certainly more than its author earned by all that he wrote.

Théophile Dondey's early poems are quite as immature and as defiant as Borel's. In the preface to *Feu et Flamme* he begs his greater comrades-in-arms to receive him into their fellowship; for, he writes, "like you I despise with all my soul the social order and the political order which is its excrement (!); like you I scoff at the priority of age in literature and in the Academy; like you I am left incredulous and cold by the magniloquence and the tinsel of the religions of the world; like you I am kindled to pious emotion only by poetry, the twin sister of God." He is restless, excited, overstrained; sometimes he is ill, sometimes haunted by the thought of suicide; and everything is expressed in verses chiselled by the hand of a master. One of the outbursts in the suicidal strain is very original. By upholding the doctrine of the Trinity (in which he does not believe) the poet makes of Christ's sacrificial death the model suicide:

> "Va, que la mort soit ton refuge!
> À l'exemple du Rédempteur,
> Ose à la fois être le juge,
> La victime et l'exécuteur."[3]

Those of O'Neddy's poems which do not deal with his own personality are all devoted to the cause of free thought and the coming republic. But by far the greater number are profoundly personal, about seven-eighths being love poems. A distinguished lady honoured him, the

nameless, poor plebeian, with her love, and the poems overflow with melancholy rapture and idolisation of the beloved; but, feeling, and knowing himself to be, ill, O'Neddy is certain that happiness is not for him, and involuntarily couples the thought of love with the thought of death.

The poetic form which as a youth he sought and found, was one which satisfied himself, because it was an exactly suitable vehicle for his feelings and thoughts; but he did not, like more fortunate poets, succeed in imparting transparency and attractiveness to this form. Therefore the reading public turned its back on him. He felt himself ever more and more forgotten by life, doomed to die with unused powers; again and again in his posthumous poems he calls himself a living corpse. Here, for example, is one of his sonnets:

"Un montagnard avait une excellente épée
Qu'il laissait se rouiller dans un coin obscur.
Un jour elle lui dit:—Que ce repos m'est dur!
Guerrier, si tu voulais!... Ma lame est bien trempée.

Dans tes rudes combats, sur la côte escarpée
Elle vaudrait, au bout de ton bras ferme et sûr,
Les autres espadons qui brillent sous ce mur.
Pourquoi seule entre tous est-elle inoccupée?—

Je suis comme ce glaive et je dis au destin:
Pourquoi seul de mon type ai-je un sort clandestin?
Ignores-tu quelle est la trempe de mon âme?

Elle pourrait jeter de glorieux reflets,
Si ta droite au soleil faisait jouer sa lame!
Elle est d'un noble acier!... Destin, si tu voulais!..."

But destiny, according to its custom and nature, was inexorable. Like the shipwrecked man clinging to his rock, waiting for a ship to appear on the horizon and come to his rescue, O'Neddy waited—waited for years; but the ship of destiny sailed past and left him standing alone on his rock. When the lady who had loved him deserted him he gave up all hope. His poetry meanwhile had been gradually assuming a more serious and philosophic cast. In one poem, reversing the Cartesian axiom, he declares: "I suffer, therefore I am." And many other beautiful poems are pessimistic in a degree which is uncommon in Romantic lyric verse. Read, for instance, the following lines:

"Or, qu'est-ce que le Vrai? Le Vrai, c'est le malheur;
Il souffle, et l'heur vaincu s'éteint, vaine apparence:
Ses pourvoyeurs constants, le désir, l'espérance,
Sous leur flamme nous font mûrir pour la douleur.

Le Vrai, c'est l'incertain; le Vrai, c'est l'ignorance;
C'est le tâtonnement dans l'ombre et dans l'erreur;
C'est un concert de fête avec un fond d'horreur;
C'est le neutre, l'oubli, le froid, l'indifférence."

O'Neddy tried criticism, but at an unpropitious moment. He began to praise Hugo as a dramatist just when, in the Forties, the great man's popularity was on the wane. Its freshness of feeling lends beauty to his passionately enthusiastic defence of *Les Burgraves*. In his animadversions on the attitude of Hugo's critics to Ponsard's *Lucrèce*, O'Neddy was not unjust to Ponsard, and showed a spirit of noble reverence. But the next time he wrote in defence of Hugo the editorship of the *Patrie* was in other hands, and his article was returned to him. He took this rebuff to heart and gave up journalism, never again writing a newspaper article. He withdrew into his own inner world, feeling like Don Quixote after his return home, or Molière's Misanthrope when he wearily seeks solitude. Yet he writes in his last poem that, unbeliever in immortality though he may be, if ever his heroes should ride victoriously over his forgotten grave, his heart will beat again, in time with their horses' gallop:

"Et qui tendra l'oreille ouïra mon fier cœur
Bondir à l'unison du fier galop vainqueur."

The "heroes" for whom he had the profoundest admiration were, amongst the men of action, Garibaldi, amongst the poets, Victor Hugo, and amongst prose authors, Michelet and Quinet, and, at a later period, Renan.

O'Neddy's later life was sad. After losing his lady-love he lost his mother. He was long ill, and in the end paralysed. Only one pleasure was reserved for his old age, that of seeing himself warmly appreciated by Théophile Gautier in an article which now forms part of the latter's *Histoire du Romantisme*. He did not die till 1875, when he had been silent as a poet for forty-two years.

Whilst we are occupied in seeking out these victims of the literary battle and victory, we seem all the time to hear a funeral march played on muffled drums. And when we have seen how numerous they are, we involuntarily regard such a book as De Vigny's *Stello* and such a drama as his *Chatterton* in a more favourable light. The idea of the suffering poet or artist was an ever-present one at that period; and yet many were allowed to perish who deserved a better fate. It would seem that at all times, in every age, there is a difficulty in finding out the deserving, suffering men of talent.

The historian whose aim is, not to touch his readers, but to throw light upon his subject, gives these background figures a momentary prominence because the characteristics of the age are no less legibly and markedly displayed in their works than in those of its geniuses. The geniuses show us Romanticism in its health and strength; its pathology is to be studied in the works and lives of these unfortunates, who are so enthusiastically devoted to a foreign language that they neglect the cultivation of their own, or who blaze up in a sudden, ephemeral literary activity, or who make a desperate assault on fame only to be discouraged for ever by their first repulse, or who are mortally wounded by the indifference of the public, or who convulsively strain their powers until they suddenly give way. These men are as legitimate offspring of the Romanticism of 1830 as any of the others. They are its genuine *enfants perdus*.

---

[1] Ymbert Galloix's *Poésies Posthumes* were published in Geneva in 1834. By some mistake —for plagiarism is out of the question—Sainte-Beuve's poem "Suicide" is included in the collection.

[2] See Borel: *Champavert* (1833); *Rapsodies* (Bruxelles, 1838); *Madame Putiphar* (Paris, 1878). Jules Claretie: *Petrus Borel, le Lycanthrope* (1865).

[3] We feel how genuinely Romantic, how profoundly characteristic of the period, such a little inspiration as this is, when we come upon the very same thought in one of George Sand's *Lettres d'un Voyageur* (January, 1835): "Jésus, en souffrant le martyre, a donné un grand exemple de suicide." It is curious that the idea never occurred to Novalis.

XXXV

CONCLUSION

Such was this school, such were its victors and its vanquished, such its artistic and its social enthusiasts. Thus it arose; thus, with all this wealth of genius and talent, it grew to be great; thus it dissolved as a school to continue its life in the intellectual life of widely different individuals who, even when in appearance farthest from their starting-point, nevertheless retained the essential qualities of the school—for we all keep long upon our shoulders the mark of the first banner we bore. The Romantic School was broken up and scattered; but before its extinction, Romanticism had revitalised style in almost every branch of literature, had brought hitherto undreamt of subjects within the range of art, had allowed itself to be fertilised by all the social and religious ideas of the day, had re-created lyric poetry, the drama, fiction, and criticism, had insinuated itself as a fertilising power into the science of history, as an inspiring power into politics.

To have attempted to write a complete history of the School would have been, in my case, to have attempted an impossibility. Here, as elsewhere in this work, I have traced only the main currents. I have dwelt long and in detail on the principal personages instead of introducing numerous secondary personages who, in spite of their real importance and interest, would have stood in the way of the condensation which has been my aim; and I have even followed the careers of one or two of these principal personages beyond the limit of the period, seeing that it was not until after 1848 that they displayed their originality in its entirety.

Many remarkable personalities I have merely sketched—such as Alexandre Dumas, who may well be called the Ariosto of French Romanticism, and De Vigny, who has described himself in the saying: "Honour is the poetry of duty." Others I have only been able to name—such as Jules Janin, "the prince of feuilletonists," whose novel, *L'Âne mort et la Femme guillotine*, is such a remarkable forerunner of the naturalism of a later period; and Nodier's successor, Gérard de Nerval, the Euphorion of Romanticism, whose female characters are ethereally delicate, whose preternatural fantasies have an oriental marvellousness, and whose sonnets, written when he was insane, are amongst the cleverest and most beautiful which the period has produced. Many men of talent of the second and third rank I have been obliged to leave altogether unnoticed—such as Antony Deschamps, who occupies much the same place in literature as Leopold Robert does in art; and Victor Hugo's worshipper, Auguste Vacquerie, who is interesting because of his blind belief in Romanticism and his aplomb, and whose drama *Tragabaldas* is one of the boldest exploits of French Romantic volatility. I have only been able, and have only desired, as a rule, to present the great typical figures in relief. The great woman of the period, George Sand, must stand alone, as a representative of its women, interesting though it would have been to describe several of the others—clever Madame de Girardin, melancholy Madame Desbordes-Valmore, or the two emancipated authoresses, the Comtesse d'Agoult and Madame Allart. Sainte-Beuve is the solitary representative of criticism; both Philarète Chasles and Jules Janin I have been obliged to ignore; and Balzac alone represents realism in fiction, no mention being made of less gifted and profound observers of life, like Alphonse Karr or Charles de Bernard. The authors of the generation of 1830 naturally divide themselves into two groups, a small group which wrote for the whole world, and a larger, which wrote for France alone; it is only the former which I have endeavoured to place distinctly before my readers.

We have seen how the character of the two Restoration monarchies, the Legitimist and the popular, formed the historic background from which Romanticism projected itself, and without which it cannot be understood; and we have also observed that the movement had numerous foreign forerunners and a not inconsiderable period of preparation in France itself. The

Restoration starts Romanticism; the *Juste-milieu* government goads it on; the study of Scott and Byron, Goethe and Hoffmann, enriches it; at the hands of André Chénier it receives its lyrical consecration; the controversies in the *Globe* develop its critical powers. The writings of Charles Nodier, which are romantic in the general, European, sense of the word, prepare the way for the great French Romanticists. Then Victor Hugo assumes the leadership of the movement, proves himself capable of the task he has undertaken, and hastens from victory to victory. Presently he and De Vigny are named in the same breath with Lamartine as lyric poets; then Hugo outshines all the rest. Both Sainte-Beuve and Théophile Gautier possess a lyrical vein, but as a lyric poet, Alfred de Musset supplants all the other younger men in the favour of the reading public, in time supplants even Hugo himself, and is long the idol of youth.

Romanticism had at first a historical tendency; De Vigny, Victor Hugo, Balzac, Mérimée, endeavoured to give France the historical novel of which England was so proud; Vitet, Mérimée, Alexandre Dumas, De Vigny, Hugo, tried to create a historical drama which should take the place of tragedy. But the historical novel soon made way for the modern novel in its various forms, as written by George Sand, Beyle, and Balzac; and the historical drama also soon lost favour; for it was, generally speaking, either uninterestingly dry, as in the case of Vitet's and Mérimée's plays, or exaggeratedly lyrical, as in Hugo's. The dramatic authors had, as a rule, most success on the stage after the first passion of their youth had raged itself out. There came a time in the Forties when there existed, not only an *école de bon sens* outside of the Romantic School, but a phase of *bon sens* in the lives of the authors within the Romantic circle. It was during this period that Alfred de Musset wrote his short plays and George Sand her peaceful novels and peasant stories. Whilst Hugo was steadily increasing in power as a lyric poet, Gautier was leading Romanticism in the direction of plastic art. Balzac developed it in the direction of physiology; Beyle, in the direction of national, or comparative, psychology; Mérimée, in the historical direction; Sainte-Beuve, in that of naturalistic criticism. In every one of these domains the generation of 1830 has produced imperishable works.

The French Romantic School may therefore, without exaggeration, be called the greatest literary school of the nineteenth century.

THE END

any way with an electronic work by people who agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement. There are a few things that you can do with most Project Gutenberg™ electronic works even without complying with the full terms of this agreement. See paragraph 1.C below. There are a lot of things you can do with Project Gutenberg™ electronic works if you follow the terms of this agreement and help preserve free future access to Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. See paragraph 1.E below.

1.C. The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation (“the Foundation” or PGLAF), owns a compilation copyright in the collection of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. Nearly all the individual works in the collection are in the public domain in the United States. If an individual work is unprotected by copyright law in the United States and you are located in the United States, we do not claim a right to prevent you from copying, distributing, performing, displaying or creating derivative works based on the work as long as all references to Project Gutenberg are removed. Of course, we hope that you will support the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting free access to electronic works by freely sharing Project Gutenberg™ works in compliance with the terms of this agreement for keeping the Project Gutenberg™ name associated with the work. You can easily comply with the terms of this agreement by keeping this work in the same format with its attached full Project Gutenberg™ License when you share it without charge with others.

1.D. The copyright laws of the place where you are located also govern what you can do with this work. Copyright laws in most countries are in a constant state of change. If you are outside the United States, check the laws of your country in addition to the terms of this agreement before downloading, copying, displaying, performing, distributing or creating derivative works based on this work or any other Project Gutenberg™ work. The Foundation makes no representations concerning the copyright status of any work in any country other than the United States.

1.E. Unless you have removed all references to Project Gutenberg:

1.E.1. The following sentence, with active links to, or other immediate access to, the full Project Gutenberg™ License must appear prominently whenever any copy of a Project Gutenberg™ work (any work on which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” appears, or with which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” is associated) is accessed, displayed, performed, viewed, copied or distributed:

> This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this eBook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you will have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

1.E.2. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is derived from texts not protected by U.S. copyright law (does not contain a notice indicating that it is posted with permission of the copyright holder), the work can be copied and distributed to anyone in the United States without paying any fees or charges. If you are redistributing or providing access to a work with the phrase “Project Gutenberg” associated with or appearing on the work, you must comply either with the requirements of paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 or obtain permission for the use of the work and the Project Gutenberg™ trademark as set forth in paragraphs 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.3. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is posted with the permission of the copyright holder, your use and distribution must comply with both paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 and any additional terms imposed by the copyright holder. Additional terms will be linked to the Project Gutenberg™ License for all works posted with the permission of the copyright holder found at the beginning of this work.

1.E.4. Do not unlink or detach or remove the full Project Gutenberg™ License terms from this work, or any files containing a part of this work or any other work associated with Project Gutenberg™.

1.E.5. Do not copy, display, perform, distribute or redistribute this electronic work, or any part of this electronic work, without prominently displaying the sentence set forth in paragraph 1.E.1 with active links or immediate access to the full terms of the Project Gutenberg™ License.

1.E.6. You may convert to and distribute this work in any binary, compressed, marked up, nonproprietary or proprietary form, including any word processing or hypertext form. However, if you provide access to or distribute copies of a Project Gutenberg™ work in a format other than “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other format used in the official version posted on the official Project Gutenberg™ website (www.gutenberg.org), you must, at no additional cost, fee or expense to the user, provide a copy, a means of exporting a copy, or a means of obtaining a copy upon request, of the work in its original “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other form. Any alternate format must include the full Project Gutenberg™ License as specified in paragraph 1.E.1.

1.E.7. Do not charge a fee for access to, viewing, displaying, performing, copying or distributing any Project Gutenberg™ works unless you comply with paragraph 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.8. You may charge a reasonable fee for copies of or providing access to or distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works provided that:

- You pay a royalty fee of 20% of the gross profits you derive from the use of Project Gutenberg™ works calculated using the method you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. The fee is owed to the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, but he has agreed to donate royalties under this paragraph to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation. Royalty payments must be paid within 60 days following each date on which you prepare (or are legally required to prepare) your periodic tax returns. Royalty payments should be clearly marked as such and sent to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation at the address specified in Section 4, “Information about donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation.”

- You provide a full refund of any money paid by a user who notifies you in writing (or by e-mail) within 30 days of receipt that s/he does not agree to the terms of the full Project Gutenberg™ License. You must require such a user to return or destroy all copies of the works possessed in a physical medium and discontinue all use of and all access to other copies of Project Gutenberg™ works.

- You provide, in accordance with paragraph 1.F.3, a full refund of any money paid for a work or a replacement copy, if a defect in the electronic work is discovered and reported to you within 90 days of receipt of the work.

- You comply with all other terms of this agreement for free distribution of Project Gutenberg™ works.

1.E.9. If you wish to charge a fee or distribute a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work or group of works on different terms than are set forth in this agreement, you must obtain permission in writing from the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the manager of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark. Contact the Foundation as set forth in Section 3 below.

1.F.

1.F.1. Project Gutenberg volunteers and employees expend considerable effort to identify, do copyright research on, transcribe and proofread works not protected by U.S. copyright law in creating the Project Gutenberg™ collection. Despite these efforts, Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, and the medium on which they may be stored, may contain “Defects,” such as, but not limited to, incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

1.F.2. LIMITED WARRANTY, DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES - Except for the “Right of Replacement or Refund” described in paragraph 1.F.3, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, and any other party distributing a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work under this agreement, disclaim all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees. YOU AGREE THAT YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE, STRICT LIABILITY, BREACH OF WARRANTY OR BREACH OF CONTRACT EXCEPT THOSE PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH 1.F.3. YOU AGREE THAT THE FOUNDATION, THE TRADEMARK OWNER, AND ANY DISTRIBUTOR UNDER THIS AGREEMENT WILL NOT BE LIABLE TO YOU FOR ACTUAL, DIRECT, INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGE.

1.F.3. LIMITED RIGHT OF REPLACEMENT OR REFUND - If you discover a defect in this electronic work within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending a written explanation to the person you received the work from. If you received the work on a physical medium, you must return the medium with your written explanation. The person or entity that provided you with the defective work may elect to provide a replacement copy in lieu of a refund. If you received the work electronically, the person or entity providing it to you may choose to give you a second opportunity to receive the work electronically in lieu of a refund. If the second copy is also defective, you may demand a refund in writing without further opportunities to fix the problem.

1.F.4. Except for the limited right of replacement or refund set forth in paragraph 1.F.3, this work is provided to you ‘AS-IS’, WITH NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR ANY PURPOSE.

1.F.5. Some states do not allow disclaimers of certain implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of certain types of damages. If any disclaimer or limitation set forth in this agreement violates the law of the state applicable to this agreement, the agreement shall be

interpreted to make the maximum disclaimer or limitation permitted by the applicable state law. The invalidity or unenforceability of any provision of this agreement shall not void the remaining provisions.

1.F.6. INDEMNITY - You agree to indemnify and hold the Foundation, the trademark owner, any agent or employee of the Foundation, anyone providing copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in accordance with this agreement, and any volunteers associated with the production, promotion and distribution of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, harmless from all liability, costs and expenses, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following which you do or cause to occur: (a) distribution of this or any Project Gutenberg™ work, (b) alteration, modification, or additions or deletions to any Project Gutenberg™ work, and (c) any Defect you cause.

Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg™

Project Gutenberg™ is synonymous with the free distribution of electronic works in formats readable by the widest variety of computers including obsolete, old, middle-aged and new computers. It exists because of the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donations from people in all walks of life.

Volunteers and financial support to provide volunteers with the assistance they need are critical to reaching Project Gutenberg™'s goals and ensuring that the Project Gutenberg™ collection will remain freely available for generations to come. In 2001, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation was created to provide a secure and permanent future for Project Gutenberg™ and future generations. To learn more about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and how your efforts and donations can help, see Sections 3 and 4 and the Foundation information page at www.gutenberg.org.

Section 3. Information about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation is a non-profit 501(c)(3) educational corporation organized under the laws of the state of Mississippi and granted tax exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service. The Foundation's EIN or federal tax identification number is 64-6221541. Contributions to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by U.S. federal laws and your state's laws.

The Foundation's business office is located at 809 North 1500 West, Salt Lake City, UT 84116, (801) 596-1887. Email contact links and up to date contact information can be found at the Foundation's website and official page at www.gutenberg.org/contact

Section 4. Information about Donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

Project Gutenberg™ depends upon and cannot survive without widespread public support and donations to carry out its mission of increasing the number of public domain and licensed works that can be freely distributed in machine-readable form accessible by the widest array of equipment including outdated equipment. Many small donations ($1 to $5,000) are particularly important to maintaining tax exempt status with the IRS.

The Foundation is committed to complying with the laws regulating charities and charitable donations in all 50 states of the United States. Compliance requirements are not uniform and it takes a considerable effort, much paperwork and many fees to meet and keep up with these requirements. We do not solicit donations in locations where we have not received written confirmation of compliance. To SEND DONATIONS or determine the status of compliance for any particular state visit www.gutenberg.org/donate.

While we cannot and do not solicit contributions from states where we have not met the solicitation requirements, we know of no prohibition against accepting unsolicited donations from donors in such states who approach us with offers to donate.

International donations are gratefully accepted, but we cannot make any statements concerning tax treatment of donations received from outside the United States. U.S. laws alone swamp our small staff.

Please check the Project Gutenberg web pages for current donation methods and addresses. Donations are accepted in a number of other ways including checks, online payments and credit card donations. To donate, please visit: www.gutenberg.org/donate

Section 5. General Information About Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

Professor Michael S. Hart was the originator of the Project Gutenberg™ concept of a library of electronic works that could be freely shared with anyone. For forty years, he produced and distributed Project Gutenberg™ eBooks with only a loose network of volunteer support.