

CHAPTER V.

Poetry cannot grow less. Why? Because it cannot grow greater.

These words, so often used, even by the lettered, "decline," "revival," show to what an extent the essence of art is ignored. Superficial intellects, easily becoming pedantic, take for revival and decline some effects of juxtaposition, some optical mirages, some exigencies of language, some ebb and flow of ideas, all the vast movement of creation and thought, the result of which is universal art. This movement is the very work of the infinite passing through the human brain.

Phenomena are only seen from the culminating point; and seen from the culminating point, poetry is immovable. There is neither rise nor decline in art. Human genius is always at its full; all the rain of heaven adds not a drop of water to the ocean. A tide is an illusion; water falls on one shore only to rise on another. You take oscillations for diminutions. To say, "There will be no more poets," is to say, "There will be no more ebbing."

Poetry is element. It is irreducible, incorruptible, and refractory. Like the sea, it says each time all it has to say; then it re-begins with a tranquil majesty, and with the inexhaustible variety which belongs only to unity. This diversity in what seems monotonous is the marvel of immensity.

Wave upon wave, billow after billow, foam behind foam, movement and again movement: the Iliad is moving away, the Romancero comes; the Bible sinks, the Koran surges up; after the aquilon Pindar comes the hurricane Dante. Does everlasting poetry repeat itself? No. It is the same and it is different. Same breath, another sound.

Do you take the Cid for an imitation of Ajax? Do you take Charlemagne for a plagiarist of Agamemnon? "There is nothing new under the sun." "Your novelty is the repetition of the old," etc. Oh, the strange process of criticism! Then art is but a series of counterfeits! Thersites has a thief, Falstaff. Orestes has an imitator, Hamlet. The Hippogriff is the jay of Pegasus. All these poets! A crew of cheats! They pillage each other, *voilà tout!* Inspiration and swindling compounded. Cervantes plunders Apuleius; Alcestes cheats Timon of Athens. The Smynthean wood is the forest of Bondy. Out of which pocket comes the hand of Shakespeare? Out of the pocket of Æschylus.

No! neither decline, nor revival, nor plagiarist, nor repetition, nor imitation: identity of heart, difference of mind,—that is all. Each great artist (we have said so already) appropriates; stamps art anew after his own image. Hamlet is Orestes

after the effigy of Shakespeare. Figaro is Scapin, with the effigy of Beaumarchais. Grangousier is Silenus, after the effigy of Rabelais.

Everything re-begins with the new poet, and at the same time nothing is interrupted. Each new genius is abyss, yet there is tradition. Tradition from abyss to abyss,—such is, in art as in the firmament, the mystery; and men of genius communicate by their effluvia, like the stars. What have they in common? Nothing,—everything.

From that pit that is called Ezekiel to that precipice that is called Juvenal, there is no solution of continuity for the thinker. Lean over this anathema, or over that satire, and the same vertigo is whirling around both.

The Apocalypse reverberates on the polar sea of ice, and you have that aurora borealis, the Niebelungen. The Edda replies to the Vedas.

Hence this, our starting-point, to which we are returning: art is not perfectible.

No possible decline for poetry, no possible improvement. We lose our time when we say, "Nescio quid majus nascitur Iliade." Art is subject neither to diminution nor enlarging. Art has its seasons, its clouds, its eclipses, even its stains, which are splendours, perhaps its interpositions of sudden opacity for which it is not responsible; but at the end it is always with the same intensity that it brings light into the human soul. It remains the same furnace giving the same brilliancy. Homer does not grow cold.

Let us insist, moreover, on this, inasmuch as the emulation of minds is the life of the beautiful, O poets, the first rank is ever free. Let us remove everything which may disconcert daring minds and break their wings: art is a species of valour. To deny that men of genius yet to come may be peers with men of genius of the past would be to deny the ever-working power of God.

Yes, and often do we return, and shall return again, to this necessary encouragement. Emulation is almost creation. Yes, those men of genius that cannot be surpassed may be equalled.

How?

By being different.

BOOK IV.

THE ANCIENT SHAKESPEARE.

CHAPTER I.

Æschylus is the ancient Shakespeare. Let us return to Æschylus. He is the grandsire of the stage.

This book would be incomplete if Æschylus had not his separate place in it.

A man whom we do not know how to class in his own century, so little does he belong to it, being at the same time so much behind it and so much in advance of it, the Marquis de Mirabeau, that queer customer as a philanthropist, but a very rare thinker after all, had a library, in the two comers of which he had had carved a dog and a she-goat, in remembrance of Socrates, who swore by the dog, and of Zeno, who swore by the goat. His library presented this peculiarity: on one side he had Hesiod, Sophocles, Euripides, Plato, Herodotus, Thucydides, Pindar, Theocritus, Anacreon, Theophrastus, Demosthenes, Plutarch, Cicero Titus Livius, Seneca, Persius, Lucan, Terence, Horace, Ovid, Propertius, Tibullus, Virgil, and underneath could be read, engraved in letters of gold, "Amo;" on the other side, he had Æschylus alone, and underneath, this word, "Timeo."

Æschylus, in reality, is formidable. He cannot be approached without trembling. He has magnitude and mystery. Barbarous, extravagant, emphatic, antithetical, bombastic, absurd,—such is the judgment passed on him by the official rhetoric of the present day. This rhetoric will be changed. Æschylus is one of those men whom superficial criticism scoffs at or disdains, but whom the true critic approaches with a sort of sacred fear. The dread of genius is the first step toward taste.

In the true critic there is always a poet, even when in a latent state.

Whoever does not comprehend Æschylus is irremediably an ordinary mind. Intellects may be tried on Æschylus.

The Drama is a strange form of art. Its diameter measures from the "Seven against Thebes" to the "Philosopher Without Knowing it," and from Brid'oison to Œdipus. Thyestes forms part of it, Turcaret also. If you wish to define it, put into your definition Electra and Marton.

The drama is disconcerting. It baffles the weak. This comes from its ubiquity. The drama has every horizon. You may then imagine its capacity. The epic poem has been blended in the drama, and the result is this marvellous literary novelty, which is at the same time a social power,—the romance.

Bronze, amalgamation of the epic, lyric, and dramatic,—such is the romance. "Don Quixote" is Iliad, ode, and comedy.

Such is the expansion possible to the drama.

The drama is the largest recipient of art. God and Satan are there; witness Job.

To look at art in the absolute point of view, the characteristic of the epic poem is grandeur; the characteristic of the drama is immensity. The immense differs from the great in this, that it excludes, if it chooses, dimension; that "it is beyond measure," as the common saying is; and that it can, without losing beauty, lose proportion. It is harmonious as is the Milky Way. It is by this characteristic of immensity that the drama commences, four thousand years ago, in Job, whom we have just named again, and two thousand two hundred years ago, in Æschylus; it is by this characteristic that it continues in Shakespeare. What personages does Æschylus take? Volcanoes,—one of his lost tragedies is called "Etna;" then the mountains,—Caucasus, with Prometheus; then the sea,—the Ocean on its dragon, and the waves, the Oceanides; then the vast East,—the Persians; then the bottomless darkness,—the Eumenides. Æschylus proves the man by the giant. In Shakespeare the drama approaches nearer to humanity, but remains colossal. Macbeth seems a polar Atrides. You see that the drama opens Nature, then opens the soul; there is no limit to this horizon. The drama is life; and life is everything. The epic poem can be only great; the drama must necessarily be immense.

This immensity, it is Æschylus throughout, and Shakespeare throughout.

The immense, in Æschylus, is a will. It is also a temperament. Æschylus invents the buskin which makes the man taller, and the mask which enlarges the voice. His metaphors are enormous. He calls Xerxes "the man with the dragon eyes." The sea, which is a plain for so many poets, is for Æschylus "a forest,"—ἄλος. These magnifying figures, peculiar to the highest poets, and to them only, are true; they are the true emanations of revery. Æschylus excites you to the very brink of convulsion. His tragical effects are like blows struck at the spectators. When the furies of Æschylus make their appearance, pregnant women miscarry. Pollux, the lexicographer, affirms that there were children taken with epilepsy and who died, on looking at those faces of serpents and at those torches violently tossed about. That is evidently "going beyond the aim." Even the grace of Æschylus, that strange and sovereign grace of which we have spoken, has a Cyclopean look. It is Polyphemus smiling. At times the smile is formidable, and seems to hide an obscure rage. Put, by way of example, in the presence of Helen,

those two poets, Homer and Æschylus. Homer is at once conquered and admires. His admiration is forgiveness. Æschylus is moved, but remains grave. He calls Helen "fatal flower;" then he adds, "soul as calm as the tranquil sea." One day Shakespeare will say, "False as the wave."

CHAPTER II.

The theatre is a crucible of civilization. It is a place of human communion. All its phases require to be studied. It is in the theatre that the public soul is formed.

We have just seen what the theatre was in the time of Shakespeare and Molière. Shall we see what it was at the time of Æschylus?

Let us go to that spectacle.

It is no longer the cart of Thespis; it is no longer the scaffold of Susarion; it is no longer the wooden circus of Chœrilus. Athens, foreboding, perceiving the coming of Æschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, has built theatres of stone. No roof, the sky for a ceiling, the day for lighting, a long platform of stone pierced with doors and staircases, and secured to a wall, the actors and the chorus going and coming on this platform, which is the logeum, and performing the play; in the centre, where in our days is the hole of the prompter, a small altar to Bacchus, the thymele; in front of the platform a vast hemicycle of stone steps, five or six thousand men sitting pell-mell,—such is the laboratory. There it is that the swarming crowd of the Piræus come to turn Athenians; there it is that the multitude become the public, until such day when the public will become the people. The multitude is in reality there,—all the multitude, including the women, the children, and the slaves, and Plato, who knits his brows.

If it is a fête-day, if we are at the Panathenæa, at the Lenæa, or at the great Dionysia, the magistrates form part of the audience; the proedri, the epistati, and the prytani sit in their place of honour. If the trilogy is to be a tetralogy, if the representation is to conclude by a piece with satyrs; if the fauns, the ægipans, the menades, the goat-footed, and the evantes, are to come at the end to perform their pranks; if among the comedians, almost priests, and called "the men of Bacchus," is to appear the favourite actor who excels in the two modes of declamation, in paralogy as well as in paracatology; if the poet is sufficiently liked by his rivals to let the public expect to see some celebrated men, Eupolis, Cratinus, or even Aristophanes figure in the chorus,—"Eupolis atque Cratinus, Aristophanesque poetæ," as Horace will one day say; if a play with women is

performed, even the old "Alcestis" of Thespis, the whole place is full; there is a crowd. The crowd is already to Æschylus what, later on, as the prologue of the "Bacchides" remarks, it will be to Plautus,—a swarm of men on seats, coughing, spitting, sneezing, making grimaces and noises with the mouth and "ore concrepario" and talking of their affairs; what a crowd is to-day.

Students scrawl with charcoal on the wall, now in token of admiration, now in irony, some well-known verses,—for instance, the singular iambic a Phrynichus in a single word:—

"Archaiomelesidonophrunicherata." ^[1]

Of which the famous Alexandrine, in two words, of one of our tragic poets of the sixteenth century was but a poor imitation:—

"Métamorphoserait Nabuchodonosor."

There are not only the students to make a row; there are the old men. Trust to the old men of the "Wasps" of Aristophanes for a noise. Two schools are in presence,—on one side Thespis, Susarion, Pratinas of Phlius, Epigenes of Sicyon, Theomis, Auleas, Chœrilus, Phrynichus, Minos himself; on the other, young Æschylus. Æschylus is twenty-eight years old. He gives his trilogy of the "Promethei,"—"Prometheus Lighting Fire;" "Prometheus Bound;" "Prometheus Delivered," followed by some piece with satyrs,—"The Argians," perhaps, of which Macrobius has preserved a fragment for us. The ancient quarrel of youth and old age breaks out; gray beards against black hair. They discuss, they dispute. The old are for the old school; the young are for Æschylus. The young defend Æschylus against Thespis, as they will defend Corneille against Garnier.

The old men are indignant. Listen to the Nestors grumbling. What is tragedy? It is the song of the he-goat. Where is the he-goat in this "Prometheus Bound"? Art is in its decline. And they repeat the celebrated objection: "Quid pro Baccho?" (What is there for Bacchus?) The graver men, the purists, do not even admit Thespis, and remind each other that Solon had raised his stick against Thespis, calling him "liar," for the sole reason that he had detached and isolated in a play an episode in the life of Bacchus,—the history of Pentheus. They hate this innovator, Æschylus. They blame all these inventions, the end of which is to bring about a closer connection between the drama and Nature, the use of the anapæst for the chorus, of the iambus for the dialogue, and of the trochee for passion, in the same way that, later on, Shakespeare was blamed for going from poetry to prose, and the theatre of the nineteenth century for that which was termed

"broken verse." These are indeed unbearable novelties. And then, the flute plays too high, and the tetrachord plays too low; and where is now the ancient sacred division of tragedies into monodies, stasimes, and exodes? Thespis never put on the stage but one speaking actor; here is Æschylus putting two. Soon we shall have three. (Sophocles, indeed, was to come.) Where will they stop? These are impieties. And how does Æschylus dare to call Jupiter "the prytanus of the Immortals?" Jupiter was a god, and he is now no more than a magistrate. Where are we going? The thymele, the ancient altar of sacrifice, is now a seat for the corypheus! The chorus ought to limit itself to executing the strophe,—that is to say, the turn to the right; then the antistrophe,—that is to say, the turn to the left; then the epode,—that is to say, repose. But what is the meaning of the chorus arriving in a winged chariot? What is the gad-fly that pursues Io? Why does the Ocean come mounted on a dragon? This is show, not poetry. Where is the ancient simplicity? This show is puerile. Your Æschylus is but a painter, a decorator, a composer of brawls, a charlatan, a machinist. All for the eyes, nothing for the mind. To the fire with all those pieces, and let us content ourselves with a recitation of the ancient pæans of Tynnichus! It is Chœrilus who, by his tetralogy of the "Curetes," has begun the evil. What are the Curetes, if you please? Gods forging metal. Well, then, he had simply to show working on the stage their five families, the Dactyli finding the metal, the Cabiri inventing the forge, the Corybantes forging the sword and the plough-share, the Curetes making the shield, and the Telchines chasing the jewelry. It was sufficiently interesting in that form; but by allowing poets to blend in it the adventure of Plexippus and Toxeus, all is lost. How can you expect society to resist such excess? It is abominable. Æschylus ought to be summoned before justice, and sentenced to drink hemlock like that old wretch Socrates. You will see that after all, he will only be exiled. Everything degenerates.

And the young men burst with laughter. They criticise as well, but in another fashion. What an old brute is that Solon! It is he who has instituted the eponymous archonship. What do they want with an archon giving his name to the year? Hoot the eponymous archon who has lately caused a poet to be elected and crowned by ten generals, instead of taking ten men from the people! It is true that one of the generals was Cimon,—an attenuating circumstance in the eyes of some, for Cimon had beaten the Phœnicians; aggravating in the eyes of others, for it is this very Cimon who, in order to get out of a prison for debt, sold his sister Elphinia, and his wife in the bargain, to Callias. If Æschylus is a bold man, and deserves to be cited before the Areopagus, has not Phrynichus also been judged

and condemned for having shown on the stage, in the "Taking of Miletus," the Greeks beaten by the Persians? When will poets be allowed to suit their own fancy? Hurrah for the liberty of Pericles and down with the censure of Solon! And then what is the law that has just been promulgated by which the chorus is reduced from fifty to fifteen? And how are they to play the "Danaïdes"? and won't they sneer at the line of Æschylus: "Egyptus, the father of *fifty* sons"? The fifty will be fifteen. These magistrates are idiots. Quarrel, uproar all round. One prefers Phrynichus, another prefers Æschylus, another prefers wine with honey and benzoin. The speaking-trumpets of the actors compete as well as they can with this deafening noise, through which is heard from time to time the shrill cry of the public vendors of phallus and the water-bearers. Such is Athenian uproar. During that time the play is going on. It is the work of a living man. The uproar has every reason to be. Later on, after the death of Æschylus, or after he has been exiled, there will be silence. It is right to be silent before a god. "Æquum est," it is Plautus who speaks, "vos deo facere silentium."

[1] Αρχαιομελεσιδονοπηρυιχηερατα.

CHAPTER III.

A genius is an accused man. As long as Æschylus lived, his life was a strife. His genius was contested, then he was persecuted,—a natural progression. According to Athenian practice, his private life was unveiled; he was traduced, slandered. A woman whom he had loved, Planesia, sister of Chrysilla, mistress of Pericles, has dishonoured herself in the eyes of posterity by the outrages that she publicly inflicted on Æschylus. People ascribed to him unnatural loves; people gave him, as well as Shakespeare, a Lord Southampton. His popularity was knocked to pieces. Then everything was charged to him as a crime, even his kindness to young poets, who respectfully offered to him their first laurels. It is curious to see this reproach constantly re-appearing. Pezay and St. Lambert repeat it in the eighteenth century:—

"Pourquoi, Voltaire, à ces auteurs
Qui t'adressent des vers flatteurs,
Répondre, en toutes tes missives,
Par des louanges excessives?"

Æschylus, living, was a kind of public target for all haters. Young, the ancient poets, Thespis and Phrynichus, were preferred to him. Old, the new ones,

Sophocles and Euripides, were placed above him. At last he was brought before the Areopagus, and, according to Suidas, because the theatre tumbled down during one of his pieces; according to Ælian, because he had blasphemed, or, which is the same thing, had related the mysteries of Eleusis, he was exiled. He died in exile.

Then Lycurgus the orator cried, "We must raise a statue of bronze to Æschylus." Athens had expelled the man, but raised the statue.

Thus Shakespeare, through death, entered into oblivion; Æschylus into glory.

This glory, which was to have in the course of ages its phases, its eclipses, its ebbing and rising tides, was then dazzling. Greece remembered Salamis, where Æschylus had fought. The Areopagus itself was ashamed. It felt that it had been ungrateful toward the man who, in the "Orestias," had paid to that tribunal the supreme honour of bringing before it Minerva and Apollo. Æschylus became, sacred. All the phratries had his bust, wreathed at first with bandolets, later on crowned with laurels. Aristophanes made him say in the "Frogs": "I am dead, but my poetry liveth." In the great Eleusinian days, the herald of the Areopagus blew the Tyrrhenian trumpet in honour of Æschylus. An official copy of his ninety-seven dramas was made at the expense of the republic, and placed under the special care of the recorder of Athens. The actors who played his pieces were obliged to go and collate their parts by this perfect and unique copy. Æschylus was made a second Homer. Æschylus had, likewise, his rhapsodists, who sang his verses at the festivals, holding in their hands a branch of myrtle.

He had been right, the great and insulted man, to write on his poems this proud and mournful dedication, "To Time."

There was no more said about his blasphemy: it had caused him to die in exile; it was well; it was enough; it was as though it had never been. Besides, one does not know where to find that blasphemy. Palingenes searched for it in an "Asterope," which, in our opinion, existed only in imagination. Musgrave sought it in the "Eumenides." Musgrave probably was right, for the "Eumenides" being a very religious piece, the priests could not help of course choosing it to accuse him of impiety.

Let us point out a whimsical coincidence. The two sons of Æschylus, Euphorion and Bion, are said to have re-cast the "Orestias," exactly as, two thousand three hundred years later, Davenant, Shakespeare's bastard, re-cast "Macbeth." But in the presence of the universal respect for Æschylus after his death, such

impudent tamperings were impossible; and what is true of Davenant, is evidently untrue of Bion and Euphorion.

The renown of Æschylus filled the world of those days. Egypt, feeling with reason that he was a giant and somewhat Egyptian, bestowed on him the name of Pimander, signifying "Superior Intelligence." In Sicily, whither he had been banished, and where they sacrificed he-goats before his tomb at Gela, he was almost an Olympian. Later on, he was almost a prophet for the Christians, owing to the prediction in "Prometheus," which some people thought to apply to Jesus.

Strange thing! it is this very glory which has wrecked his work.

We speak here of the material wreck; for, as we have said, the mighty name of Æschylus survives!

It is indeed a drama, and an extraordinary drama, the disappearance of those poems. A king has stupidly robbed the human mind.

Let us relate this robbery.

CHAPTER IV.

Here are the facts,—the legend at least; for at such a distance, and in such a twilight, history is legendary:—

There was a king of Egypt, named Ptolemy Euergetes, brother-in-law to Antiochus the god.

Let us mention it en passant, all these people were gods:—gods Soters, gods Euergetes, gods Epiphanes, gods Philometors, gods Philadelphi, gods Philopators. Translation: Gods saviours, gods beneficent, gods illustrious, gods loving their mother, gods loving their brothers, gods loving their father. Cleopatra was goddess Soter. The priests and priestesses of Ptolemy Soter were at Ptolemais. Ptolemy VI. was called "God-love-Mother" (Philometor), because he hated his mother, Cleopatra. Ptolemy IV. was "God-love-Father" (Philopator), because he had poisoned his father. Ptolemy II. was "God-love-Brothers" (Philadelphus), because he had killed his two brothers.

Let us return to Ptolemy Euergetes.

He was the son of the Philadelphus who gave golden crowns to the Roman ambassadors,—the same to whom the pseudo-Aristeus attributes by mistake the

version of the Septuagint. This Philadelphus had much increased the library of Alexandria, which, during his lifetime, counted two hundred thousand volumes, and which, in the sixth century, attained, it is said, the incredible number of seven hundred thousand manuscripts.

This stock of human knowledge, formed under the eyes of Euclid, and by the care of Callimachus, Diodorus Cronos, Theodorus the Atheist, Philetas, Apollonius, Aratus, the Egyptian priest Manetho, Lycophron, and Theocritus, had for its first librarian, according to some, Zenodotus of Ephesus, according to others, Demetrius of Phalerum, to whom the Athenians had raised three hundred and sixty statues, which they took one year to put up and one day to destroy. Now, this library had no copy of Æschylus. One day the Greek Demetrius said to Euergetes, "Pharaoh has not Æschylus,"—exactly as, later on, Leidrade, archbishop of Lyons and librarian of Charlemagne, said to Charlemagne, "The Emperor has not Scæva Memor."

Ptolemy Euergetes, wishing to complete the work of the Philadelphus his father, resolved to give Æschylus to the Alexandrian library. He declared that he would cause a copy to be made. He sent an embassy to borrow from the Athenians the unique and sacred copy under the care of the recorder of the republic. Athens, not over-prone to lend, hesitated and demanded a security. The king of Egypt offered fifteen silver talents. Now, those who wish to realize the value of fifteen talents, have but to know that it was three-fourths of the annual tribute of ransom payed by Judea to Egypt, which was twenty talents, and weighed so heavily on the Jewish people that the high priest Onias II., founder of the Onion temple, decided to refuse this tribute at the risk of a war. Athens accepted the security. The fifteen talents were deposited. The complete copy of Æschylus was delivered to the king of Egypt. The king gave up the fifteen talents and kept the book.

Athens, indignant, had some thought of declaring war against Egypt. To reconquer Æschylus was as good as reconquering Helen. To recommence Troy, but this time to get back Homer, it was a fine thing. Yet, time was taken for consideration. Ptolemy was powerful. He had forcibly taken back from Asia the two thousand five hundred Egyptian gods formerly carried there by Cambyses, because they were in gold and silver. He had, besides, conquered Cilicia and Syria, and all the country from the Euphrates to the Tigris. With Athens it was no longer the day when she improvised a fleet of two hundred vessels against Artaxerxes. She left Æschylus a prisoner in Egypt.

A prisoner-god. This time the word *god* is in its right place. They paid Æschylus unheard-of honours. The king refused, it is said, to let a copy be made of it, stupidly bent on possessing a unique copy.

Particular care was taken of this manuscript when the library of Alexandria, enlarged by the library of Pergamus, which Antony gave to Cleopatra, was transferred to the temple of Jupiter Serapis. There it was that Saint Jerome came to read, in the Athenian text, the famous passage in "Prometheus" prophesying Christ: "Go and tell Jupiter that nothing shall make me name the one who is to dethrone him."

Other doctors of the Church made, from the same copy, the same verification. For, at all times, the orthodox asseverations have been combined with what have been called the testimonies of polytheism, and great efforts have been resorted to in order to make the Pagans say Christian things,—*teste David cum Sibylla*. People came to the Alexandrian library, as on a pilgrimage, to examine "Prometheus,"—constant visits which deceived the Emperor Adrian, and made him write to the consul Servianus: "Those who adore Serapis are Christians: those who profess to be bishops of Christ are at the same time devotees of Serapis."

Under the Roman dominion the library of Alexandria belonged to the emperor. Egypt was Cæsar's property. "Augustus," says Tacitus, "seposuit Ægyptum." It was not every one who could travel there. Egypt was closed. The Roman knights, and even the senators, could not easily obtain admission.

It was during this period that the complete copy of Æschylus could be consulted and perused by Timocharis, Aristarchus, Athenæus, Stobæus, Diodorus of Sicily, Macrobius, Plotinus, Jamblichus, Sopater, Clement of Alexandria, Nepotian of Africa, Valerius Maximus, Justin the Martyr, and even by Ælian, although Ælian left Italy but seldom.

In the seventh century a man entered Alexandria. He was mounted on a camel and seated between two sacks,—one full of figs, the other full of corn. These two sacks were, with a wooden platter, all that he possessed. This man never seated himself except on the ground. He drank nothing but water and ate nothing but bread. He had conquered half of Asia and of Africa, taken or burned thirty-six thousand towns, villages, fortresses, and castles, destroyed four thousand Pagan or Christian temples, built fourteen hundred mosques, conquered Izdeger, King of Persia, and Heraclius, Emperor of the East, and he called himself Omar. He burned the library of Alexandria.

Omar is for that reason celebrated. Louis, called the Great, has not the same celebrity, which is unjust, for he burned the Rupertine library at Heidelberg.



Anne Hathaway's Cottage.

Photogravure.—From Photograph.

CHAPTER V.

Now, is not that incident a complete drama? It might be entitled "*Æschylus Lost.*" Recital, node, and *dénouement*. After Euergetes, Omar. The action begins with a robber and ends with an incendiary.

Euergetes (this is his excuse) robbed from enthusiasm,—an unpleasant instance of the admiration of an imbecile.

As for Omar, he is the fanatic. By the way, we must say that strange historical rehabilitations have been attempted in our time. We do not speak of Nero, who is the fashion; but an attempt has been made to exonerate Omar, as well as to bring a verdict of not guilty for Pius V. Holy Pius V. personifies the Inquisition; to canonize him was enough, why declare him innocent? We do not lend ourselves

to those attempts at appeal in trials which have received final judgment. We have no taste for rendering small services to fanaticism, whether it be caliph or pope, whether it burn books or men. Omar has had many advocates. A certain class of historians and biographical critics are readily moved to pity for the sword,—a victim of slander, this poor sword! Imagine then the tenderness that is felt for a scimitar! The scimitar is the ideal sword. It is better than brute,—it is Turk. Omar, then, has been cleaned as much as possible. A first fire in the Bruchion district, where the Alexandrian library stood, was used as an argument to prove how easily such accidents happen. That one was the fault of Julius Cæsar,—another sword. Then a second argument was found in a second fire, only partial, of the Serapeum, in order to accuse the Christians, the demagogues of those days. If the fire at the Serapeum had destroyed the Alexandrian library in the fourth century, Hypatia would not have been able, in the fifth century, to give, in that same library, those lessons in philosophy which caused her to be murdered with broken pieces of earthen pots. About Omar we willingly believe the Arabs. Abd-Allatif saw at Alexandria, about 1220, "the column of pillars supporting a cupola," and said, "There stood the library that Amrou-ben-Asad burned by permission of Omar." Abulfarage, in 1260, relates in his "Dynastic History" that by order of Omar they took the books from the library, and with them heated the baths of Alexandria for six months. According to Gibbon, there were at Alexandria four thousand baths. Ebn-Khaldoun, in his "Historical Prolegomena," relates another wanton destruction,—the annihilation of the library of the Medes by Saad, Omar's lieutenant. Now, Omar having caused the burning of the Median library in Persia by Saad, was logical in causing the destruction of the Egyptian-Greek library in Egypt by Amrou. His lieutenants have preserved his orders for us: "If these books contain falsehoods, to the fire with them. If they contain truths, these truths are in the Koran; to the fire with them." In place of the Koran, put the Bible, Veda, Edda, Zend-Avesta, Toldos Jeschut, Talmud, Gospel, and you have the imperturbable and universal formula of all fanaticisms. This being said, we do not see any reason to reverse the verdict of history; we award to the caliph the smoke of the seven hundred thousand volumes of Alexandria, Æschylus included, and we maintain Omar in possession of his rights as incendiary.

Euergetes, through his wish for exclusive possession, and treating a library as a seraglio, has robbed us of Æschylus. Imbecile contempt can have the same effect as imbecile adoration. Shakespeare was very near having the fate of Æschylus. He has had, too, his fire. Shakespeare was so little printed, printing existed so little for him, thanks to the silly indifference of his immediate

posterity, that in 1666 there was still but one edition of the poet of Stratford-on-Avon (Hemynge and Condell's edition), three hundred copies of which were printed. Shakespeare, with this obscure and pitiful edition, waiting in vain for the public, was a sort of poor wretch ashamed to beg for glory. These three hundred copies were nearly all stored up in London when the fire of 1666 broke out. It burned London, and nearly burned Shakespeare. The whole edition of Hemynge and Condell disappeared, with the exception of forty-four copies, which had been sold in fifty years. Those forty-four purchasers saved from death the work of Shakespeare.

CHAPTER VI.

The disappearance of Æschylus! Stretch this catastrophe hypothetically to a few more names, and it seems as though you felt the vacuum annihilating the human mind.

The work of Æschylus was, by its extent, the greatest, certainly, of all antiquity. By the seven plays which remain to us, we may judge what that universe was.

Let us point out what Æschylus lost is.

Fourteen trilogies: the "Promethei," of which "Prometheus Bound" formed a part; the "Seven Chiefs before Thebes," of which there remains one piece, "The Danaid," which comprised the "Suppliants," written in Sicily, and in which the *Sicelism* of Æschylus is traceable; "Laius," which comprised "Œdipus;" "Athamas," which ended with the "Isthmiasts;" "Perseus," the node of which was the "Phorcydes;" "Etna," which had as prologue the "Etnean Women;" "Iphigenia," the *dénouement* of which was the tragedy of the "Priestesses;" the "Ethiopic," the titles of which are nowhere to be found; "Pentheus," in which were the "Hydrophores;" "Teucer," which opened with the "Judgment of Arms;" "Niobe," which commenced with the "Nurses" and ended with the "Men of the Train;" a trilogy in honour of Achilles, the "Tragic Iliad," composed of the "Myridons," the "Nereids," and the "Phrygians;" one in honour of Bacchus, the "Lycurgia," composed of the "Edons," the "Bassarides," and the "Young Men."

These fourteen trilogies in themselves alone give a total of fifty-six plays, if we consider that nearly all were tetralogies,—that is to say, quadruple dramas,—and ended with a satyride. Thus the "Orestias" had, as a final satyride, "Proteus," and the "Seven Chiefs before Thebes," had the "Sphinx."

Add to those fifty-six pieces a probable trilogy of the "Labdacides;" add the tragedies,—the "Egyptians," the "Ransom of Hector," "Memnon," undoubtedly connected with some trilogies; add all the satyrises,—"Sisyphus the Deserter," the "Heralds," the "Lion," the "Argians," "Amymone," "Circe," "Cercyon," "Glaucus the Mariner," comedies in which was found the mirth of that wild genius.

See all that is lost.

Euergetes and Omar have robbed us of all that.

It is difficult to state precisely the total number of pieces written by Æschylus. The amount varies. The anonymous biographer speaks of seventy-five, Suidas of ninety, Jean Deslyons of ninety-seven, Meursius of one hundred.

Meursius reckons up more than a hundred titles, but some are probably used twice.

Jean Deslyons, doctor of the Sorbonne, theologal of Senlis, author of the "Discours ecclesiastique contre le paganisme du Roi boit," published in the seventeenth century a work against the custom of laying coffins one above the other in the cemeteries, in which he took for his authority the twenty-fifth canon of the Council of Auxerre: "Non licet mortuum super mortuum mitti." Deslyons, in a note added to that work, now very scarce, and a copy of which was in the possession of Charles Nodier, if our memory is faithful, quotes a passage from the great antiquarian numismatist of Venloo, Hubert Goltzius, in which, in reference to embalming, Goltzius mentions the "Egyptians," of Æschylus, and "The Apotheosis of Orpheus,"—a title omitted in the enumeration given by Meursius. Goltzius adds that "The Apotheosis of Orpheus" was recited at the mysteries of the Lycomidians.

This title, "The Apotheosis of Orpheus" opens a field for thought. Æschylus speaking of Orpheus, the Titan measuring the giant, the god interpreting the god, what more magnificent, and how one would long to read that work! Dante, speaking of Virgil and calling him his master, does not fill up this gap, because Virgil, a noble poet, but without invention, is less than Dante; it is between equals, from genius to genius, from sovereign to sovereign, that such homage is splendid. Æschylus raises to Orpheus a temple of which he might occupy the altar himself: it is grand.

CHAPTER VII.

Æschylus is incommensurate. There is in him something of India. The wild majesty of his stature recalls those vast poems of the Ganges which walk through art with the steps of a mammoth, and which have, among the Iliads and the Odysseys, the appearance of hippopotami among lions. Æschylus, a thorough Greek, is yet something else besides a Greek. He has the Oriental immensity.

Saumaise declares that he is full of Hebraisms and Syrianisms.^[1] Æschylus makes the Winds carry Jupiter's throne, as the Bible makes the Cherubim carry Jehovah's throne, as the Rig-Veda makes the Marouts carry the throne of Indra. The winds, the cherubim, and the marouts are the same beings,—the Breezes. Saumaise is right. The double-meaning words so frequent in the Phœnician language, abound in Æschylus. He plays, for instance, in reference to Jupiter and Europa, on the Phœnician word *ilpha*, which has the double meaning of "ship" and "bull." He loves that language of Tyre and Sidon, and at times he borrows the strange gleams of its style; the metaphor, "Xerxes with the dragon eyes," seems an inspiration from the Ninevite dialect, in which the word *draka* meant at the same time dragon and clear-sighted. He has Phœnician heresies. His heifer Io is rather the cow of Isis; he believes, like the priests of Sidon, that the temple of Delphi was built by Apollo with a paste made of wax and bees'-wings. In his exile in Sicily he often drank religiously at the fountain of Arethusa, and never did the shepherds who watched him hear his name Arethusa otherwise than by this mysterious name, *Alphaga*,—an Assyrian word signifying "source surrounded with willows."

Æschylus is, in the whole Hellenic literature, the sole example of the Athenian mind with a mixture of Egypt and Asia. These depths were repugnant to the Greek intelligence. Corinth, Epidaurus, Œdepsus, Gythium, Cheronea, which was to be the birth-place of Plutarch, Thebes, where Pindar's house was, Mantinea, where the glory of Epaminondas shone,—all these golden towns repudiated the Unknown, a glimpse of which was seen like a cloud behind the Caucasus. It seemed as though the sun was Greek. The sun, used to the Parthenon, was not made to enter the diluvian forests of Grand Tartary under the gigantic mouldiness of the monocotyledons under the lofty ferns of five hundred cubits, where swarmed all the first dreadful models of Nature, and under whose shadows existed unknown, shapeless cities, such as that fabulous Anarodgurro, the existence of which was denied until it sent an embassy to Claudius. Gagasmira, Sambulaca, Maliarpha, Barygaza, Cavenpatnam Sochoth-Benoth, Theglath-Phalazar, Tana-Serim—all these almost hideous names affrighted Greece when they came to be reported by the adventurers on their return first by those with

Jason, then by those of Alexander. Æschylus had no such horror. He loved the Caucasus. It was there he had made the acquaintance of Prometheus. One almost feels in reading Æschylus that he had haunted the vast primitive thickets now become coal mines, and that he has taken huge strides over the roots, snake-like and half-living, of the ancient vegetable monsters. Æschylus is a kind of behemoth among geniuses.

Let us say, however, that the affinity of Greece with the East, an affinity hated by the Greeks, was real. The letters of the Greek alphabet are nothing else but the letters of the Phœnician alphabet reversed. Æschylus was all the more Greek from the fact of his being a little of a Phœnician.

This powerful mind, at times apparently crude on account of his very grandeur, has the Titanic gayety and affability. He indulges in quibbles on the names of Prometheus, Polynices, Helen, Apollo, Ilion, on the cock and the sun, imitating in this respect Homer, who made on the olive that famous pun which caused Diogenes to throw away his plate of olives and eat a tart.

The father of Æschylus, Euphorion, was a disciple of Pythagoras. The soul of Pythagoras, that philosopher half magian and half brahmin, seemed to have entered through Euphorion into Æschylus. We have said already that in the dark and mysterious quarrel between the celestial and the terrestrial gods, the intestinal war of Paganism, Æschylus was terrestrial. He belonged to the faction of the gods of earth. The Cyclops had worked for Jupiter; he rejected them as we would reject a corporation of workers who had turned traitors, and he preferred to them the Cabyri. He adored Ceres. "O thou, Ceres, nurse of my soul!" and Ceres is Demeter, is Gemeter, is the mother-earth. Hence his veneration for Asia. It seemed then as though Earth was rather in Asia than elsewhere. Asia is, in reality, compared with Europe, a kind of block almost without capes and gulfs, and little penetrated by the sea. The Minerva of Æschylus says, "Great Asia." "The sacred soil of Asia," says the chorus of the Oceanides. In his epitaph, graven on his tomb at Gela and written by himself, Æschylus attests "the Mede with long hair." He makes the chorus celebrate "Susicanes and Pegastagon, born in Egypt, and the chief of Memphis, the sacred city." Like the Phœnicians, he gives the name of "Oncea" to Minerva. In the "Etna" he celebrates the Sicilian Dioscuri, the Palici, those twin gods whose worship, connected with the local worship of Vulcan, had reached Asia through Sarepta and Tyre. He calls them "the venerable Palici." Three of his trilogies are entitled the "Persians," the "Ethiopic," the "Egyptians." In the geography of Æschylus, Egypt was Asia, as well as Arabia. Prometheus says, "the dower of Arabia, the heroes of Caucasus." Æschylus was, in geography, very

peculiar. He had a Gorgonian city Cysthenes, which he placed in Asia, as well as a river Pluto, rolling gold, and defended by men with a single eye,—the Arimaspes. The pirates to whom he makes allusion somewhere are, according to all appearance, the pirates of Angria who inhabited the rock Vizindruk. He could see distinctly beyond the Pas-du-Nil, in the mountains of Byblos, the source of the Nile, still unknown to-day. He knew the precise spot where Prometheus had stolen the fire, and he designated without hesitation Mount Mosychlus in the neighbourhood of Lemnos.

When this geography ceases to be fanciful, it is exact as an itinerary. It becomes true and remains without measure. Nothing more real than that splendid transmission of the news of the capture of Troy in one night by bonfires lighted one after the other and corresponding from mountain to mountain,—from Mount Ida to the promontory of Hermes, from the promontory of Hermes to Mount Athos, from Mount Athos to Mount Macispe, from the Macispe to the Messapius, from Mount Messapius over the river Asopus to Mount Cytheron, from Mount Cytheron over the morass of Gorgopis to Mount Egiplanctus, from Mount Egiplanctus to Cape Saronica (later Spireum); from Cape Saronica to Mount Arachne, from Mount Arachne to Argos. You may follow on the map that train of fire announcing Agamemnon to Clytemnestra.

This bewildering geography is mingled with an extraordinary tragedy, in which you hear dialogues more than human:—

Prometheus. "Alas!"

Mercury. "This is a word that Jupiter speaks not."

And where Gerontes is the Ocean. "To look a fool," says the Ocean to Prometheus, "is the secret of the sage,"—saying as deep as the sea. Who knows the mental reservations of the tempest? And the Power exclaims, "There is but one free god; it is Jupiter."

Æschylus has his own geography; he has also his own fauna.

This fauna, which strikes as fabulous, is enigmatical rather than chimerical. The author of these lines has discovered and authenticated at the Hague, in a glass in the Japanese Museum, the impossible serpent in the "Orestias," having two heads attached to its two extremities. There are, it may be added, in that glass several specimens of bestiality that might belong to another world, at all events strange and not accounted for, as we are little disposed to admit, for our part, the absurd hypothesis of the Japanese stitchers of monsters.

Æschylus at moments sees Nature with simplifications stamped with a mysterious disdain. Here the Pythagorician disappears, and the magian shows himself. All beasts are the beast. Æschylus seems to see in the animal kingdom only a dog. The griffin is a "dumb dog;" the eagle is a "winged dog,"—"The winged dog of Jupiter," says Prometheus.

We have just pronounced the word *magian*. In fact, Æschylus officiates at times like Job. One would suppose that he exercises over Nature, over human creatures, and even over gods, a kind of magianism. He upbraids animals for their voracity. A vulture which seizes, even while running, a doe-hare with young, and feeds on it, "eats a whole race stopped in its flight." He calls on the dust and on the smoke; to the one he says, "Thirsty sister of mire!" to the other, "Black sister of fire!" He insults the dreaded bay of Salmydessus: "Hard-hearted mother of vessels."

He brings down to dwarfish proportions the Greeks, conquerors of Troy by treachery; he shows them brought forth by an implement of war,—he calls them "these young of a horse." As for the gods, he goes so far as to incorporate Apollo with Jupiter. He magnificently calls Apollo "the conscience of Jupiter."

His familiar boldness is absolute, characteristic of sovereignty. He makes the sacrificer take Iphigenia "as a she-goat" A queen who is a faithful spouse is for him "the good house-bitch." As for Orestes, he has seen him when quite a child, and he speaks of him as "wetting his swaddling-cloths,"—*humectatio ex urina*. He even goes beyond this Latin. The expression, which we do not repeat here, is to be found in "Les Plaideurs," act III. scene 3. If you are bent upon reading the word which we hesitate to write, apply to Racine.

The whole is immense and mournful. The profound despair of fate is in Æschylus. He shows in terrible lines "the impotence which chains down, as in a dream, the blind living creatures." His tragedy is nothing but the old Orphean dithyrambic suddenly launching into tears and lamentations over man.

[1]"Hebraïsmis et Syrianismis."

CHAPTER VIII.

Aristophanes loved Æschylus by that law of affinity which causes Marivaux to love Racine tragedy and comedy made to understand each other.

The same distracted and all-powerful breath fills Æschylus and Aristophanes. They are the two inspired spirits of the antique mask.

Aristophanes, who is not yet judged, adhered to the mysteries, to Cecropian poetry, to Eleusis, to Dodona, to the Asiatic twilight, to the profound pensive dream. This dream, whence sprung the art of Egina, was at the threshold of the Ionian philosophy in Thales as well as at the threshold of the Italian philosophy in Pythagoras. It was the sphinx guarding the entrance.

This sphinx has been a muse,—the great pontifical and lascivious muse of universal rut; and Aristophanes loved it This sphinx breathed tragedy into Æschylus, and comedy into Aristophanes. It had something of Cybele. The ancient sacred immodesty is in Aristophanes. At moments he has Bacchus foaming at the lips. He came from the Dionysia, or from the Aschosia, or from the great Trieteric Orgy, and he strikes one as a raving maniac of the mysteries. His wild verse resembles the bassaride hopping giddily upon bladders filled with air. Aristophanes has the sacerdotal obscurity. He is for nudity against love. He denounces the Phedras and Sthenobæas, and he creates Lysistrata.

Let no one be deceived on this point; it was religion, and a cynic was an austere mind. The gymnosophists were the point of intersection between lewdness and thought The he-goat, with its philosopher's beard, belonged to that sect That dark ecstatic and bestial Oriental spirit lives still in the santon, the dervish, and the fakir. The corybantes were a kind of Greek fakirs. Aristophanes, like Diogenes, belonged to that family. Æschylus, by the Oriental bent of his nature, nearly belonged to it himself, but he retained the tragic chastity.

That mysterious naturalism was the ancient spirit of Greece. It was called poetry and philosophy. It had under it the group of the seven sages, one of whom, Periander, was a tyrant. Now, a certain vulgar, mean spirit appeared with Socrates. It was sagacity clearing and bottling up wisdom. Reduction of Thales and Pythagoras to the immediate true. Such was the operation. A sort of filtering, which, purifying and weakening, allowed the ancient divine doctrine to percolate, drop by drop, and become human. These simplifications disgust fanaticism; dogmas object to a process of sifting. To ameliorate a religion is to lay violent hands on it. Progress offering its services to Faith, offends it. Faith is an ignorance which professes to know, and which, in certain cases, knows perhaps more than Science. In the face of the lofty affirmations of believers, Socrates had an uncomfortably sly half-smile. There is something of Voltaire in Socrates. Socrates denounces all the Eleusinian philosophy as unintelligible and indiscernible; and

he said to Euripides that to understand Heraclitus and the old philosophers, "one required to be a swimmer of Delos,"—in other words, a swimmer capable of landing on an isle which was always receding before him. That was impiety and sacrilege for the ancient Hellenic naturalism. There was no other cause for the antipathy of Aristophanes toward Socrates.

This antipathy was quite fearful. The poet showed himself a persecutor; he has lent assistance to the oppressors against the oppressed, and his comedy has been guilty of crimes. Aristophanes has remained in the eyes of posterity in the condition of a wicked genius,—fearful punishment! But there is for him one attenuating circumstance: he was an ardent admirer of the poet of "Prometheus," and to admire him was to defend him. Aristophanes did what he could to prevent his banishment; and if anything can diminish one's indignation in reading the "Clouds," implacable on Socrates, it is that one may see in the background the hand of Aristophanes holding the mantle of Æschylus going into exile. Æschylus has likewise a comedy, a sister of the broad farce of Aristophanes. We have spoken of his mirth. It goes very far in "The Argians." It equals Aristophanes, and outstrips the Shrove Tuesday of our Carnival. Listen: "He throws at my head a chamber utensil. The full vase falls on my head, and is broken, odoriferous, but in a different manner from an urnful of perfume." Who says that? Æschylus. And in his turn Shakespeare will come and will exclaim through Falstaff's lips: "Empty the jorden." What can you say? You have to deal with savages.

One of those savages is Molière: witness from one end to the other the "Malade Imaginaire." Racine also is in a degree one of them: see "Les Plaideurs," already mentioned.

The Abbé Camus was a witty bishop,—a rare thing at all times; and what is more, he was a good man. He would have deserved this reproach of another bishop: "Bon jusqu'à la bêtise." Perhaps he was good because he had wit. He gave to the poor all the revenue of his bishopric of Belley. He objected to canonization. It was he who said, "Il n'est chasse que de vieux chiens et châsse que de vieux saints;" and although he did not like the new-comers in sanctity, he was a friend of Saint François de Sales, by whose advice he wrote novels. He relates in one of his letters that one day François de Sales said to him: "The Church laughs readily."

Art also laughs readily. Art, which is a temple, has its laughter. Whence comes this hilarity? All at once, in the midst of *chefs-d'œuvre*, serious figures, a buffoon stands up and blurts out,—a *chef-d'œuvre* also. Sancho Panza jostles Agamemnon. All the marvels of thought are there; irony comes to complicate and

complete them. Enigma. Behold art, great art, breaking into an excess of gayety. Its problem, matter, amuses it. It was forming it, now it deforms it. It was shaping it for beauty, now it delights in extracting from it ugliness. It seems to forget its responsibility. It does not forget it, however; for suddenly, behind the grimace, philosophy makes its appearance,—a philosophy smooth, less sidereal, more terrestrial, quite as mysterious as the grave philosophy. The unknown which is in man, and the unknown which is in things, face each other; and it turns out that in the act of meeting, these two augurs, Nature and Fate, cannot keep their serious countenance. Poetry, laden with anxieties, befools—whom? Itself. A mirth, which is not serenity, gushes out from the incomprehensible. An unknown, lofty, and sinister raillery flashes its lightning through the human darkness. The shadows piled up around us play with our soul. Formidable blossoming of the unknown. The jest proceeds from the abyss.

This alarming mirth in art is called, in olden times, Aristophanes, and in modern times, Rabelais.

When Pratinas the Dorian had invented the play with satyrs, comedy making its appearance opposite tragedy, mirth by the side of mourning, the two styles ready perhaps to unite, it was a matter of scandal. Agathon, the friend of Euripides, went to Dodona to consult Loxias. Loxias is Apollo. Loxias means crooked; and Apollo was called The Crooked, on account of his oracles being always obscure and full of ambiguous meanings. Agathon inquired from Apollo whether the new style was not impious, and whether comedy existed by right as well as tragedy. Loxias answered, "Poetry has two ears."

This answer, which Aristotle declares obscure, seems to us very clear. It sums up the entire law of art. Two problems, in fact, are presented. In the full light the first problem,—noisy, tumultuous, stormy, clamorous, the vast vital causeway, offering every direction to the ten thousand feet of man; the quarrels, the uproar, the passions with their *why*; the evil, which undergoes suffering the first, for to be evil is worse than doing it; sorrows, griefs, tears, cries, rumours. In the shade, the second one, mute problem, immense silence, with an inexpressible and terrible meaning. And poetry has two ears,—one which listens to life, the other which listens to death.

CHAPTER IX.

The power that Greece had to evolve her luminous effluvia is prodigious,—even like that to-day which we see in France. Greece did not colonize without civilizing,—an example that more than one modern nation might follow. To buy and sell is not everything.

Tyre bought and sold; Berytus bought and sold; Sidon bought and sold; Sarepta bought and sold. Where are these cities? Athens taught; Athens is still at this hour one of the capitals of human thought.

The grass is growing on the six steps of the tribune where spoke Demosthenes; the Ceramicus is a ravine half-choked with the marble-dust which was once the palace of Cecrops; the Odeon of Herod Atticus at the foot of the Acropolis is now but a ruin on which falls, at certain hours, the imperfect shadow of the Parthenon; the temple of Theseus belongs to the swallows; the goats browse on the Pnyx. Still the Greek spirit is living; still Greece is queen; still Greece is goddess. A commercial firm passes away; a school remains.

It is curious to say to one's self to-day that twenty-two centuries ago small towns, isolated and scattered on the outskirts of the known world, possessed, all of them, theatres. In point of civilization, Greece began always by the construction of an academy, of a portico, or of a logeum. Whoever could have seen, nearly at the same period, rising at a short distance one from the other, in Umbria, the Gallic town of Sens (now Sinigaglia), and, near Vesuvius, the Hellenic city Parthenopea (at present Naples), would have recognized Gaul by the big stone standing all red with blood, and Greece by the theatre.

This civilization by poetry and art had such a mighty force that sometimes it subdued even war. The Sicilians—Plutarch relates it in speaking of Nicias—gave liberty to the Greek prisoners who sang the verses of Euripides.

Let us point out some very little known and very singular facts.

The Messenian colony, Zancle, in Sicily; the Corinthian colony, Corcyra, distinct from the Corcyra of the Absyrtides Islands; the Cycladian colony, Cyrene, in Libya; the three Phocean colonies, Helea in Lucania, Palania in Corsica, Marseilles in France, had theatres. The gad-fly having pursued lo all along the Adriatic Gulf, the Ionian Sea reached as far as the harbour of Venetus, and Tregeste (now Trieste) had a theatre. A theatre at Salpe, in Apulia; a theatre at Squillacium, in Calabria; a theatre at Thernus, in Livadia; a theatre at Lysimachia, founded by Lysimachus, Alexander's lieutenant; a theatre at Scapta-Hyla, where Thucydides had gold-mines; a theatre at Byzia, where Theseus had lived; a

theatre in Chaonia, at Buthrotum, where performed those equilibrists from Mount Chimera whom Apuleius admired on the Pœcile; a theatre in Pannonia, at Bude, where the Metanastes were,—that is to say, the "Transplanted." Many of these colonies, situated afar, were much exposed. In the Isle of Sardinia, which the Greeks named Ichnusa, on account of its resemblance to the sole of the foot, Calaris (now Cagliari) was, so to speak, under the Punic clutch; Cibalis, in Mysia, had to fear the Triballi; Aspalathon, the Illyrians; Tomis, the future resting-place of Ovid, the Scordisci; Miletus, in Anatolia, the Massagetes; Denia, in Spain, the Cantabrians; Salmydessus, the Molossians; Carsina, the Tauro-Scythians; Gelonus, the Arymphæans of Sarmatia who lived on acorns; Apollonia, the Hamaxobians, wandering in their chariots; Abdera, the birth-place of Democritus, the Thracians, men tattooed all over,—all these towns, by the side of their citadel, had a theatre. Why? Because the theatre keeps alight the flame of love for the fatherland. Having the barbarians at their gates, it was important that they should remain Greeks. The national spirit is the strongest of bulwarks.

The Greek drama was profoundly lyrical. It was often less a tragedy than a dithyramb. It had occasionally strophes as powerful as swords. It rushed on the scene, wearing the helmet, and it was an ode armed *cap-à-pie*. We know what a Marseillaise can do.

Many of these theatres were in granite, some in brick. The theatre of Apollonia was in marble. The theatre of Salmydessus, which could be moved to the Doric place or to the Epiphanian place, was a vast scaffolding rolling on cylinders, after the fashion of those wooden towers which they thrust against the stone towers of besieged towns.

And what poet did they play by preference at these theatres? Æschylus.

Æschylus was for Greece the autochthonic poet. He was more than Greek, he was Pelasgian. He was born at Eleusis; and not only was he Eleusian, but Eleusiatic,—that is to say, a believer. It is the same shade as English and Anglican. The Asiatic element, the grandiose deformation of this genius, increased respect for it; for people said that the great Dionysus, that Bacchus, common to the West and the East, came in Æschylus's dreams to dictate to him his tragedies. You find again here the "familiar spirit" of Shakespeare.

Æschylus, Eupatride, and Eginetic struck the Greeks as more Greek than themselves. In those times of code and dogma mingled together, to be sacerdotal was an elevated way of being national. Fifty-two of his tragedies had been crowned. On leaving the theatre after the performance of the plays of Æschylus,

the men would strike the shields hung at the doors of the temples, crying, "Fatherland, fatherland!" Let us add here, that to be hieratic did not hinder him from being demotic. Æschylus loved the people, and the people adored him. There are two sides to greatness: majesty is one, familiarity is the other. Æschylus was familiar with the turbulent and generous mob of Athens. He often gave to that mob a fine part in his plays. See, in the "Orestias," how tenderly the chorus, which is the people, receive Cassandra! The queen uses the slave roughly, and scares him whom the chorus tries to reassure and soothe. Æschylus had introduced the people in his grandest works,—in "Pentheus," by the tragedy of "The Woolcombers;" in "Niobe," by the tragedy of the "Nurses;" in "Athamas," by the tragedy of the "Net-drawers;" in "Iphigenia," by the tragedy of the "Bed-Makers." It was on the side of the people that he turned the balance in that mysterious drama, "The Weighing of Souls."^[1] Therefore had he been chosen to preserve the sacred fire.

In all the Greek colonies they played the "Orestias" and "The Persians." Æschylus being present, the fatherland was no longer absent. The magistrates ordered these almost religious representations. The gigantic Æschylean theatre was intrusted with watching over the infancy of the colonies. It enclosed them in the Greek spirit, it guaranteed them from the influence of bad neighbours, and from all temptations of being led astray. It preserved them from foreign contact, it maintained them within the Hellenic circle. It was there as a warning. All those young offsprings of Greece were, so to speak, placed under the care of Æschylus.

In India they readily give the children into the charge of elephants. These enormous specimens of goodness watch over the little things. The whole group of flaxen heads sing, laugh, and play under the shade of the trees. The habitation is at some distance. The mother is not with them. She is at home, busy with her domestic cares; she pays no attention to her children. Yet, joyful as they are, they are in danger. These beautiful trees are treacherous; they hide under their thickness thorns, claws, and teeth. There the cactus bristles up, the lynx roams, the viper crawls. The children must not wander away; beyond a certain limit they would be lost. Nevertheless, they run about, call to one another, pull and entice one another away, some of them scarcely stuttering, and quite unsteady on their little feet. At times one of them goes too far. Then a formidable trunk is stretched out, seizes the little one, and gently carries him home.

[1]The Psychostasia.

CHAPTER X.

There were some copies more or less complete of Æschylus.

Besides the copies in the colonies, which were limited to a small number of pieces, it is certain that partial copies of the original at Athens were made by the Alexandrian critics and scholars, who have left us some fragments,—among others the comic fragment of "The Argians," the Bacchic fragment of the "Edons," the lines cited by Stobæus, and even the probably apocryphal verses given by Justin the Martyr.

These copies, buried but perhaps not destroyed, have buoyed up the persistent hope of searchers,—notably of Le Clerc, who published in Holland, in 1709, the discovered fragments of Menander. Pierre Pelhestre, of Rouen, the man who had read everything, for which the worthy Archbishop Péréfixe scolded him, affirmed that the greater part of the poems of Æschylus would be found in the libraries of the monasteries of Mount Athos, just as the five books of the "Annals" of Tacitus had been discovered in the Convent of Corwey in Germany, and the "Institutions" of Quintilian, in an old tower of the Abbey of St. Gall.

A tradition, not undisputed, would have it that Euergetes II. had returned to Athens, not the original copy of Æschylus, but a copy, leaving the fifteen talents as a compensation.

Independently of the story about Euergetes and Omar that we have related, and which, very true in the whole, is perhaps legendary in more than one particular, the loss of so many beautiful works of antiquity is but too well explained by the small number of copies. Egypt, in particular, transcribed everything on papyrus. The papyrus, being very dear, became very rare. People were reduced to write on pottery. To break a vase was to destroy a book. About the time when Jesus Christ was painted on the walls at Rome, with the hoofs of an ass, and this inscription, "The God of the Christians, hoof of an ass," in the third century, to make ten manuscripts of Tacitus yearly,—or, as we should say to-day, to strike off ten copies of his works,—a Cæsar must needs call himself Tacitus, and believe Tacitus to be his uncle. And yet Tacitus is nearly lost. Of the twenty-eight years of his "History of the Cæsars,"—from the year 69 to the year 96,—we have but one complete year, 69, and a fragment of the year 70. Euergetes prohibited the exportation of papyrus, which caused parchment to be invented. The price of papyrus was so high that Firmius the Cyclop, manufacturer of papyrus in 270, made by his trade enough money to raise armies, wage war against Aurelian, and declare himself emperor.

Gutenberg is a redeemer. These submersions of the works of the mind, inevitable before the invention of printing, are impossible at present. Printing is the discovery of the inexhaustible. It is perpetual motion found for social science. From time to time a despot seeks to stop or to slacken it, and he is worn away by the friction. The impossibility to shackle thought, the impossibility to stop progress, the book imperishable,—such is the result of printing. Before printing, civilization was subject to losses of substance; the essential signs of progress, proceeding from such a philosopher or such a poet, were all at once lacking: a page was suddenly torn from the human book. To disinherit humanity of all the great bequests of genius, the stupidity of a copyist or the caprice of a tyrant sufficed. No such danger in the present day. Henceforth the unseizable reigns. No one could serve a writ upon thought and take up its body. It has no longer a body. The manuscript was the body of the masterpiece; the manuscript was perishable, and carried off the soul,—the work. The work, made a printed sheet, is delivered. It is now only a soul. Kill now this immortal! Thanks to Gutenberg, the copy is no longer exhaustible. Every copy is a root, and has in itself its own possible regeneration in thousands of editions; the unit is pregnant with the innumerable. This prodigy has saved universal intelligence. Gutenberg, in the fifteenth century, emerges from the awful obscurity, bringing out of the darkness that ransomed captive, the human mind. Gutenberg is forever the auxiliary of life; he is the permanent fellow-workman in the great work of civilization. Nothing is done without him. He has marked the transition of the man-slave to the free-man. Try and deprive civilization of him, you become Egypt. The decrease of the liberty of the press is enough to diminish the stature of a people.

One of the great features in this deliverance of man by printing, is, let us insist on it, the indefinite preservation of poets and philosophers. Gutenberg is like the second father of the creations of the mind. Before him, yes, it was possible for a *chef-d'œuvre* to die.

Greece and Rome have left—mournful thing to say—vast ruins of books. A whole facade of the human mind half crumbled, that is antiquity. Here the ruin of an epic poem, there a tragedy dismantled; great verses effaced, buried, and disfigured; pediments of ideas almost entirely fallen; geniuses truncated like columns; palaces of thought without ceiling and door; bleached bones of poems; a death's-head which has been a strophe; immortality in ruins. Fearful nightmare! Oblivion, dark spider, hangs its web between the drama of Æschylus and the history of Tacitus.

Where is Æschylus? In pieces everywhere. Æschylus is scattered in twenty texts. His ruins must be sought in innumerable different places. Athenæus gives the dedication "To Time," Macrobius the fragment of "Etna" and the homage to the Palic gods, Pausanias the epitaph. The biographer is anonymous; Goltzius and Meursius give the titles of the lost pieces.

We know from Cicero, in the "Disputationes Tusculanæ," that Æschylus was a Pythagorean; from Herodotus, that he fought bravely at Marathon; from Diodorus of Sicily, that his brother Amynias behaved valiantly at Platæa; from Justin, that his brother Cynegyryus was heroic at Salamis. We know by the didascalies that "The Persians" were represented under the archon Meno, "The Seven Chiefs before Thebes" under the archon Theagenides, and the "Orestias" under the archon Philocles; we know from Aristotle that Æschylus was the first to venture to make two personages speak at a time on the stage; from Plato that the slaves were present at his plays; from Horace, that he invented the mask and the buskin; from Pollux, that pregnant women miscarried at the appearance of his Furies; from Philostratus, that he abridged the monodies; from Suidas, that his theatre tumbled down under the pressure of the crowd; from Ælian, that he committed blasphemy; from Plutarch, that he was exiled; from Valerius Maximus, that an eagle killed him by letting a tortoise fall on his head; from Quintilian, that his plays were re-cast; from Fabricius, that his sons are accused of this crime of lazy-paternity; from the Arundel marbles, the date of his birth, the date of his death, and his age,—sixty-nine years.

Now, take away from the drama the East and replace it by the North; take away Greece and put England, take away India and put Germany, that other immense mother, *All-men* (Allemagne); take away Pericles and put Elizabeth; take away the Parthenon and put the Tower of London; take away the plebs and put the mob; take away the fatality and put the melancholy; take away the gorgon and put the witch; take away the eagle and put the cloud; take away the sun and put on the heath, shuddering in the evening wind, the livid light of the moon, and you have Shakespeare.

Given the dynasty of men of genius, the originality of each being absolutely reserved, the poet of the Carlovingian formation being the natural successor of the poet of the Jupiterian formation and the gothic mist of the antique mystery, Shakespeare is Æschylus II.

There remains the right of the French Revolution, creator of the third world, to be represented in Art. Art is an immense gaping chasm, ready to receive all that is within possibility.

BOOK V.

THE SOULS.

CHAPTER I.

The production of souls is the secret of the unfathomable depth. The innate, what a shadow! What is that concentration of the unknown which takes place in the darkness, and whence abruptly bursts forth that light, a genius? What is the law of these events, O Love? The human heart does its work on earth, and that moves the great deep. What is that incomprehensible meeting of material sublimation and moral sublimation in the atom, indivisible if looked at from life, incorruptible if looked at from death? The atom, what a marvel! No dimension, no extent, nor height, nor width, nor thickness, independent of every possible measure, and yet, everything in this nothing! For algebra, the geometrical point. For philosophy, a soul. As a geometrical point, the basis of science; as a soul, the basis of faith. Such is the atom. Two urns, the sexes, imbibe life from the infinite; and the spilling of one into the other produces the being. This is the normal condition of all, animal as well as man. But the man more than man, whence comes he?

The Supreme Intelligence, which here below is the great man, what is the power which invokes it, incorporates it, and reduces it to a human state? What part do the flesh and the blood take in this prodigy? Why do certain terrestrial sparks seek certain celestial molecules? Where do they plunge, those sparks? Where do they go? How do they manage? What is this gift of man to set fire to the unknown? This mine, the infinite, this extraction, a genius, what more wonderful! Whence does that spring up? Why, at a given moment, this one and not that one? Here, as everywhere, the incalculable law of affinities appears and escapes. One gets a glimpse, but sees not. O forger of the unfathomable, where art thou?

Qualities the most diverse, the most complex, the most opposed in appearance, enter into the composition of souls. The contraries do not exclude each other,—far from that; they complete each other. More than one prophet contains a scholiast; more than one magian is a philologist. Inspiration knows its own trade. Every poet is a critic: witness that excellent piece of criticism on the theatre that Shakespeare puts in the mouth of Hamlet. A visionary mind may be at the same

time precise,—like Dante, who writes a book on rhetoric, and a grammar. A precise mind may be at the same time visionary,—like Newton, who comments on the Apocalypse; like Leibnitz, who demonstrates, *nova inventa logica*, the Holy Trinity. Dante knows the distinction between the three sorts of words, *parola piana*, *parola sdrucchiola*, *parola tronca*; he knows that the *piana* gives a trochee, the *sdrucchiola* a dactyl, and the *tronca* an iambus. Newton is perfectly sure that the Pope is the Antichrist. Dante combines and calculates; Newton dreams.

No law is to be grasped in that obscurity. No system is possible. The currents of adhesions and of cohesions cross each other pell-mell. At times one imagines that he detects the phenomenon of the transmission of the idea, and fancies that he distinctly sees a hand taking the light from him who is departing, to give it to him who arrives. 1642, for example, is a strange year. Galileo dies, Newton is born, in that year. Good. It is a thread; try and tie it, it breaks at once. Here is a disappearance: on the 23d of April, 1616, on the same day, almost at the same minute, Shakespeare and Cervantes die. Why are these two flames extinguished at the same moment? No apparent logic. A whirlwind in the night.

Enigmas constantly. Why does Commodus proceed from Marcus Aurelius?

These problems beset in the desert Jerome, that man of the caves, that Isaiah of the New Testament He interrupted his deep thoughts on eternity, and his attention to the trumpet of the archangel, in order to meditate on the soul of some Pagan in whom he felt interested. He calculated the age of Persius, connecting that research with some obscure chance of possible salvation for that poet, dear to the cenobite on account of his strictness; and nothing is so surprising as to see this wild thinker, half naked on his straw, like Job, dispute on this question, so frivolous in appearance, of the birth of a man, with Rufinus and Theophilus of Alexandria,—Rufinus observing to him that he is mistaken in his calculations, and that Persius having been born in December under the consulship of Fabius Persicus and Vitellius, and having died in November, under the consulship of Publius Marius and Asinius Gallus, these periods do not correspond rigorously with the year II. of the two hundred and third Olympiad, and the year II. of the two hundred and tenth, the dates fixed by Jerome. The mystery thus attracts deep thinkers.

These calculations, almost wild, of Jerome, or other similar ones, are made by more than one dreamer. Never to find a stop, to pass from one spiral to another like Archimedes, and from one zone to another like Alighieri, to fall, while fluttering about in the circular well, is the eternal lot of the dreamer. He strikes

against the hard wall on which the pale ray glides. Sometimes certainty comes to him as an obstacle, and sometimes clearness as a fear. He keeps on his way. He is the bird under the vault. It is terrible. No matter, the dreamer goes on.

To dream is to think here and there,—*passim*. What means the birth of Euripides during that battle of Salamis where Sophocles, a youth, prays, and where Æschylus, in his manhood, fights? What means the birth of Alexander in the night which saw the burning of the temple of Ephesus? What tie between that temple and that man? Is it the conquering and radiant spirit of Europe which, destroyed under the form of the *chef-d'œuvre*, revives under the form of the hero? For do not forget that Ctesiphon is the Greek architect of the temple of Ephesus. We have mentioned just now the simultaneous disappearance of Shakespeare and Cervantes. Here is another case not less surprising. The day when Diogenes died at Corinth, Alexander died at Babylon. These two cynics, the one of the tub, the other of the sword, depart together; and Diogenes, longing to enjoy the immense unknown radiance, will again say to Alexander: "Stand out of my sunlight!"

What is the meaning of certain harmonies in the myths represented by divine men? What is this analogy between Hercules and Jesus which struck the Fathers of the Church, which made Sorel indignant, but edified Duperron, and which makes Alcides a kind of material mirror of Christ? Is there not a community of souls, and, unknown to them, a communication between the Greek legislator and the Hebrew legislator, creating at the same moment, without knowing each other, and without their suspecting the existence of each other, the first the Areopagus, the second the Sanhedrim? Strange resemblance between the jubilee of Moses and the jubilee of Lycurgus! What are these double paternities,—paternity of the body, paternity of the soul, like that of David for Solomon? Giddy heights, steeps, precipices.

He who looks too long into this sacred horror feels immensity racking his brain. What does the sounding-line give you when thrown into that mystery? What do you see? Conjectures quiver, doctrines shake, hypotheses float; all the human philosophy vacillates before the mournful blast rising from that chasm.

The expanse of the possible is, so to speak, under your eyes. The dream that you have in yourself, you discover it beyond yourself. All is indistinct. Confused white shadows are moving. Are they souls? One catches, in the depths below, a glimpse of vague archangels passing along; will they be men at some future day? Holding your head between your hands, you strive to see and to know. You are at the window looking into the unknown. On all sides the deep layers of effects and

causes, heaped one behind the other, wrap you with mist. The man who meditates not lives in blindness; the man who meditates lives in darkness. The choice between darkness and darkness, that is all we have. In that darkness, which is up to the present time nearly all our science, experience gropes, observation lies in wait, supposition moves about. If you gaze at it very often, you become *vates*. Vast religious meditation takes possession of you.

Every man has in him his Patmos. He is free to go or not to go on that frightful promontory of thought from which darkness is seen. If he goes not, he remains in the common life, with the common conscience, with the common virtue, with the common faith, or with the common doubt; and it is well. For the inward peace it is evidently the best. If he ascends to that peak, he is caught. The profound waves of the marvellous have appeared to him. No one sees with impunity that ocean. Henceforth he will be the thinker enlarged, magnified, but floating,—that is to say, the dreamer. He will partake of the poet and of the prophet. A certain quantity of him now belongs to darkness. The boundless enters into his life, into his conscience, into his virtue, into his philosophy. He becomes extraordinary in the eyes of other men, for his measure is different from theirs. He has duties which they have not. He lives in a sort of vague prayer, attaching himself, strangely enough, to an indefinite certainty which he calls God. He distinguishes in that twilight enough of the anterior life and enough of the ulterior life to seize these two ends of the dark thread, and with them to tie up his soul again. Who has drunk will drink; who has dreamed will dream. He will not give up that alluring abyss, that sounding of the fathomless, that indifference for the world and for life, that entrance into the forbidden, that effort to handle the impalpable and to see the invisible; he returns to them, he leans and bends over them; he takes one step forward, then two,—and thus it is that one penetrates into the impenetrable; and thus it is that one plunges into the boundless chasms of infinite meditation.

He who walks down them is a Kant; he who falls down them is a Swedenborg.

To keep one's own free will in that dilatation, is to be great. But, however great one may be, the problems cannot be solved. One may ply the fathomless with questions. Nothing more. As for the answers, they are there, but mingled with shadows. The huge lineaments of truth seem at times to appear for one moment, then go back, and are lost in the absolute. Of all those questions, that among them all which besets the intellect, that among them all which rends the heart, is the question of the soul.

Does the soul exist? Question the first. The persistency of the self is the thirst of man. Without the persistent self, all creation is for him but an immense *cui bono*? Listen to the astounding affirmation which bursts forth from all consciences. The whole sum of God that there is on the earth, within all men, condenses itself in a single cry,—to affirm the soul. And then, question the second: Are there great souls?

It seems impossible to doubt it. Why not great minds in humanity as well as great trees in the forest, as well as great peaks in the horizon? The great souls are seen as well as the great mountains. Then, they exist. But here the interrogation presses further; interrogation is anxiety: Whence come they? What are they? Who are they? Are these atoms more divine than others? This atom, for instance, which shall be endowed with irradiation here below, this one which shall be Thales, this one Æschylus, this one Plato, this one Ezekiel, this one Macchabœus, this one Apollonius of Tyana, this one Tertullian, this one Epictetus, this one Marcus Aurelius, this one Nestorius, this one Pelagius, this one Gama, this one Copernicus, this one Jean Huss, this one Descartes, this one Vincent de Paul, this one Piranesi, this one Washington, this one Beethoven, this one Garibaldi, this one John Brown,—all these atoms, souls having a sublime function among men, have they seen other worlds, and do they bring on earth the essence of those worlds? The master souls, the leading intellects, who sends them? Who determines their appearance? Who is judge of the actual want of humanity? Who chooses the souls? Who musters the atoms? Who ordains the departures? Who premeditates the arrivals? Does the atom conjunction, the atom universal, the atom binder of worlds, exist? Is not that the great soul?

To complete one universe by the other; to pour upon the too little of the one the too much of the other; to increase here liberty, there science, there the ideal; to communicate to the inferiors patterns of superior beauty; to exchange the effluvia; to bring the central fire to the planet; to harmonize the various worlds of the same system; to urge forward those which are behind; to mix the creations,—does not that mysterious function exist?

Is it not fulfilled, unknown to them, by certain elects, who, momentarily and during their earthly transit, partly ignore themselves? Is not the function of such or such atom, divine motive power called soul, to give movement to a solar man among earthly men? Since the floral atom exists, why should not the stellary atom exist? That solar man will be, in turn, the savant, the seer, the calculator, the thaumaturge, the navigator, the architect, the magian, the legislator, the philosopher, the prophet, the hero, the poet. The life of humanity will move

onward through them. The volution of civilization will be their task; that team of minds will drag the huge chariot. One being unyoked, the others will start again. Each completion of a century will be one stage on the journey. Never any solution of continuity. That which one mind will begin, another mind will finish, soldering phenomenon to phenomenon, sometimes without suspecting that welding process. To each revolution in the fact will correspond an adequate revolution in the ideas, and reciprocally. The horizon will not be allowed to extend to the right without stretching as much to the left. Men the most diverse, the most opposite, sometimes will adhere by unexpected parts; and in these adherences will burst forth the imperious logic of progress. Orpheus, Bouddha, Confucius, Zoroaster, Pythagoras, Moses, Manou, Mahomet, with many more, will be the links of the same chain. A Gutenberg discovering the method for the sowing of civilization, and the means for the ubiquity of thought, will be followed by a Christopher Columbus discovering a new field. A Christopher Columbus discovering a world will be followed by a Luther discovering a liberty. After Luther, innovator in the dogma, will come Shakespeare, innovator in art. One genius completes the other.

But not in the same region. The astronomer follows the philosopher; the legislator is the executor of the poet's wishes; the fighting liberator lends his assistance to the thinking liberator; the poet corroborates the statesman. Newton is the appendix to Bacon; Danton originates from Diderot; Milton confirms Cromwell; Byron supports Botzaris; Æschylus, before him, has assisted Miltiades. The work is mysterious even for the very men who perform it. Some are conscious of it, others not. At great distances, at intervals of centuries, the correlations manifest themselves, wonderful. The modification in human manners, begun by the religious revealer, will be completed by the philosophical reasoner, so that Voltaire follows up Jesus. Their work agrees and coincides. If this concordance rested with them, both would resist, perhaps,—the one, the divine man, indignant in his martyrdom, the other, the human man, humiliated in his irony; but that is so. Some one who is very high orders it in that way.

Yes, let us meditate on these vast obscurities. The characteristic of revery is to gaze at darkness so intently that it brings light out of it.

Humanity developing itself from the interior to the exterior is, properly speaking, civilization. Human intelligence becomes radiance, and step by step, wins, conquers, and humanizes matter. Sublime domestication! This labour has phases; and each of these phases, marking an age in progress, is opened or closed by one of those beings called geniuses. These missionary spirits, these legates of God, do they not carry in them a sort of partial solution of this question,

so abstruse, of free will? The apostolate, being an act of will, is related on one side to liberty, and on the other, being a mission, is related by predestination to fatality. The voluntary necessary. Such is the Messiah; such is Genius.

Now let us return,—for all questions which append to mystery form the circle, and one cannot get out of it,—let us return to our starting-point, and to our first question: What is a genius? Is it not perchance a cosmic soul, a soul imbued with a ray from the unknown? In what depths are such souls prepared? How long do they wait? What medium do they traverse? What is the germination which precedes the hatching? What is the mystery of the ante-birth? Where was this atom? It seems as if it was the point of intersection of all the forces. How come all the powers to converge and tie themselves into an indivisible unity in this sovereign intelligence? Who has bred this eagle? The incubation of the fathomless on genius, what an enigma! These lofty souls, momentarily belonging to earth, have they not seen something else? Is it for that reason that they arrive here with so many intuitions? Some of them seem full of the dream of a previous world. Is it thence that comes to them the scared wildness that they sometimes have? Is it that which inspires them with wonderful words? Is it that which gives them strange agitations? Is it thence that they derive the hallucination which makes them, so to speak, see and touch imaginary things and beings? Moses had his fiery thicket; Socrates his familiar demon; Mahomet his dove; Luther his goblin playing with his pen, and to whom he would say, "Be still, there!" Pascal his gaping chasm that he hid with a screen.

Many of those majestic souls are evidently conscious of a mission. They act at times as if they knew. They seem to have a confused certainty. They have it. They have it for the mysterious *ensemble*. They have it also for the detail. Jean Huss dying predicts Luther. He exclaims, "You burn the goose [Huss], but the swan will come." Who sends these souls? Who creates them? What is the law of their formation anterior and superior to life? Who provides them with force, patience, fecundation, will, passion? From what urn of goodness have they drawn sternness? In what region of the lightnings have they culled love? Each of these great newly arrived souls renews philosophy or art or science or poetry, and re-makes these worlds after its own image. They are as though impregnated with creation. At times a truth emanates from these souls which lights up the questions on which it falls. Some of these souls are like a star from which light would drip. From what wonderful source, then, do they proceed, that they are all different? Not one originates from the other, and yet they have this in common, that they all bring the infinite. Incommensurable and insoluble questions. That

does not stop the good pedants and the clever men from bridling up, and saying, while pointing with the finger at the sidereal group of geniuses on the heights of civilization: "You will have no more men such as those. They cannot be matched. There are no more of them. We declare to you that the earth has exhausted its contingent of master spirits. Now for decadence and general closing. We must make up our minds to it We shall have no more men of genius."—Ah, you have seen the bottom of the unfathomable, you!

CHAPTER II

No, Thou art not worn out. Thou hast not before thee the bourn, the limit, the term, the frontier. Thou has nothing to bound thee, as winter bounds summer, as lassitude the birds, as the precipice the torrent, as the cliff the ocean, as the tomb man. Thou art boundless. The "Thou shalt not go farther," is spoken *by* thee, and it is not said *of* thee. No, thou windest not a skein which diminishes, and the thread of which breaks; no, thou stoppest not short; no, thy quantity decreaseth not; no, thy thickness becometh not thinner; no, thy faculty miscarrieth not; no, it is not true that they begin to perceive in thy all-powerfulness that transparence which announces the end, and to get a glimpse behind thee of another thing besides thee. Another thing! And what then? The obstacle. The obstacle to whom? The obstacle to creation, the obstacle to the everlasting, the obstacle to the necessary! What a dream!

When thou hearest men say, "This is as far as God advances,—do not ask more of him; he starts from here, and stops there. In Homer, in Aristotle, in Newton, he has given you all that he had; leave him at rest now,—he is empty. God does not begin again; he could do that once, he cannot do it twice; he has spent himself altogether in this man,—enough of God does not remain to make a similar man;"—when thou hearest them say such things, if thou wast a man like them, thou wouldst smile in thy terrible depth; but thou art not in a terrible depth, and being goodness, thou hast no smile. The smile is but a passing wrinkle, unknown to the absolute.

Thou struck by a powerless chill; thou to leave off; thou to break down; thou to say "Halt!" Never. Thou shouldst be compelled to take breath after having created a man! No; whoever that man may be, thou art God. If this weak swarm of living beings, in presence of the unknown, must feel wonder and fear at something, it is not at the possibility of seeing the germ-seed dry up and the power of procreation become sterile; it is, O God, at the eternal unleashing of miracles. The hurricane

of miracles blows perpetually. Day and night the phenomena surge around us on all sides, and, not less marvellous, without disturbing the majestic tranquillity of the Being. This tumult is harmony.

The huge concentric waves of universal life are boundless. The starry sky that we study is but a partial apparition. We steal from the network of the Being but some links. The complication of the phenomenon, of which a glimpse can be caught, beyond our senses, only by contemplation and ecstasy, makes the mind giddy. The thinker who reaches so far, is, for other men, only a visionary. The necessary entanglement of the perceptible and of the imperceptible strikes the philosopher with stupor. This plenitude is required by thy all-powerfulness, which does not admit any blank. The permeation of universes into universes makes part of thy infinitude. Here we extend the word universe to an order of facts that no astronomer can reach. In the Cosmos that the vision spies, and which escapes our organs of flesh, the spheres enter into the spheres without deforming each other, the density of creations being different; so that, according to every appearance, with our world is amalgamated, in some inexplicable way, another world invisible to us, as we are invisible to it.

And thou, centre and place of all things, as though thou, the Being, couldst be exhausted! that the absolute serenities could, at certain moments, fear the want of means on the part of the Infinite! that there would come an hour when thou couldst no longer supply humanity with the lights which it requires! that mechanically unwearied, thou couldst be worn out in the intellectual and moral order! that it would be proper to say, "God is extinguished on this side!" No! no! no! O Father!

Phidias created does not stop you from making Michael Angelo. Michael Angelo completed, there still remains to thee the material for Rembrandt. A Dante does not tire thee. Thou art no more exhausted by a Homer than by a star. The auroras by the side of auroras, the indefinite renewing of meteors, the worlds above the worlds, the wonderful passage of these incandescent stars called comets, the geniuses and again the geniuses, Orpheus, then Moses, then Isaiah, then Æschylus, then Lucretius, then Tacitus, then Juvenal, then Cervantes and Rabelais, then Shakespeare, then Molière, then Voltaire, those who have been and those who will be,—that does not weary thee. Swarm of constellations! there is room in thy immensity.

SHAKESPEARE.—HIS GENIUS.

CHAPTER I.

"Shakespeare," says Forbes, "had neither the tragic talent nor the comic talent. His tragedy is artificial, and his comedy is but instinctive." Johnson confirms the verdict: "His tragedy is the result of industry, and his comedy the result of instinct." After Forbes and Johnson had contested his claim to drama, Green contested his claim to originality. Shakespeare is "a plagiarist;" Shakespeare is "a copyist;" Shakespeare "has invented nothing;" he is "a crow adorned with the plumes of others;" he pilfers Æschylus, Boccaccio, Bandello, Holinshed, Belleforest, Benoist de St. Maur; he pilfers Layamon, Robert of Gloucester, Robert of Wace, Peter of Langtoft, Robert Manning, John de Mandeville, Sackville, Spenser; he steals the "Arcadia" of Sidney; he steals the anonymous work called the "True Chronicle of King Leir;" he steals from Rowley in "The Troublesome Reign of King John" (1591), the character of the bastard Faulconbridge. Shakespeare pilfers Thomas Greene; Shakespeare pilfers Dekker and Chettle. Hamlet is not his;—Othello is not his; Timon of Athens is not his, nothing is his. As for Green, Shakespeare is for him not only "a blower of blank verses," a "shakescene," a *Johannes factotum* (allusion to his former position as call-boy and supernumerary); Shakespeare is a wild beast. Crow no longer suffices; Shakespeare is promoted to a tiger. Here is the text: "Tyger's heart wrapt in a player's hyde."^[1]

Thomas Rhymer judges "Othello:"—

"The moral of this story is certainly very instructive. It is a warning to good housewives to look after their linen."

Then the same Rhymer condescends to give up joking, and to take Shakespeare in earnest:—

"What edifying and useful impression can the audience receive from such poetry? To what can this poetry serve, unless it is to mislead our good sense, to throw our thoughts into disorder, to trouble our brain, to pervert our instincts, to crack our imaginations, to corrupt our taste, and to fill our heads with vanity, confusion, clatter, and nonsense?"

This was printed eighty years after the death of Shakespeare, in 1693. All the critics and all the connoisseurs were of one opinion.

Here are some of the reproaches unanimously addressed to Shakespeare: Conceits, play on words, puns; improbability, extravagance, absurdity; obscenity; puerility; bombast; emphasis, exaggeration; false glitter, pathos; far-fetched ideas, affected style; abuse of contrast and metaphor; subtilty; immorality; writing for the mob; pandering to the *canaille*; delighting in the horrible; want of grace; want of charm; overreaching his aim; having too much wit; having no wit; overdoing his works.

"This Shakespeare is a coarse and savage mind," says Lord Shaftesbury. Dryden adds, "Shakespeare is unintelligible." Mrs. Lennox gives Shakespeare this slap: "This poet alters historical truth." A German critic of 1680, Bentheim, feels himself disarmed, because, says he, "Shakespeare is a mind full of drollery." Ben Jonson, Shakespeare's protégé, relates this. "I recollect that the comedians mentioned to the honour of Shakespeare, that in his writings he never erased a line. I answered, 'Would to God he had erased a thousand.'" ^[2] This wish, moreover, was granted by the worthy publishers of 1623,—Blount and Jaggard. They struck out of Hamlet alone two hundred lines; they cut out two hundred and twenty lines of "King Lear." Garrick played at Drury Lane only the "King Lear" of Nahum Tate. Listen again to Rhymer: "'Othello' is a sanguinary farce without wit." Johnson adds, "'Julius Cæsar,' a cold tragedy, and lacking the power to move the public." "I think," says Warburton, in a letter to the Dean of St. Asaph, "that Swift has much more wit than Shakespeare, and that the comic in Shakespeare, altogether low as it is, is very inferior to the comic in Shadwell." As for the witches in "Macbeth," "Nothing equals," says that critic of the seventeenth century, Forbes, repeated by a critic of the nineteenth, "the absurdity of such a spectacle." Samuel Foote, the author of the "Young Hypocrite," makes this declaration: "The comic in Shakespeare is too heavy, and does not make one laugh. It is buffoonery without wit." At last, Pope, in 1725, finds a reason why Shakespeare wrote his dramas, and exclaims, "One must eat!"

After these words of Pope, one cannot understand with what object Voltaire, aghast about Shakespeare, writes: "Shakespeare whom the English take for a Sophocles, flourished about the time of Lopez [Lope, if you please, Voltaire] de Vega." Voltaire adds, "You are not ignorant that in 'Hamlet' the diggers prepare a grave, drinking, singing ballads, and cracking over the heads of dead people the jokes usual to men of their profession." And, concluding, he qualifies thus the whole scene,— "these follies." He characterizes Shakespeare's pieces by this word, "monstrous farces called tragedies," and completes the judgment by declaring that Shakespeare "has ruined the English theatre."

Marmontel comes to see Voltaire at Ferney. Voltaire is in bed, holding a book in his hand; all at once he rises up, throws the book away, stretches his thin legs across the bed, and cries to Marmontel, "Your Shakespeare is a barbarian!" "He is not my Shakespeare at all," replies Marmontel.

Shakespeare was an occasion for Voltaire to show his skill at the target Voltaire missed him rarely. Voltaire shot at Shakespeare as the peasants shoot at the goose. It was Voltaire who had commenced in France the attack against that barbarian. He nicknamed him the Saint Christopher of Tragic Poets. He said to Madame de Graffigny, "Shakespeare pour rire." He said to Cardinal de Bernis, "Compose pretty verses; deliver us, monsignor, from plagues, witches, the school of the King of Prussia, the Bull Unigenitus, the constitutionalists and the convulsionists, and from that ninny Shakespeare! *Libera nos, Domine*," The attitude of Fréron toward Voltaire has, in the eyes of posterity, as an attenuating circumstance, the attitude of Voltaire toward Shakespeare. Nevertheless, throughout the eighteenth century, Voltaire gives the law. The moment that Voltaire sneers at Shakespeare, Englishmen of wit, such as my Lord Marshal follow suit. Johnson confesses the ignorance and vulgarity of Shakespeare. Frederic II. comes in for a word also. He writes to Voltaire *à propos* of "Julius Cæsar:" "You have done well in re-casting, according to principles, the crude piece of that Englishman." Behold, then, where Shakespeare is in the last century. Voltaire insults him. La Harpe protects him: "Shakespeare himself, coarse as he was, was not without reading and knowledge."^[3]

In our days, the class of critics of whom we have just seen some samples, have not lost courage. Coleridge speaks of "Measure for Measure:" "a painful comedy," he hints. "Revolting," says Mr. Knight. "Disgusting," responds Mr. Hunter.

In 1804 the author of one of those idiotic *Biographies Universelles*, in which they contrive to relate the history of Calas without pronouncing the name of Voltaire, and to which governments, knowing what they are about, grant readily their patronage and subsidies, a certain Delandine feels himself called upon to be a judge, and to pass sentence on Shakespeare; and after having said that "Shakespear, which is pronounced Chekspir," had, in his youth, "stolen the deer of a nobleman," he adds: "Nature had brought together in the head of this poet the highest greatness we can imagine, with the lowest coarseness, without wit." Lately, we read the following words, written a short time ago by an eminent dolt who is living: "Second-rate authors and inferior poets, such as Shakespeare," etc.

[1]A Groatsworth of Wit. 1592.

[2] Works, vol IX. p. 175, Gifford's edition.

[3] La Harpe: *Introduction au Cours de Littérature*.

CHAPTER II.

Poet must at the same time, and necessarily, be a historian and a philosopher. Herodotus and Thales are included in Homer. Shakespeare, likewise, is this triple man. He is, besides, the painter, and what a painter!—the colossal painter. The poet in reality does more than relate; he exhibits. Poets have in them a reflector, observation, and a condenser, emotion; thence those grand luminous spectres which burst out from their brain, and which go on blazing forever on the gloomy human wall. These phantoms have life. To exist as much as Achilles, would be the ambition of Alexander. Shakespeare has tragedy, comedy, fairy-land, hymn, farce, grand divine laughter, terror and horror, and, to say all in one word, the drama. He touches the two poles. He belongs to Olympus and to the travelling booth. No possibility fails him.

When he grasps you, you are subdued. Do not expect from him any pity. His cruelty is pathetic. He shows you a mother,—Constance, mother of Arthur; and when he has brought you to that point of tenderness that your heart is as her heart, he kills her child. He goes farther in horror even than history, which is difficult. He does not content himself with killing Rutland and driving York to despair; he dips in the blood of the son the handkerchief with which he wipes the eyes of the father. He causes elegy to be choked by the drama, Desdemona by Othello. No attenuation in anguish. Genius is inexorable. It has its law and follows it. The mind also has its inclined planes, and these slopes determine its direction. Shakespeare glides toward the terrible. Shakespeare, Æschylus, Dante, are great streams of human emotion pouring from the depth of their cave the um of tears.

The poet is only limited by his aim; he considers nothing but the idea to be worked out; he does not recognize any other sovereignty, any other necessity but the idea; for, art emanating from the absolute, in art, as in the absolute, the end justifies the means. This is, it may be said parenthetically, one of those deviations from the ordinary terrestrial law which make lofty criticism muse and reflect, and which reveal to it the mysterious side of art. In art, above all, is visible the *quid divinum*. The poet moves in his work as providence in its own; he excites, astounds, strikes, then exalts or depresses, often in inverse ratio to what you

expected, diving into your soul through surprise. Now, consider. Art has, like the Infinite, a Because superior to all the *Why's*. Go and ask the wherefore of a tempest from the ocean, that great lyric. What seems to you odious or absurd has an inner reason for existing. Ask of Job why he scrapes the pus on his ulcer with a bit of glass, and of Dante why he sews with a thread of iron the eyelids of the larvas in purgatory, making the stitches trickle with fearful tears!^[1] Job continues to clean his sore with his broken glass and wipes it on his dunghheap, and Dante goes on his way. The same with Shakespeare.

His sovereign horrors reign, and force themselves upon you. He mingles with them, when he chooses, the charm, that august charm of the powerful, as superior to feeble sweetness, to slender attraction, to the charm of Ovid or of Tibullus, as the Venus of Milo to the Venus de Medici. The things of the unknown; the unfathomable metaphysical problems; the enigmas of the soul and of Nature, which is also a soul; the far-off intuitions of the eventual included in destiny; the amalgams of thought and event,—can be translated into delicate figures, and fill poetry with mysterious and exquisite types, the more delightful that they are rather sorrowful, somewhat invisible, and at the same time very real, anxious concerning the shadow which is behind them, and yet trying to please you. Profound grace does exist.

Prettiness combined with greatness is possible (it is found in Homer; Astyanax is a type of it); but the profound grace of which we speak is something more than this epic delicacy. It is linked to a certain amount of agitation, and means the infinite without expressing it. It is a kind of light and shade radiance. The modern men of genius alone have that depth in the smile which shows elegance and depth at the same time.

Shakespeare possesses this grace, which is the very opposite to the unhealthy grace, although it resembles it, emanating as it does likewise from the grave.

Sorrow,—the great sorrow of the drama, which is nothing else but human constitution carried into art,—envelops this grace and this horror.

Hamlet, doubt, is at the centre of his work; and at the two extremities, love,—Romeo and Othello, all the heart. There is light in the folds of the shroud of Juliet; yet nothing but darkness in the winding-sheet of Ophelia disdained and of Desdemona suspected. These two innocents, to whom love has broken faith, cannot be consoled. Desdemona sings the song of the willow under which the water bears Ophelia away. They are sisters without knowing each other, and kindred souls, although each has her separate drama. The willow trembles over

them both. In the mysterious chant of the calumniated who is about to die, floats the dishevelled shadow of the drowned one.

Shakespeare in philosophy goes at times deeper than Homer. Beyond Priam there is Lear; to weep at ingratitude is worse than weeping at death. Homer meets envy and strikes it with the sceptre; Shakespeare gives the sceptre to the envious, and out of Thersites creates Richard III. Envy is exposed in its nakedness all the better for being clothed in purple; its reason for existing is then visibly altogether in itself. Envy on the throne, what more striking!

Deformity in the person of the tyrant is not enough for this philosopher; he must have it also in the shape of the valet, and he creates Falstaff. The dynasty of common-sense, inaugurated in Panurge, continued in Sancho Panza, goes wrong and miscarries in Falstaff. The rock which this wisdom splits upon is, in reality, lowness. Sancho Panza, in combination with the ass, is embodied with ignorance. Falstaff-glutton, poltroon, savage, obscene, human face and stomach, with the lower parts of the brute—walks on the four feet of turpitude; Falstaff is the centaur man and pig.

Shakespeare is, above all, an imagination. Now,—and this is a truth to which we have already alluded, and which is well known to thinkers,—imagination is depth. No faculty of the mind goes and sinks deeper than imagination; it is the great diver. Science, reaching the lowest depths, meets imagination. In conic sections, in logarithms, in the differential and integral calculus, in the calculation of probabilities, in the infinitesimal calculus, in the calculations of sonorous waves, in the application of algebra to geometry, the imagination is the co-efficient of calculation, and mathematics becomes poetry. I have no faith in the science of stupid learned men.

The poet philosophizes because he imagines. That is why Shakespeare has that sovereign management of reality which enables him to have his way with it; and his very whims are varieties of the true,—varieties which deserve meditation. Does not destiny resemble a constant whim? Nothing more incoherent in appearance, nothing less connected, nothing worse as deduction. Why crown this monster, John? Why kill that child, Arthur? Why have Joan of Arc burned? Why Monk triumphant? Why Louis XV. happy? Why Louis XVI. punished? Let the logic of God pass. It is from that logic that the fancy of the poet is drawn. Comedy bursts forth in the midst of tears; the sob rises out of laughter; figures mingle and clash; massive forms, nearly animals, pass clumsily; larvas—women perhaps, perhaps smoke—float about; souls, libellulas of darkness, flies of the twilight,

quiver among all these black reeds that we call passions and events. At one pole Lady Macbeth, at the other Titania. A colossal thought, and an immense caprice.

What are the "Tempest," "Troilus and Cressida," "The Two Gentlemen of Verona," "The Merry Wives of Windsor," the "Midsummer Night's Dream," "The Winter's Tale?" They are fancy,—arabesque work. The arabesque in art is the same phenomenon as vegetation in Nature. The arabesque grows, increases, knots, exfoliates, multiplies, becomes green, blooms, branches, and creeps around every dream. The arabesque is endless; it has a strange power of extension and aggrandizement; it fills horizons, and opens up others; it intercepts the luminous deeds by innumerable intersections; and, if you mix the human figure with these entangled branches, the *ensemble* makes you giddy; it is striking. Behind the arabesque, and through its openings, all philosophy can be seen; vegetation lives; man becomes pantheist; a combination of infinite takes place in the finite; and before such work, in which are found the impossible and the true, the human soul trembles with an emotion obscure and yet supreme.

For all this, the edifice ought not to be overrun by vegetation, nor the drama by arabesque.

One of the characteristics of genius is the singular union of faculties the most distant. To draw an astragal like Ariosto, then to dive into souls like Pascal,—such is the poet Man's inner conscience belongs to Shakespeare; he surprises you with it constantly. He extracts from conscience every unforeseen contingency that it contains. Few poets surpass him in this psychical research. Many of the strangest peculiarities of the human mind are indicated by him. He skilfully makes us feel the simplicity of the metaphysical fact under the complication of the dramatic fact. That which the human creature does not acknowledge inwardly, the obscure thing that he begins by fearing and ends by desiring,—such is the point of junction and the strange place of meeting for the heart of virgins and the heart of murderers; for the soul of Juliet and the soul of Macbeth. The innocent fears and longs for love, just as the wicked one for ambition. Perilous kisses given on the sly to the phantom, smiling here, fierce there.

To all these prodigalities, analysis, synthesis, creation in flesh and bone, revery, fancy, science, metaphysics, add history,—here the history of historians, there the history of the tale; specimens of everything,—of the traitor, from Macbeth the assassin of his guest, up to Coriolanus, the assassin of his country; of the despot, from the intellectual tyrant Cæsar, to the bestial tyrant Henry VIII.; of the carnivorous, from the lion down to the usurer. One may say to Shylock: "Well

bitten, Jew!" And, in the background of this wonderful drama, on the desert heath, in the twilight, in order to promise crowns to murderers, three black outlines appear, in which Hesiod, through the vista of ages, perhaps recognizes the Parcae. Inordinate force, exquisite charm, epic ferocity, pity, creative faculty, gayety (that lofty gayety unintelligible to narrow understandings), sarcasm (the cutting lash for the wicked), star-like greatness, microscopic tenuity, boundless poetry, which has a zenith and a nadir; the *ensemble* vast, the detail profound,—nothing is wanting in this mind. One feels, on approaching the work of this man, the powerful wind which would burst forth from the opening of a whole world. The radiancy of genius on every side,—that is Shakespeare. "Totus in antithesi," says Jonathan Forbes.

[1]

And as the sun does not reach the blind, so the spirits of which I was just speaking have not the gift of heavenly light. An iron wire pierces and fastens together their eyelids, as it is done to the wild hawk in order to tame it.

—*Purgatory, chap. XIII.*

CHAPTER III.

One of the characteristics which distinguish men of genius from ordinary minds, is that they have a double reflection,—just as the carbuncle, according to Jerome Cardan, differs from crystal and glass in having a double refraction.

Genius and carbuncle, double reflection, double refraction; the same phenomenon in the moral and in the physical order.

Does this diamond of diamonds, the carbuncle, exist? It is a question. Alchemy says yes, chemistry searches. As for genius, it exists. It is sufficient to read one verse of Æschylus or Juvenal in order to find this carbuncle of the human brain.

This phenomenon of double reflection raises to the highest power in men of genius what rhetoricians call antithesis,—that is to say, the sovereign faculty of seeing the two sides of things.

I dislike Ovid, that proscribed coward, that lickster of bloody hands, that fawning cur of exile, that far-away flatterer disdained by the tyrant, and I hate the *bel esprit* of which Ovid is full; but I do not confound that *bel esprit* with the powerful antithesis of Shakespeare.

Complete minds having everything, Shakespeare contains Gongora as Michael Angelo contains Bernini; and there are on that subject ready-made sentences: "Michael Angelo is a mannerist, Shakespeare is antithetical." These are the formulas of the school; but it is the great question of contrast in art seen by the small side.

Totus in antithesi. Shakespeare is all in antithesis. Certainly, it is not very just to see all the man, and such a man, in one of his qualities. But, this reserve being made, let us observe that this saying, *Totus in antithesi*, which pretends to be a criticism, might be simply a statement. Shakespeare, in fact, has deserved, like all truly great poets, this praise,—that he is like creation. What is creation? Good and evil, joy and sorrow, man and woman, roar and song, eagle and vulture, lightning and ray, bee and drone, mountain and valley, love and hate, the medal and its reverse, beauty and ugliness, star and swine, high and low. Nature is the Eternal bifronted. And this antithesis, whence comes the antiphrasis, is found in all the habits of man; it is in fable, in history, in philosophy, in language. Are you the Furies, they call you Eumenides,—the Charming; do you kill your brothers, you are called Philadelphus; kill your father, they will call you Philopator; be a great general, they will call you *le petit caporal*. The antithesis of Shakespeare is universal antithesis, always and everywhere; it is the ubiquity of antinomy,—life and death, cold and heat, just and unjust, angel and demon, heaven and earth, flower and lightning, melody and harmony, spirit and flesh, high and low, ocean and envy, foam and slaver, hurricane and whistle, self and not-self, the objective and subjective, marvel and miracle, type and monster, soul and shadow. It is from this sombre palpable difference, from this endless ebb and flow, from this perpetual yes and no, from this irreducible opposition, from this immense antagonism ever existing, that Rembrandt obtains his chiaroscuro and Piranesi his vertiginous height.

Before removing this antithesis from art, commence by removing it from Nature.

CHAPTER IV.

"He is reserved and discreet. You may trust him; he will take no advantage. He has, above all, a very rare quality,—he is sober."

What is this? A recommendation for a domestic? No. It is the panegyric of a writer. A certain school, called "serious," has in our days hoisted this programme of poetry: sobriety. It seems that the only question should be to preserve

literature from indigestion. Formerly, the motto was "Prolificness and power;" to-day it is "tisane." You are in the resplendent garden of the Muses, where those divine blossoms of the mind that the Greeks called "tropes" blow in riot and luxuriance on every branch; everywhere the ideal image, everywhere the thought-flower, everywhere fruits, metaphors, golden apples, perfumes, colours, rays, strophes, wonders; touch nothing, be discreet. Whoever gathers nothing there proves himself a true poet. Be of the temperance society. A good critical book is a treatise on the dangers of drinking. Do you wish to compose the Iliad, put yourself on diet Ah, thou mayest well open thy eyes wide, old Rabelais!

Lyricism is heady, the beautiful intoxicates, greatness inebriates, the ideal causes giddiness; whoever proceeds from it is no longer in his right senses; when you have walked among the stars, you are capable of refusing a prefecture; you are no longer a sensible being; they might offer you a seat in the senate of Domitian and you would refuse it; you no longer give to Cæsar what is due to Cæsar; you have reached that point of mental alienation that you will not even salute the Lord Incitatus, consul and horse. See what is the result of your having drunk in that shocking place, the Emyrean! You become proud, ambitious, disinterested. Now, be sober. It is forbidden to haunt the tavern of the sublime.

Liberty means libertinism. To restrain yourself is well, to geld yourself is better.

Pass your life in restraining yourself.

Observe sobriety, decency, respect for authority, an irreproachable toilet. There is no poetry unless it be fashionably dressed. An uncombed savannah, a lion which does not pare its nails, an unsifted torrent, the navel of the sea which allows itself to be seen, the cloud which forgets itself so far as to show Aldebaran—oh, shocking! The wave foams on the rock, the cataract vomits into the gulf, Juvenal spits on the tyrant. Fie!

We like not enough better than too much. No exaggeration. Henceforth the rose-tree shall be compelled to count its roses. The prairie shall be requested not to be so prodigal of daisies; the spring shall be ordered to restrain itself. The nests are rather too prolific. The groves are too rich in warblers. The Milky Way must condescend to number its stars; there are a good many.

Take example from the big Mullen Serpentaria of the Botanical Garden, which blooms only every fifty years. That is a flower truly respectable.

A true critic of the sober school is that garden-keeper who, to this question, "Have you any nightingales in your trees?" replied, "Ah, don't mention it! For the whole month of May these ugly beasts have been doing nothing but bark."

M. Suard gave to Marie Joseph Chénier this certificate: "His style has the great merit of not containing comparisons." In our days we have seen that singular eulogium reproduced. This reminds us that a great professor of the Restoration, indignant at the comparisons and figures which abound in the prophets, crushes Isaiah, Daniel, and Jeremiah, with this profound apothegm: "The whole Bible is in 'like' (*comme*)."

Another, a greater professor still, was the author of this saying, which is still celebrated at the normal school: "I throw Juvenal back to the romantic dunghill." Of what crime was Juvenal guilty? Of the same as Isaiah,—namely, of readily expressing the idea by the image. Shall we return, little by little, in the walks of learning, to the metonymy term of chemistry, and to the opinion of Pradon on metaphor?

One would suppose, from the demands and clamours of the doctrinary school, that it has to supply, at its own expense, all the consumption of metaphors and figures that poets can make, and that it feels itself ruined by spendthrifts such as Pindar, Aristophanes, Ezekiel, Plautus, and Cervantes. This school puts under lock and key passions, sentiments, the human heart, reality, the ideal, life. Frightened, it looks at the men of genius, hides from them everything, and says, "How greedy they are!" Therefore it has invented for writers this superlative praise: "He is temperate."

On all these points sacerdotal criticism fraternizes with doctrinal criticism. The prude and the devotee help each other.

A curious bashful fashion tends to prevail. We blush at the coarse manner in which grenadiers meet death; rhetoric has for heroes modest vine-leaves which they call periphrases; it is agreed that the bivouac speaks like the convent, the talk of the guardroom is a calumny; a veteran drops his eyes at the recollection of Waterloo, and the Cross of Honour is given to these modest eyes. Certain sayings which are in history have no right to be historical; and it is well understood, for example, that the gendarme who fired a pistol at Robespierre at the Hôtel-de-Ville was called *La-garde-meurt-et-ne-se-rend-pas*.

One salutary reaction is the result of the combined effort of two critics watching over public tranquillity. This reaction has already produced some specimens of poets,—steady, well-bred, prudent, whose style always keeps good time; who never indulge in an orgy with all those mad things, ideas; who are never met at the

corner of a wood, *solus cum sola*, with that Bohemian, Revery; who are incapable of having connection either with Imagination, a dangerous vagabond, or with Inspiration, a Bacchante, or with Fancy, a *lorette*; who have never in their life given a kiss to that beggarly chit, the Muse; who do not sleep out, and who are honoured with the esteem of their door-keeper, Nicholas Boileau. If Polyhymnia goes by with her hair rather flowing, what a scandal! Quick, they call the hairdresser. M. de la Harpe comes hastily. These two sister critics, the doctrinal and the sacerdotal, undertake to educate. They bring up writers from the birth. They keep houses to wean them, a boarding-school for juvenile reputations.

Thence a discipline, a literature, an art. Dress right, fall into line! Society must be saved in literature as well as in politics. Every one knows that poetry is a frivolous, insignificant thing, childishly occupied in seeking rhymes, barren, vain; therefore nothing is more formidable. It behoves us to well secure the thinkers. Lie down, dangerous beast! What is a poet? For honour, nothing; for persecution, everything.

This race of writers requires repression. It is useful to have recourse to the secular arm. The means vary. From time to time a good banishment is expedient. The list of exiled writers opens with Æschylus, and does not close with Voltaire. Each century has its link in this chain. But there must be at least a pretext for exile, banishment, and proscription. That cannot apply to all cases. It is rather unmanageable; it is important to have a lighter weapon for every-day skirmishing. A State criticism, duly sworn in and accredited, can render service. To organize the persecution of writers by means of writers is not a bad thing. To entrap the pen by the pen is ingenious. Why not have literary policemen?

Good taste is a precaution taken by good order. Sober writers are the counterpart of prudent electors. Inspiration is suspected of love for liberty. Poetry is rather outside of legality; there is, therefore, an official art, the offspring of official criticism.

A whole special rhetoric proceeds from those premises. Nature has in that particular art but a narrow entrance, and goes in through the side door. Nature is infected with demagogy. The elements are suppressed as being bad company, and making too much uproar. The equinox is guilty of breaking into reserved grounds; the squall is a nightly row. The other day, at the School of Fine Arts, a pupil-painter having caused the wind to lift up the folds of a mantle during a storm, a local professor, shocked at this lifting up, said, "The style does not admit of wind."

After all, reaction does not despair. We get on; some progress is accomplished. A ticket of confession sometimes gains admittance for its bearer into the Academy. Jules Janin, Théophile Gautier, Paul de Saint-Victor, Littré, Renan, please to recite your creed.

But that does not suffice; the evil is deep-rooted. The ancient Catholic society, and the ancient legitimate literature, are threatened. Darkness is in peril To war with new generations! to war with the modern spirit! and down upon Democracy, the daughter of Philosophy!

Cases of rabidness—that is to say, the works of genius—are to be feared. Hygienic prescriptions are renewed. The public high-road is evidently badly watched. It appears that there are some poets wandering about. The prefect of police, a negligent man, allows some spirits to rove about. What is Authority thinking of? Let us take care. Intellects can be bitten; there is danger. It is certain, evident. It is rumoured that Shakespeare has been met without a muzzle on.

This Shakespeare without a muzzle is the present translation.^[1]

[1]The Complete Works of Shakespeare, translated by François Victor Hugo.

CHAPTER V.

If ever a man was undeserving of the good character of "he is sober," it is most certainly William Shakespeare. Shakespeare is one of the worst rakes that serious æsthetics ever had to lord over.

Shakespeare is fertility, force, exuberance, the overflowing breast, the foaming cup, the brimful tub, the overrunning sap, the overflowing lava, the whirlwind scattering germs, the universal rain of life, everything by thousands, everything by millions, no reticence, no binding, no economy, the inordinate and tranquil prodigality of the creator. To those who feel the bottom of their pocket, the inexhaustible seems insane. Will it stop soon? Never. Shakespeare is the sower of dazzling wonders. At every turn, the image; at every turn, contrast; at every turn, light and darkness.

The poet, we have said, is Nature. Subtle, minute, keen, microscopical like Nature; immense. Not discreet, not reserved, not sparing. Simply magnificent. Let us explain this word, *simple*.

Sobriety in poetry is poverty; simplicity is grandeur. To give to each thing the quantity of space which fits it, neither more nor less, is simplicity. Simplicity is justice. The whole law of taste is in that. Each thing put in its place and spoken with its own word. On the only condition that a certain latent equilibrium is maintained and a certain mysterious proportion preserved, simplicity may be found in the most stupendous complication, either in the style, or in the *ensemble*. These are the arcana of great art. Lofty criticism alone, which takes its starting-point from enthusiasm, penetrates and comprehends these learned laws. Opulence, profusion, dazzling radiancy, may be simplicity. The sun is simple.

Such simplicity does not evidently resemble the simplicity recommended by Le Batteux, the Abbé d'Aubignac, and Father Bouhours.

Whatever may be the abundance, whatever may be the entanglement, even if perplexing, confused, and inextricable, all that is true is simple. A root is simple.

That simplicity which is profound is the only one that art recognizes.

Simplicity, being true, is artless. Artlessness is the characteristic of truth. Shakespeare's simplicity is the great simplicity. He is foolishly full of it. He ignores the small simplicity.

The simplicity which is impotence, the simplicity which is meagreness, the simplicity which is short-winded, is a case for pathology. It has nothing to do with poetry. An order for the hospital suits it better than a ride on the hippogriff.

I admit that the hump of Thersites is simple; but the breastplates of Hercules are simple also. I prefer that simplicity to the other.

The simplicity which belongs to poetry may be as bushy as the oak. Does the oak by chance produce on you the effect of a Byzantine and of a refined being? Its innumerable antitheses,—gigantic trunk and small leaves, rough bark and velvet mosses, reception of rays and shedding of shade, crowns for heroes and fruit for swine,—are they marks of affectation, corruption, subtlety and bad taste? Could the oak be too witty? Could the oak belong to the Hôtel Rambouillet? Could the oak be a *précieux ridicule*? Could the oak be tainted with Gongorism? Could the oak belong to the age of decadence? Is by chance complete simplicity, *sancta simplicitas*, condensed in the cabbage?

Refinement, excess of wit, affectation, Gongorism,—that is what they have hurled at Shakespeare's head. They say that those are the faults of littleness, and they hasten to reproach the giant with them.

But then this Shakespeare respects nothing, he goes straight on, putting out of breath those who wish to follow; he strides over proprieties; he overthrows Aristotle; he spreads havoc among the Jesuits, methodists, the Purists, and the Puritans; he puts Loyola to flight, and upsets Wesley; he is valiant, bold, enterprising, militant, direct. His inkstand smokes like a crater. He is always laborious, ready, spirited, disposed, going forward. Pen in hand, his brow blazing, he goes on driven by the demon of genius. The stallion abuses; there are he-mules passing by to whom this is offensive. To be prolific is to be aggressive. A poet like Isaiah, like Juvenal, like Shakespeare, is, in truth, exorbitant. By all that is holy! some attention ought to be paid to others; one man has no right to everything. What! always virility, inspiration everywhere, as many metaphors as the prairie, as many antitheses as the oak, as many contrasts and depths as the universe; what! forever generation, hatching, hymen, parturition, vast ensemble, exquisite and robust detail, living communion, fecundation, plenitude, production! It is too much; it infringes the rights of human geldings.

For nearly three centuries Shakespeare, this poet all brimming with virility, has been looked upon by sober critics with that discontented air that certain bereaved spectators must have in the seraglio.

Shakespeare has no reserve, no discretion, no limit, no blank. What is wanting in him is that he wants nothing. No box for savings, no fast-day with him. He overflows like vegetation, like germination, like light, like flame. Yet, it does not hinder him from thinking of you, spectator or reader, from preaching to you, from giving you advice, from being your friend, like any other kind-hearted La Fontaine, and from rendering you small services. You can warm your hands at the conflagration he kindles.

Othello, Romeo, Iago, Macbeth, Shylock, Richard III., Julius Cæsar, Oberon, Puck, Ophelia, Desdemona, Juliet, Titania, men, women, witches, fairies, souls,—Shakespeare is the grand distributor; take, take, take, all of you! Do you want more? Here is Ariel, Parolles, Macduff, Prospero, Viola, Miranda, Caliban. More yet? Here is Jessica, Cordelia, Cressida, Portia, Brabantio, Polonius, Horatio, Mercutio, Imogene, Pandarus of Troy, Bottom, Theseus. *Ecce Deus!* It is the poet, he offers himself: who will have me? He gives, scatters, squanders himself; he is never empty. Why? He cannot be. Exhaustion with him is impossible. There is in

him something of the fathomless. He fills up again, and spends himself; then recommences. He is the bottomless treasury of genius.

In license and audacity of language Shakespeare equals Rabelais, whom, a few days ago, a swan-like critic called a swine.

Like all lofty minds in full riot of Omnipotence, Shakespeare decants all Nature, drinks it, and makes you drink it. Voltaire reproached him for his drunkenness, and was quite right. Why on earth, we repeat why has this Shakespeare such a temperament? He does not stop, he does not feel fatigue, he is without pity for the poor weak stomachs that are candidates for the Academy. The gastritis called "good taste," he does not labour under it. He is powerful. What is this vast intemperate song that he sings through ages,—war-song, drinking-song, love-ditty,—which passes from King Lear to Queen Mab, and from Hamlet to Falstaff, heart-rending at times as a sob, grand as the Iliad? "I have the lumbago from reading Shakespeare," said M. Auger.

His poetry has the sharp perfume of honey made by the vagabond bee without a hive. Here prose, there verse; all forms, being but receptacles for the idea, suit him. This poetry weeps and laughs. The English tongue, a language little formed, now assists, now harms him, but everywhere the deep mind gushes forth translucent Shakespeare's drama proceeds with a kind of distracted rhythm. It is so vast that it staggers; it has and gives the vertigo; but nothing is so solid as this excited grandeur. Shakespeare, shuddering, has in himself the winds, the spirits, the philters, the vibrations, the fluctuations of transient breezes, the obscure penetration of effluvia, the great unknown sap. Thence his agitation, in the depth of which is repose. It is this agitation in which Goethe is wanting, wrongly praised for his impassiveness, which is inferiority. This agitation, all minds of the first order have it. It is in Job, in Æschylus, in Alighieri. This agitation is humanity. On earth the divine must be human. It must propose to itself its own enigma and feel disturbed about it. Inspiration being prodigy, a sacred stupor mingles with it. A certain majesty of mind resembles solitudes and is blended with astonishment. Shakespeare, like all great poets, like all great things, is absorbed by a dream. His own vegetation astounds him; his own tempest appals him. It seems at times as if Shakespeare terrified Shakespeare. He shudders at his own depth. This is the sign of supreme intellects. It is his own vastness which shakes him and imparts to him unaccountable huge oscillations. There is no genius without waves. An inebriated savage it may be. He has the wildness of the virgin forest; he has the intoxication of the high sea.

Shakespeare (the condor alone gives some idea of such gigantic gait) departs, arrives, starts again, mounts, descends, hovers, dives, sinks, rushes, plunges into the depths below, plunges into the depths above. He is one of those geniuses that God purposely leaves unbridled, so that they may go headlong and in full flight into the infinite.

From time to time comes on this globe one of these spirits. Their passage, as we have said, renews art, science, philosophy, or society.

They fill a century, then disappear. Then it is not one century alone that their light illumines, it is humanity from one end to another of time; and it is perceived that each of these men was the human mind itself contained whole in one brain, and coming, at a given moment, to give on earth an impetus to progress.

These supreme spirits, once life achieved and the work completed, go in death to rejoin the mysterious group, and are probably at home in the infinite.

BOOK II.

SHAKESPEARE.—HIS WORK.—THE CULMINATING POINTS.

CHAPTER I.

The characteristic of men of genius of the first order is to produce each a peculiar model of man. All bestow on humanity its portrait,—some laughing, some weeping, others pensive. These last are the greatest. Plautus laughs, and gives to man Amphitryon; Rabelais laughs, and gives to man Gargantua; Cervantes laughs, and gives to man Don Quixote; Beaumarchais laughs, and gives to man Figaro; Molière weeps, and gives to man Alceste; Shakespeare dreams, and gives to man Hamlet; Æschylus meditates, and gives to man Prometheus. The others are great; Æschylus and Shakespeare are immense.

These portraits of humanity, left to humanity as a last farewell by those passers-by, the poets, are rarely flattered, always exact, striking likenesses. Vice, or folly, or virtue, is extracted from the soul and stamped on the visage. The tear congealed becomes a pearl; the smile petrified ends by looking like a menace; wrinkles are the furrows of wisdom; some frowns are tragic. This series of models of man is the permanent lesson for generations; each century adds in some figures,—sometimes done in full light and strong relief, like Macette, Célimène,

Tartuffe, Turcaret, and the Nephew of Rameau; sometimes simple profiles, like Gil Bias, Manon Lescaut, Clarissa Harlowe, and Candide.

God creates by intuition; man creates by inspiration, strengthened by observation. This second creation, which is nothing else but divine action carried out by man, is what is called genius.

The poet stepping into the place of destiny; an invention of men and events so strange, so true to nature, and so masterly that certain religious sects hold it in horror as an encroachment upon Providence, and call the poet "the liar;" the conscience of man, taken in the act and placed in a medium which it combats, governs or transforms,—such is the drama. And there is in this something superior. This handling of the human soul seems a kind of equality with God,—equality, the mystery of which is explained when we reflect that God is within man. This equality is identity. Who is our conscience? He. And He counsels good acts. Who is our intelligence? He. And He inspires the *chef-d'œuvre*.

God may be there, but it removes nothing, as we have proved, from the sourness of critics; the greatest minds are those which are most brought into question. It even sometimes happens that true intellects attack genius; the inspired, strangely enough, do not recognize inspiration. Erasmus, Bayle, Scaliger, St. Evremond, Voltaire, many of the Fathers of the Church, whole families of philosophers, the whole School of Alexandria, Cicero, Horace, Lucian, Plutarch, Josephus, Dion Chrysostom, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Philostratus, Metrodorus of Lampsacus, Plato, Pythagoras, have severally criticised Homer. In this enumeration we omit Zoilus. Men who deny are not critics. Hatred is not intelligence. To insult is not to discuss. Zoilus, Mævius, Cecchi, Green, Avellaneda, William Lauder, Visé, Fréron,—no cleansing of these names is possible. These men have wounded the human race through her men of genius; these wretched hands forever retain the colour of the mud that they have thrown.

And these men have not even either the sad renown that they seem to have acquired by right, or the whole quantity of shame that they have hoped for. One scarcely knows that they have existed. They are half forgotten,—a greater humiliation than to be wholly forgotten. With the exception of two or three among them who have become by-words of contempt, despicable owls, nailed up for an example, all these wretched names are unknown. An obscure notoriety follows their equivocal existence. Look at this Clement, who had called himself the "hypercritic," and whose profession it was to bite and denounce Diderot; he disappears, and is confounded, although born at Geneva, with Clement of Dijon,

confessor to Mesdames; with David Clement, author of the "Bibliothèque Curieuse;" with Clement of Baize, Benedictine of St. Maur; and with Clement d'Ascaïn, Capuchin, definator and provincial of Béarn. What avails it him to have declared that the work of Diderot is but an "obscure verbiage," and to have died mad at Charenton, to be afterward submerged in four or five unknown Clements? In vain did Famiën Strada rabidly attack Tacitus; one scarcely knows him now from Fabien Spada, called *L'Epée de Bois*, the jester of Sigismond Augustus. In vain did Cecchi vilify Dante; we are not certain whether his name was not Cecco. In vain did Green fasten on Shakespeare; he is now confounded with Greene. Avellaneda, the "enemy" of Cervantes, is perhaps Avellanedo. Lauder, the slanderer of Milton, is perhaps Leuder. The unknown De Visé, who tormented Molière, turns out to be a certain Donneau; he had surnamed himself De Visé, through a taste for nobility. Those men relied, in order to create for themselves a little *éclat*, on the greatness of those whom they outraged. But no, they have remained obscure. These poor insulters did not get their salary. Contempt has failed them. Let us pity them.

CHAPTER II.

Let us add that calumny loses its labour. Then what purpose can it serve? Not even an evil one. Do you know anything more useless than the sting which does not sting?

Better still. This sting is beneficial. In a given time it is found that calumny, envy, and hatred, thinking to labour against, have worked in aid of truth. Their insults bring fame, their blackening makes illustrious. They succeed only in mingling with glory an outcry which increases it.

Let us continue.

So, each of the men of genius tries on in his turn this immense human mask; and such is the strength of the soul which they cause to pass through the mysterious aperture of the eyes, that this look changes the mask, and, from terrible, makes it comic, then pensive, then grieved, then young and smiling, then decrepit, then sensual and gluttonous, then religious, then outrageous; and it is Cain, Job, Atreus, Ajax, Priam, Hecuba, Niobe, Clytemnestra, Nausicaa, Pistoclerus, Grumio, Davus, Pasicompsa, Chimène, Don Arias, Don Diego, Mudarra, Richard III., Lady Macbeth, Desdemona, Juliet, Romeo, Lear, Sancho Panza, Pantagruel,

Panurge, Arnolphe, Dandin Sganarelle, Agnes, Rosine, Victorine, Basile, Almaviva, Cherubin, Manfred.

From the direct divine creation proceeds Adam, the prototype. From the indirect divine creation,—that is to say, from the human creation,—proceed other Adams, the types.

A type does not produce any man in particular; it cannot be exactly superposed upon any individual; it sums up and concentrates under one human form a whole family of characters and minds. A type is no abridgment; it is a condensation. It is not one, it is all Alcibiades is but Alcibiades, Petronius is but Petronius, Bassompierre is but Bassompierre, Buckingham is but Buckingham, Fronsac is but Fronsac, Lauzun is but Lauzun; but take Lauzun, Fronsac, Buckingham, Bassompierre, Petronius, and Alcibiades, and pound them in the mortar of imagination, and from that process you have a phantom more real than them all,—Don Juan. Take the usurers one by one; no one of them is that fierce merchant of Venice, crying, "Go, Tubal, fee me an officer, bespeak him a fortnight before; I will have the heart of him if he forfeit." Take all the usurers together; from the crowd of them comes a total,—Shylock. Sum up usury, you have Shylock. The metaphor of the people, who are never mistaken, confirms, without knowing it, the inventions of the poet; and while Shakespeare makes Shylock, it creates the *gripe-all*. Shylock is the Jewish bargaining. He is also Judaism; that is to say, his whole nation,—the high as well as the low, faith as well as fraud; and it is because he sums up a whole race, such as oppression has made it, that Shylock is great. Jews, even those of the Middle Ages, might with reason say that not one of them is Shylock. Men of pleasure may with reason say that not one of them is Don Juan. No leaf of the orange-tree when chewed gives the flavour of the orange, yet there is a deep affinity, an identity of roots, a sap rising from the same source, the sharing of the same subterraneous shadow before life. The fruit contains the mystery of the tree, and the type contains the mystery of the man. Hence the strange vitality of the type. For—and this is the prodigy—the type lives. If it were but an abstraction, men would not recognize it, and would allow this shadow to pass by. The tragedy termed classic makes larvæ; the drama creates types. A lesson which is a man; a myth with a human face so plastic that it looks at you, and that its look is a mirror; a parable which warns you; a symbol which cries out "Beware!" an idea which is nerve, muscle, and flesh, and which has a heart to love, bowels to suffer, eyes to weep, and teeth to devour or laugh, a psychical conception with the relief of actual fact, and which, if it bleeds, drops real blood,—that is the type. O power of true poetry! Types are beings. They breathe,

palpitate, their steps are heard on the floor, they exist. They exist with an existence more intense than that of any creature thinking himself living there in the street. These phantoms have more density than man. There is in their essence that amount of eternity which belongs to *chefs-d'œuvre*, and which makes Trimalcion live, while M. Romieu is dead.

Types are cases foreseen by God; genius realizes them. It seems that God prefers to teach man a lesson through man, in order to inspire confidence. The poet is on the pavement of the living; he speaks to them nearer to their ear. Thence the efficacy of types. Man is a premise, the type the conclusion; God creates the phenomenon, genius puts a name on it; God creates the miser only, genius Harpagon; God creates the traitor only, genius makes Iago; God creates the coquette, genius makes Célimène; God creates the citizen only, genius makes Chrysale; God creates the king only, genius makes Grandgousier. Sometimes, at a given moment, the type proceeds complete from some unknown partnership of the mass of the people with a great natural comedian, involuntary and powerful realizer; the crowd is a mid-wife. In an epoch which bears at one of its extremities Talleyrand, and at another Chodruc-Duclos, springs up suddenly, in a flash of lightning, under the mysterious incubation of the theatre, that spectre, Robert Macaire.

Types go and come firmly in art and in Nature. They are the ideal realized. The good and the evil of man are in these figures. From each of them results, in the eyes of the thinker, a humanity.

As we have said before, so many types, so many Adams. The man of Homer, Achilles, is an Adam; from him comes the species of the slayers: the man of Æschylus, Prometheus, is an Adam; from him comes the race of the fighters: Shakespeare's man, Hamlet, is an Adam; to him belongs the family of the dreamers. Other Adams, created by poets, incarnate, this one passion, another duty, another reason, another conscience, another the fall, another the ascension. Prudence, drifting to trepidation, goes on from the old man Nestor to the old man Géronte. Love, drifting to appetite, goes on from Daphne to Lovelace. Beauty, entwined with the serpent, goes from Eve to Melusina. The types begin in Genesis, and a link of their chain passes through Restif de la Bretonne and Vadé. The lyric suits them, Billingsgate is not unbecoming to them. They speak in country dialects by the mouth of Gros-René; and in Homer they say to Minerva, holding them by the hair of the head: "What dost thou want with me, goddess?"

A surprising exception has been conceded to Dante. The man of Dante is Dante. Dante has, so to speak, created himself a second time in his poem. He is his own type; his Adam is himself. For the action of his poem he has sought out no one. He has only taken Virgil as supernumerary. Moreover, he made himself epic at once, without even giving himself the trouble to change his name. What he had to do was in fact simple,—to descend into hell and remount to heaven. What good was it to trouble himself for so little? He knocks gravely at the door of the infinite and says, "Open! I am Dante."

CHAPTER III.

Two marvellous Adams, we have just said, are the man of Æschylus, Prometheus, and the man of Shakespeare, Hamlet.

Prometheus is action. Hamlet is hesitation.

In Prometheus the obstacle is exterior; in Hamlet it is interior.

In Prometheus the will is securely nailed down by nails of brass and cannot get loose; besides, it has by its side two watchers,—Force and Power. In Hamlet the will is more tied down yet; it is bound by previous meditation,—the endless chain of the undecided. Try to get out of yourself if you can! What a Gordian knot is our reverie! Slavery from within, that is slavery indeed. Scale this enclosure, "to dream!" escape, if you can, from this prison, "to love!" The only dungeon is that which walls conscience in. Prometheus, in order to be free, has but a bronze collar to break and a god to conquer; Hamlet must break and conquer himself. Prometheus can raise himself upright, if he only lifts a mountain; to raise himself up, Hamlet must lift his own thoughts. If Prometheus plucks the vulture from his breast, all is said; Hamlet must tear Hamlet from his breast. Prometheus and Hamlet are two naked livers; from one runs blood, from the other doubt.

We are in the habit of comparing Æschylus and Shakespeare by Orestes and Hamlet, these two tragedies being the same drama. Never in fact was a subject more identical. The learned mark an analogy between them; the impotent, who are also the ignorant, the envious, who are also the imbeciles, have the petty joy of thinking they establish a plagiarism. It is after all a possible field for erudition and for serious criticism. Hamlet walks behind Orestes, parricide through filial love. This easy comparison, rather superficial than deep, strikes us less than the mysterious confronting of those two enchained beings, Prometheus and Hamlet.

Let us not forget that the human mind, half divine as it is, creates from time to time superhuman works. These superhuman works of man are, moreover, more numerous than it is thought, for they entirely fill art. Out of poetry, where marvels abound, there is in music Beethoven, in sculpture Phidias, in architecture Piranesi, in painting Rembrandt, and in painting, architecture, and sculpture Michael Angelo. We pass many over, and not the least.

Prometheus and Hamlet are among those more than human works.

A kind of gigantic determination; the usual measure exceeded; greatness everywhere; that which astounds ordinary intellects demonstrated when necessary by the improbable; destiny, society, law, religion, brought to trial and judgment in the name of the Unknown, the abyss of the mysterious equilibrium; the event treated as a *rôle* played out, and, on occasion, hurled as a reproach against Fatality or Providence; passion, terrible personage, going and coming in man; the audacity and sometimes the insolence of reason; the haughty forms of a style at ease in all extremes, and at the same time a profound wisdom; the gentleness of the giant; the goodness of a softened monster; an ineffable dawn which cannot be accounted for and which lights up everything,—such are the signs of those supreme works. In certain poems there is starlight.

This light is in Æschylus and in Shakespeare.

CHAPTER IV.

Nothing can be more fiercely wild than Prometheus stretched on the Caucasus. It is gigantic tragedy. The old punishment that our ancient laws of torture call extension, and which Cartouche escaped because of a hernia, Prometheus undergoes it; only, the wooden horse is a mountain. What is his crime? Right. To characterize right as crime, and movement as rebellion, is the immemorial talent of tyrants. Prometheus has done on Olympus what Eve did in Eden,—he has taken a little knowledge. Jupiter, identical with Jehovah (*Iovi, Iova*), punishes this temerity,—the desire to live. The Eginetic traditions, which localize Jupiter, deprive him of the cosmic personality of the Jehovah of Genesis. The Greek Jupiter, bad son of a bad father, in rebellion against Saturn, who has himself been a rebel against Coelus, is a *parvenu*. The Titans are a sort of elder branch, which has its legitimists, of whom Æschylus, the avenger of Prometheus, was one. Prometheus is right conquered. Jupiter has, as is always the case, consummated the usurpation of power by the punishment of right. Olympus claims the aid of

Caucasus. Prometheus is fastened there to the *carcan*. There is the Titan, fallen, prostrate, nailed down. Mercury, the friend of everybody, comes to give him such counsel as follows generally the perpetration of *coups d'état*. Mercury is the type of cowardly intellect, of every possible vice, but of vice full of wit. Mercury, the god of vice, serves Jupiter the god of crime. This fawning in evil is still marked to-day by the veneration of the pickpocket for the assassin. There is something of that law in the arrival of the diplomatist behind the conqueror. The *chefs-d'œuvre* are immense in this, that they are eternally present to the deeds of humanity. Prometheus on the Caucasus, is Poland after 1772; France after 1815; the Revolution after Brumaire. Mercury speaks; Prometheus listens but little. Offers of amnesty miscarry when it is the victim who alone should have the right to grant pardon. Prometheus, though conquered, scorns Mercury standing proudly above him, and Jupiter standing above Mercury, and Destiny standing above Jupiter. Prometheus jests at the vulture which gnaws at him; he shrugs disdainfully his shoulders as much as his chain allows. What does he care for Jupiter, and what good is Mercury? There is no hold on this haughty sufferer. The scorching thunderbolt causes a smart, which is a constant call upon pride. Meanwhile tears flow around him, the earth despairs, the women-clouds (the fifty Oceanides), come to worship the Titan, the forests scream, wild beasts groan, winds howl, the waves sob, the elements moan, the world suffers in Prometheus; his *carcan* chokes universal life. An immense participation in the torture of the demigod seems to be henceforth the tragic delight of all Nature; anxiety for the future mingles with it: and what is to be done now? How are we to move? What will become of us? And in the vast whole of created beings, things, men, animals, plants, rocks, all turned toward the Caucasus, is felt this inexpressible anguish,—the liberator is enchained.

Hamlet, less of a giant and more of a man, is not less grand,—Hamlet, the appalling, the unaccountable, complete in incompleteness; all, in order to be nothing. He is prince and demagogue, sagacious and extravagant, profound and frivolous, man and neuter. He has but little faith in the sceptre, rails at the throne, has a student for his comrade, converses with any one passing by, argues with the first comer, understands the people, despises the mob, hates strength, suspects success, questions obscurity, and says "thou" to mystery. He gives to others maladies which he has not himself: his false madness inoculates his mistress with true madness. He is familiar with spectres and with comedians. He jests with the axe of Orestes in his hand. He talks of literature, recites verses, composes a theatrical criticism, plays with bones in a cemetery, dumbfounds his

mother, avenges his father, and ends the wonderful drama of life and death by a gigantic point of interrogation. He terrifies and then disconcerts. Never has anything more overwhelming been dreamed. It is the parricide saying: "What do I know?"

Parricide? Let us pause on that word. Is Hamlet a parricide? Yes, and no. He confines himself to threatening his mother; but the threat is so fierce that the mother shudders. His words are like daggers. "What wilt thou do? Thou wilt not murder me? Help! help! ho!" And when she dies, Hamlet, without grieving for her, strikes Claudius with this tragic cry: "Follow my mother!" Hamlet is that sinister thing, the possible parricide.

In place of the northern ice which he has in his nature, let him have, like Orestes, southern fire in his veins, and he will kill his mother.

This drama is stern. In it truth doubts, sincerity lies. Nothing can be more immense, more subtle. In it man is the world, and the world is zero. Hamlet, even full of life, is not sure of his existence. In this tragedy, which is at the same time a philosophy, everything floats, hesitates, delays, staggers, becomes discomposed, scatters, and is dispersed. Thought is a cloud, will is a vapour, resolution is a crepuscule; the action blows each moment in an opposite direction; man is governed by the winds. Overwhelming and vertiginous work, in which is seen the depth of everything, in which thought oscillates only between the king murdered and Yorick buried, and in which what is best realized is royalty represented by a ghost, and mirth represented by a death's-head.

"Hamlet" is the *chef-d'œuvre* of the tragedy-dream.

CHAPTER V.

One of the probable causes of the feigned madness of Hamlet has not been up to the present time indicated by critics. It has been said, "Hamlet acts the madman to hide his thought, like Brutus." In fact, it is easy for apparent imbecility to hatch a great project; the supposed idiot can take aim deliberately. But the case of Brutus is not that of Hamlet. Hamlet acts the madman for his safety. Brutus screens his project, Hamlet his person. The manners of those tragic courts being known, from the moment that Hamlet, through the revelation of the ghost, is acquainted with the crime of Claudius, Hamlet is in danger. The superior historian within the poet is here manifested, and one feels the deep insight of Shakespeare into the ancient darkness of royalty. In the Middle Ages and in the

Lower Empire, and even at earlier periods, woe unto him who found out a murder or a poisoning committed by a king! Ovid, according to Voltaire's conjecture, was exiled from Rome for having seen something shameful in the house of Augustus. To know that the king was an assassin was a State crime. When it pleased the prince not to have had a witness, it was a matter involving one's head to ignore everything. It was bad policy to have good eyes. A man suspected of suspicion was lost. He had but one refuge,—folly; to pass for "an innocent" He was despised, and that was all. Do you remember the advice that, in Æschylus, the Ocean gives to Prometheus: "To look a fool is the secret of the wise man." When the Chamberlain Hugolin found the iron spit with which Edrick the Vendee had empaled Edmond II., "he hastened to put on madness," says the Saxon Chronicle of 1016, and saved himself in that way. Heraclian of Nisibe, having discovered by chance that Rhinomete was a fratricide, had himself declared mad by the doctors, and succeeded in getting himself shut up for life in a cloister. He thus lived peaceably, growing old and waiting for death with a vacant stare. Hamlet runs the same peril, and has recourse to the same means. He gets himself declared mad like Heraclian, and puts on folly like Hugolin. This does not prevent the restless Claudius from twice making an effort to get rid of him,—in the middle of the drama by the axe or the dagger in England, and toward the conclusion by poison.

The same indication is again found in "King Lear;" the Earl of Gloster's son takes refuge also in apparent lunacy. There is in that a key to open and understand Shakespeare's thought. In the eyes of the philosophy of art, the feigned folly of Edgar throws light upon the feigned folly of Hamlet.

The Amleth of Belleforest is a magician; the Hamlet of Shakespeare is a philosopher. We just now spoke of the strange reality which characterizes poetical creations. There is no more striking example than this type,—Hamlet. Hamlet has nothing belonging to an abstraction about him. He has been at the University; he has the Danish rudeness softened by Italian politeness; he is small, plump, somewhat lymphatic; he fences well with the sword, but is soon out of breath. He does not care to drink too soon during the assault of arms with Laërtes,—probably for fear of producing perspiration. After having thus supplied his personage with real life, the poet can launch him into full ideal. There is ballast enough.

Other works of the human mind equal "Hamlet;" none surpasses it. The whole majesty of melancholy is in "Hamlet." An open sepulchre from which goes forth a drama,—this is colossal "Hamlet" is to our mind Shakespeare's chief work.

No figure among those that poets have created is more poignant and stirring. Doubt counselled by a ghost,—that is Hamlet. Hamlet has seen his dead father and has spoken to him. Is he convinced? No, he shakes his head. What shall he do? He does not know. His hands clench, then fall by his side. Within him are conjectures, systems, monstrous apparitions, bloody recollections, veneration for the spectre, hate, tenderness, anxiety to act and not to act, his father, his mother, his duties in contradiction to each other,—a deep storm. Livid hesitation is in his mind. Shakespeare, wonderful plastic poet, makes the grandiose pallor of this soul almost visible. Like the great larva of Albert Dürer, Hamlet might be named "Melancholia." He also has above his head the bat which flies disembowelled; and at his feet science, the sphere, the compass, the hour-glass, love; and behind him in the horizon an enormous, terrible sun, which seems to make the sky but darker.

Nevertheless, at least one half of Hamlet is anger, transport, outrage, hurricane, sarcasm to Ophelia, malediction on his mother, insult to himself. He talks with the gravediggers, nearly laughs, then clutches Laërtes by the hair in the very grave of Ophelia, and stamps furiously upon the coffin. Sword-thrusts at Polonius, sword-thrusts at Laërtes, sword-thrusts at Claudius. From time to time his inaction is tom in twain, and from the rent comes forth thunder.

He is tormented by that possible life, intermixed with reality and chimera, the anxiety of which is shared by all of us. There is in all his actions an expanded somnambulism. One might almost consider his brain as a formation; there is a layer of suffering, a layer of thought, then a layer of dreaminess. It is through this layer of dreaminess that he feels, comprehends, learns, perceives, drinks, eats, frets, mocks, weeps, and reasons. There is between life and him a transparency; it is the wall of dreams. One sees beyond, but one cannot step over it. A kind of cloudy obstacle everywhere surrounds Hamlet. Have you ever while sleeping, had the nightmare of pursuit or flight, and tried to hasten on, and felt ankylosis in the knees, heaviness in the arms, the horror of paralysed hands, the impossibility of movement? This nightmare Hamlet undergoes while waking. Hamlet is not upon the spot where his life is. He has ever the appearance of a man who talks to you from the other side of a stream. He calls to you at the same time that he questions you. He is at a distance from the catastrophe in which he takes part, from the passer-by whom he interrogates, from the thought that he carries, from the action that he performs. He seems not to touch even what he grinds. It is isolation in its highest degree. It is the loneliness of a mind, even more than the loftiness of a prince. Indecision is in fact a solitude. You have not even

your will to keep you company. It is as if your own self was absent and had left you there. The burden of Hamlet is less rigid than that of Orestes, but more undulating. Orestes carries predestination; Hamlet carries fate.

And thus apart from men, Hamlet has still in him a something which represents them all. *Agnosco fratrem*. At certain hours, if we felt our own pulse, we should be conscious of his fever. His strange reality is our own reality after all. He is the mournful man that we all are in certain situations. Unhealthy as he is, Hamlet expresses a permanent condition of man. He represents the discomfort of the soul in a life which is not sufficiently adapted to it. He represents the shoe that pinches and stops our walking; the shoe is the body. Shakespeare frees him from it, and he is right Hamlet—prince if you like, but king never—Hamlet is incapable of governing a people; he lives too much in a world beyond. On the other hand, he does better than to reign; he *is*. Take from him his family, his country, his ghost, and the whole adventure at Elsinore, and even in the form of an inactive type, he remains strangely terrible. That is the consequence of the amount of humanity and the amount of mystery that is in him. Hamlet is formidable, which does not prevent his being ironical. He has the two profiles of destiny.

Let us retract a statement made above. The chief work of Shakespeare is not "Hamlet." The chief work of Shakespeare is all Shakespeare. That is, moreover, true of all minds of this order. They are mass, block, majesty, bible, and their solemnity is their ensemble.

Have you sometimes looked upon a cape prolonging itself under the clouds and jutting out, as far as the eye can go, into the deep water? Each of its hillocks contributes to make it up. No one of its undulations is lost in its dimension. Its strong outline is sharply marked upon the sky, and enters as far as possible into the waves, and there is not a useless rock. Thanks to this cape, you can go amidst the boundless waters, walk among the winds, see closely the eagles soar and the monsters swim, let your humanity wander mid the eternal hum, penetrate the impenetrable. The poet renders this service to your mind. A genius is a promontory into the infinite.

CHAPTER VI

Near "Hamlet," and on the same level, must be placed three grand dramas,— "Macbeth," "Othello," "King Lear."

Hamlet, Macbeth, Othello, Lear,—these four figures tower upon the lofty edifice of Shakespeare. We have said what Hamlet is.

To say, "Macbeth is ambition," is to say nothing. Macbeth is hunger. What hunger? The hunger of ten monsters, which is always possible in man. Certain souls have teeth. Do not wake up their hunger.

To bite at the apple, that is a fearful thing. The apple is called *Omnia*, says Filesac, that doctor of the Sorbonne who confessed Ravailac. Macbeth has a wife whom the chronicle calls Gruoch. This Eve tempts this Adam. Once Macbeth has given the first bite he is lost. The first thing that Adam produces with Eve is Cain; the first thing that Macbeth accomplishes with Gruoch is murder.

Covetousness easily becoming violence, violence easily becoming crime, crime easily becoming madness,—this progression is Macbeth. Covetousness, crime, madness,—these three vampires have spoken to him in the solitude, and have invited him to the throne. The cat Graymalkin has called him: Macbeth will be cunning. The toad Paddock has called him: Macbeth will be horror.

The *unsexed* being, Gruoch, completes him. It is done; Macbeth is no longer a man. He is nothing more than an unconscious energy rushing wildly toward evil. Henceforth, no notion of right; appetite is everything. Transitory right, royalty; eternal right, hospitality,—Macbeth murders them all. He does more than slay them,—he ignores them. Before they fell bleeding under his hand, they already lay dead within his soul. Macbeth commences by this parricide,—the murder of Duncan, his guest; a crime so terrible that from the counter-blow in the night, when their master is stabbed, the horses of Duncan again become wild. The first step taken, the fall begins. It is the avalanche. Macbeth rolls headlong. He is precipitated. He falls and rebounds from one crime to another, always deeper and deeper. He undergoes the mournful gravitation of matter invading the soul. He is a thing that destroys. He is a stone of ruin, flame of war, beast of prey, scourge. He marches over all Scotland, king as he is, his bare legged kernes and his heavily-armed gallowglasses, devouring, pillaging, slaying. He decimates the Thanes, he kills Banquo, he kills all the Macduffs except the one who shall slay him, he kills the nobility, he kills the people, he kills his country, he kills "sleep." At length the catastrophe arrives,—the forest of Birnam moves against him. Macbeth has infringed all, burst through everything, violated everything, torn everything, and this desperation ends in arousing even Nature. Nature loses patience, Nature enters into action against Macbeth, Nature becomes soul against the man who has become brute force.

This drama has epic proportions. Macbeth represents that frightful hungry one who prowls throughout history, called brigand in the forest and on the throne conqueror. The ancestor of Macbeth is Nimrod. These men of force, are they forever furious? Let us be just; no. They have a goal, which being attained, they stop. Give to Alexander, to Cyrus, to Sesostris, to Cæsar, what?—the world; they are appeased. Geoffroy St. Hilaire said to me one day: "When the lion has eaten, he is at peace with Nature." For Cambyses, Sennacherib, and Genghis Khan, and their parallels, to have eaten is to possess all the earth. They would calm themselves down in the process of digesting the human race.

Now, what is Othello? He is night; an immense fatal figure. Night is amorous of day. Darkness loves the dawn. The African adores the white woman. Desdemona is Othello's brightness and frenzy! And then how easy to him is jealousy! He is great, he is dignified, he is majestic, he soars above all heads, he has as an escort bravery, battle, the braying of trumpets, the banner of war, renown, glory; he is radiant with twenty victories, he is studded with stars, this Othello: but he is black. And thus how soon, when jealous, the hero becomes monster, the black becomes the negro! How speedily has night beckoned to death!

By the side of Othello, who is night, there is Iago, who is evil,—evil, the other form of darkness. Night is but the night of the world; evil is the night of the soul. How deeply black are perfidy and falsehood! To have ink or treason in the veins is the same thing. Whoever has jostled against imposture and perjury knows it. One must blindly grope one's way with roguery. Pour hypocrisy upon the break of day, and you put out the sun; and this, thanks to false religions, happens to God.

Iago near Othello is the precipice near the landslip. "This way!" he says in a low voice. The snare advises blindness. The being of darkness guides the black. Deceit takes upon itself to give what light may be required by night. Jealousy uses falsehood as the blind man his dog. Othello the negro, Iago the traitor, opposed to whiteness and candour,—what can be more terrible! These ferocities of the darkness act in unison. These two incarnations of the eclipse conspire together,—the one roaring, the other sneering; the tragic extinguishment of light.

Sound this profound thing. Othello is the night, and being night, and wishing to kill, what does he take to slay with? Poison, the club, the axe, the knife? No; the pillow. To kill is to lull to sleep. Shakespeare himself perhaps did not take this into account. The creator sometimes, almost unknown to himself, yields to his type, so much is that type a power. And it is thus that Desdemona, spouse of the man

Night, dies stifled by the pillow, which has had the first kiss, and which has the last sigh.

Lear is the occasion for Cordelia. Maternity of the daughter toward the father,— profound subject; maternity venerable among all other maternities, so admirably translated by the legend of that Roman girl, who, in the depth of a prison, nurses her old father. The young breast near the white beard,—there is not a spectacle more holy. This filial breast is Cordelia.

Once this figure dreamed of and found, Shakespeare created his drama. Where should he put this consoling vision? In an obscure age. Shakespeare has taken the year of the world 3105, the time when Joas was king of Judah, Aganippus, king of France, and Leir, king of England. The whole earth was at that time mysterious. Represent to yourself that epoch: the temple of Jerusalem is still quite new; the gardens of Semiramis, constructed nine hundred years previously, begin to crumble; the first gold coin appears in Ægina; the first balance is made by Phydron, tyrant of Argos; the first eclipse of the sun is calculated by the Chinese; three hundred and twelve years have passed since Orestes, accused by the Eumenides before the Areopagus, was acquitted; Hesiod is just dead; Homer, if he still lives, is a hundred years old; Lycurgus, thoughtful traveller, re-enters Sparta; and one may perceive in the depth of the sombre cloud of the East the chariot fire which carries Elias away. It is at that period that Leir—Lear—lives, and reigns over the dark islands. Jonas, Holofernes, Draco, Solon, Thespis, Nebuchadnezzar, Anaximenes who is to invent the signs of the zodiac, Cyrus, Zorobabel, Tarquin, Pythagoras, Æschylus, are not born yet Coriolanus, Xerxes, Cincinnatus, Pericles, Socrates, Brennus, Aristotle, Timoleon, Demosthenes, Alexander, Epicurus, Hannibal, are larvæ waiting their hour to enter among men. Judas Maccabæus, Viriatus, Popilius, Jugurtha, Mithridates, Marius and Sylla, Cæsar and Pompey, Cleopatra and Antony, are far away in the future; and at the moment when Lear is king of Brittany and of Iceland, there must pass away eight hundred and ninety-five years before Virgil says, "Penitus toto divisos orbe Britannos," and nine hundred and fifty years before Seneca says "Ultima Thule." The Picts and the Celts (the Scotch and the English) are tattooed. A redskin of the present day gives a vague idea of an Englishman then. It is this twilight that Shakespeare has chosen,—a broad night well adapted to the dream in which this inventor at his pleasure puts everything that he chooses, this King Lear, and then a King of France, a Duke of Burgundy, a Duke of Cornwall, a Duke of Albany, an Earl of Kent, and an Earl of Gloster. What does your history matter to him who has humanity? Besides, he has with him the legend, which is a kind of science also,

and as true as history perhaps, but in another point of view. Shakespeare agrees with Walter Mapes, archdeacon of Oxford,—that is something; he admits, from Brutus to Cadwalla, the ninety-nine Celtic kings who have preceded the Scandinavian Hengist and the Saxon Horsa: and since he believes in Mulmutius, Cinigisil, Ceolulf, Cassibelan, Cymbeline, Cynulphus, Arviragus, Guiderius, Escuin, Cudred, Vortigern, Arthur, Uther Pendragon, he has every right to believe in King Lear, and to create Cordelia. This land adopted, the place for the scene marked out, this foundation established, he takes everything and builds his work. Unheard of edifice. He takes tyranny, of which, at a later period, he will make weakness,—Lear; he takes treason,—Edmond; he takes devotion,—Kent; he takes ingratitude which begins with a caress, and he gives to this monster two heads,—Goneril, whom the legend calls Gonerille, and Regan, whom the legend calls Ragaü; he takes paternity; he takes royalty; he takes feudality; he takes ambition; he takes madness, which he divides into three, and he puts in presence three madmen,—the king's buffoon, madman by trade; Edgar of Gloster, mad for prudence's sake; the king mad through misery. It is at the summit of this tragic heap that he raises Cordelia.

There are some formidable cathedral towers, like, for instance, the Giralda of Seville, which seem made all complete, with their spirals, their staircases, their sculptures, their cellars, their cœcums, their aerial cells, their sounding chambers, their bells, and their mass and their spire, and all their enormity, in order to carry an angel spreading on their summit her golden wings. Such is this drama, "King Lear."

The father is the pretext for the daughter. This admirable human creation, Lear, serves as a support to that ineffable divine creation, Cordelia. The reason why that chaos of crimes, vices, madneses, and miseries exists is, for the more splendid setting forth of virtue. Shakespeare, carrying Cordelia in his thoughts, created that tragedy like a god who, having an Aurora to put forward, makes a world expressly for it.

And what a figure is that father! What a caryatid! He is man bent down by weight, but shifts his burdens for others that are heavier. The more the old man becomes enfeebled, the more his load augments. He lives under an overburden. He bears at first power, then ingratitude, then isolation, then despair, then hunger and thirst, then madness, then all Nature. Clouds overcast him, forests heap shadow on him, the hurricane beats on the nape of his neck, the tempest makes his mantle heavy as lead, the rain falls on his shoulders, he walks bent and haggard as if he had the two knees of night upon his back. Dismayed and yet immense, he

throws to the winds and to the hail this epic cry: "Why do you hate me, tempests? Why do you persecute me? *You are not my daughters.*" And then it is over; the light is extinguished,—reason loses courage and leaves him. Lear is in his dotage. Ah, he is childish, this old man. Very well! he requires a mother. His daughter appears,—his one daughter Cordelia; for the two others Regan and Goneril, are no longer his daughters, save to that extent which gives them a right to the name of parricides.

Cordelia approaches.—"Sir, do you know me?" "You are a spirit, I know," replies the old man, with the sublime clairvoyance of bewilderment. From this moment the adorable nursing commences. Cordelia applies herself to nourish this old despairing soul, dying of inanition in hatred. Cordelia nourishes Lear with love, and his courage revives; she nourishes him with respect, and the smile returns; she nourishes him with hope, and confidence is restored; she nourishes him with wisdom, and reason revives. Lear, convalescent, rises again, and, step by step, returns again to life. The child becomes again an old man; the old man becomes a man again. And behold him happy, this wretched one. It is on this expansion of happiness that the catastrophe is hurled down. Alas! there are traitors, there are perjurers, there are murderers. Cordelia dies. Nothing more heart-rending than this. The old man is stunned; he no longer understands anything; and embracing the corpse, he expires. He dies on this dead one. The supreme anguish is spared him of remaining behind her among the living, a poor shadow, to feel the place in his heart empty and to seek for his soul, carried away by that sweet being who is departed. O God, those whom thou lovest thou dost not allow to survive.

To live after the flight of the angel; to be the father orphaned of his child; to be the eye which no longer has light; to be the deadened heart which has no more joy; from time to time to stretch the hands into obscurity, and try to reclasp a being who was there (where, then, can she be?); to feel himself forgotten in that departure; to have lost all reason for being here below; to be henceforth a man who goes to and fro before a sepulchre, not received, not admitted,—that would be indeed a gloomy destiny. Thou hast done well, poet, to kill this old man.

BOOK III.

ZOILUS AS ETERNAL AS HOMER.

CHAPTER I.

"Ce courtisan grossier du profane vulgaire."^[1]

This Alexandrine is by La Harpe, who hurls it at Shakespeare. Somewhere else La Harpe says, "Shakespeare panders to the mob."

Voltaire, as a matter of course, reproaches Shakespeare with antithesis: that is well. And La Beaumelle reproaches Voltaire with antithesis: that is better.

Voltaire, when he is himself in question, *pro domo sua*, gets angry. "But," he writes, "this Langleviel, alias La Beaumelle, is an ass. I defy you to find in any poet, in any book, a fine thing which is not an image or an antithesis."

Voltaire's criticism is double-edged. He wounds and is wounded. This is how he characterizes the Ecclesiastes and the Canticle of Canticles: "Works without order, full of low images and coarse expressions."

A little while after, furious, he exclaims,—

"On m'ose préférer Crébillon le barbare!"^[2]

An idler of the Œil-de-Bœuf, wearing the red heel and the blue ribbon, a stripling and a marquis,—M. de Créqui,—comes to Ferney, and writes with an air of superiority: "I have seen Voltaire, that childish old man."

That injustice should receive a counterstroke from injustice, is nothing more than right; and Voltaire gets what he deserved. But to throw stones at men of genius is a general law, and all have to bear it. Insult is a crown, it appears.

For Saumaise, Æschylus is nothing but farrago.^[3] Quintilian understands nothing of the "Orestias." Sophocles mildly scorned Æschylus. "When he does well, he does not know it," said Sophocles. Racine rejected everything, except two or three scenes of the "Choephoroi," which he condescended to spare by a note in the margin of his copy of Æschylus. Fontenelle says in his "Remarques": "One does not know what to make of the 'Prometheus' of Æschylus. Æschylus is a kind of madman." The eighteenth century, without exception, railed at Diderot for admiring the "Eumenides."

"The whole of Dante is a hotch-potch," says Chaudon. "Michael Angelo wearies me," says Joseph de Maistre. "Not one of the eight comedies of Cervantes is supportable," says La Harpe. "It is a pity that Molière does not know how to write," says Fénelon. "Molière is a worthless buffoon," says Bossuet. "A schoolboy would avoid the mistakes of Milton," says the Abbé Trublet, an authority as good as another. "Corneille exaggerates, Shakespeare raves," says that same Voltaire, who must always be fought against and fought for.

"Shakespeare," says Ben Jonson, "talked heavily and without any wit." How prove the contrary? Writings remain, talk passes away. Well, it is always so much denied to Shakespeare. That man of genius had no wit: how nicely that flatters the numberless men of wit who have no genius!

Some time before Scudéry called Corneille "Corneille déplumée" (unfeathered carrion crow), Green had called Shakespeare "a crow decked out with our feathers." In 1752 Diderot was sent to the fortress of Vincennes for having published the first volume of the "Encyclopædia," and the great success of the year was a print sold on the quays which represented a Franciscan friar flogging Diderot. Although Weber is dead,—an attenuating circumstance for those who are guilty of genius,—he is turned into ridicule in Germany; and for thirty-three years a *chef-d'œuvre* has been disposed of with a pun. The "Euryanthe" is called the "Ennuyante" (wearisome).

D'Alembert hits at one blow Calderon and Shakespeare. He writes to Voltaire:—

"I have announced to the Academy your 'Heraclius,' of Calderon. The Academy will read it with as much pleasure as the harlequinade of Gilles Shakespeare."^[4]

That everything should be perpetually brought again into question, that everything should be contested, even the incontestable,—what does it matter? The eclipse is a good trial for truth as well as for liberty. Genius, being truth and liberty, has a claim to persecution. What matters to genius that which is transient? It was before, and will be after. It is not on the sun that the eclipse throws darkness.

Everything can be written. Paper is patience itself. Last year a grave review printed this: "Homer is now going out of fashion."

The judgment passed on the philosopher, on the artist, on the poet is completed by the portrait of the man.

Byron has killed his tailor. Molière has married his own daughter. Shakespeare has "loved" Lord Southampton.

"Et pour voir à la fin tous les vices ensemble,
Le parterre en tumulte a demandé l'auteur."^[5]

That *ensemble* of all vices is Beaumarchais.

As for Byron, we mention this name a second time; he is worth the trouble. Read "Glenarvon," and listen, on the subject of Byron's abominations, to Lady Bl—, whom he had loved, and who, of course, resented it.

Phidias was a procurer; Socrates was an apostate and a thief, *décrocheur de manteaux*; Spinosa was a renegade, and sought to obtain legacies by undue influence; Dante was a peculator; Michael Angelo was cudgelled by Julius II., and quietly put up with it for the sake of five hundred crowns; D'Aubigné was a courtier sleeping in the water-closet of the king, ill-tempered when he was not paid, and for whom Henri IV. was too kind; Diderot was a libertine; Voltaire a miser; Milton was venal,—he received a thousand pounds sterling for his apology, in Latin, of regicide: "Defensio pro se," etc. Who says these things? Who relates these histories? That good person, your old fawning friend, O tyrants, your ancient comrade, O traitors, your old auxiliary, O bigots, your ancient comforter, O imbeciles!—calumny.

[1] This coarse flatterer of the vulgar herd.

[2] To me they dare to prefer Crébillon the barbarian.

[3] The passage in Saumaise is curious and worth the trouble of being transcribed:—

Unus ejus Agamemnon obscuritate superat quantum est librorum sacrorum cum suis hebraismis et syrianismis et totâ hellenisticâ supellectile vel farragine. —*De Re Hellenisticâ*, p. 38, ep. dedic.

[4] Letter CV.

[5] "And at last, in order to see all the vices together,
The riotous pit called for the author."

CHAPTER II.

Let us add a detail. Diatribe is, on certain occasions, a useful means of government.

Thus the hand of the police was in the print of Diderot Flogged, and the engraver of the Franciscan friar must have been kindred to the turnkey of Vincennes. Governments, more passionate than necessary, neglect to remain strangers to the animosities of the lower orders. Political persecution of former days—it is of former days that we are speaking—willingly availed itself of a dash of literary

persecution. Certainly, hatred hates without being paid for it. Envy, to do its work, does not need a minister of State to encourage it and to give it a pension; and there is such a thing as unofficial calumny. But a money-bag does no harm. When Roy, the court-poet, rhymed against Voltaire, "Tell me, daring stoic," etc., the position of treasurer of the chamber of Clermont, and the cross of St. Michael, were not likely to damp his enthusiasm for the Court, and his spirit against Voltaire. A gratuity is pleasant to receive after a service rendered; the masters upstairs smile; you receive the agreeable order to insult some one you detest; you obey richly; you are free to bite like a glutton; you take your fill; it is all profit; you hate and you give satisfaction. Formerly authority had its scribes. It was a pack of hounds as good as any other. Against the free rebel spirit, the despot would let loose the scribbler. To torture was not sufficient; teasing was resorted to likewise. Trissotin held a confabulation with Vidocq, and from their tête-à-tête would burst a complex inspiration. Pedagogism, thus supported by the police, felt itself an integral part of authority, and strengthened its æsthetics with legal means. It was arrogant. The pedant raised to the dignity of policeman,—nothing can be so arrogant as that vileness. See, after the struggle between the Arminians and the Gomarists, with what a superb air Sparanus Buyter, his pocket full of Maurice of Nassau's florins, denounces Josse Vondel, and proves, Aristotle in hand, that the Palamède of Vondel's tragedy is no other than Barneveldt,—useful rhetoric, by which Buyter obtains against Vondel a fine of three hundred crowns, and for himself a fat prebend at Dordrecht.

The author of the book "Querelles Littéraires," the Abbé Irail, canon of Monistrol, asks of La Beaumelle: "Why do you insult M. de Voltaire so much?" "It is because it sells well," replies La Beaumelle. And Voltaire, informed of the question and of the reply, concludes: "It is just; the booby buys the writing, and the minister buys the writer. It sells well."

Françoise d'Issembourg de Happoncourt, wife of François Hugo, chamberlain of Lorraine, and very celebrated under the name of Madame de Graffigny, writes to M. Devaux, reader to King Stanislaus:—

My dear Pampam,—Atys being far off [read: Voltaire being banished], the police cause to be published against him a swarm of small writings and pamphlets, which are sold at a sou in the cafés and theatres. That would displease the marquise,^[1] if it did not please the king.

Desfontaines, that other insulter of Voltaire, by whom he had been taken out of Bicêtre, said to the Abbé Prévost, who advised him to make his peace with the philosopher: "If Algiers did not make war, Algiers would die of famine."

This Desfontaines, also an abbé, died of dropsy; and his well-known tastes gained for him this epitaph: "Periit aqua qui meruit igne."

Among the publications suppressed in the last century by decree of Parliament, can be observed a document printed by Quinet and Besogne, and destroyed doubtless because of the revelations it contained, and of which the title gave promise: "L'Arétinade, ou Tarif des Libellistes et Gens de Lettres Injurieux."

Madame de Staël, sent in exile forty-five leagues from Paris, stops exactly at the forty-five leagues,—at Beaumont-sur-Loire,—and thence writes to her friends. Here is a fragment of a letter addressed to Madame Gay, mother of the illustrious Madame de Girardin:—

"Ah, dear madame, what a persecution are these exiles!... [We suppress some lines.] You write a book; it is forbidden to speak of it. Your name in the journals displeases. Permission is, however, fully given to speak ill of it."

[1] Madame de Pompadour.

CHAPTER III.

Sometimes the diatribe is sprinkled with quicklime. All those black pen-nibs finish by digging ill-omened ditches.

Among the writers abhorred for having been useful, Voltaire and Rousseau hold a conspicuous rank. They were reviled when alive, mangled when dead. To have a bite at these renowned ones was a splendid deed, and reckoned as such in favour of literary constables. A man who insulted Voltaire was at once promoted to the dignity of pedant. Men in power encouraged the men of libellous propensity. A swarm of mosquitoes have rushed upon those two illustrious minds, and ate yet buzzing.

Voltaire is the most hated, being the greatest. Everything was good for an attack on him, everything was a pretext: Mesdames de France, Newton, Madame du Châtelet, the Princess of Prussia, Maupertuis, Frederic, the Encyclopædia, the Academy, even Labarre, Sirven, and Calas,—never a truce. His popularity suggested to Joseph de Maistre this: "Paris crowned him; Sodom would have

banished him." Arouet was translated into *A rouer*.^[1] At the house of the Abbess of Nivelles, Princess of the Holy Empire, half recluse and half worldling, and having recourse, it is said, in order to make her cheeks rosy, to the method of the Abbess of Montbazou, charades were played,—among others, this one: The first syllable is his fortune; the second should be his duty. The word was *Vol-taire*.^[2] A celebrated member of the Academy of Sciences, Napoleon Bonaparte, seeing in 1803, in the library of the Institute, in the centre of a crown of laurels, this inscription: "Au grand Voltaire," scratched with his nail the last three letters, leaving only, *Au grand Volta!*

There is round Voltaire particularly a *cordon sanitaire* of priests, the Abbé Desfontaines at the head, the Abbé Nicolardot at the tail. Fréron, although a layman, is a critic after the priestly fashion, and belongs to this band.

Voltaire made his first appearance at the Bastille. His cell was next to the dungeon in which had died Bernard Palissy. Young, he tasted the prison; old, exile. He was kept twenty-seven years away from Paris.

Jean-Jacques, wild and rather surly, was tormented in consequence of those traits in his nature. Paris issued a writ against his person; Geneva expelled him; Neufchâtel rejected him; Motiers-Travers damned him; Bienne stoned him; Berne gave him the choice between prison and expulsion; London, hospitable London, scoffed at him.

Both died, following closely on each other. Death caused no interruption to the outrages. A man is dead; insult does not slacken pursuit for such a trifle. Hatred can feast on a corpse. Libels continued, falling furiously on these glories.

The Revolution came and sent them to the Pantheon.

At the beginning of this century, children were often brought to see these two graves. They were told, "It is here." That made a strong impression on their minds. They carried forever in their thoughts that apparition of two sepulchres side by side,—the elliptical arch of the vault; the antique form of the two monuments provisionally covered with wood painted like marble; these two names, Rousseau, Voltaire, in the twilight; and the arm carrying a flambeau which was thrust out of the tomb of Jean-Jacques.

Louis XVIII. returned. The restoration of the Stuarts had torn Cromwell from his grave; the restoration of the Bourbons could not do less for Voltaire.

One night, in May, 1814, about two o'clock in the morning, a cab stopped near the barrier of La Gare, which faces Bercy, at the door of an enclosure of planks. This enclosure surrounded a large vacant piece of ground, reserved for the projected *entrepôt*, and belonging to the city of Paris. The cab was coming from the Pantheon, and the coachman had been ordered to take the most deserted streets. The closed planking opened. Some men alighted from the cab and entered the enclosure. Two carried a sack between them. They were conducted, so tradition asserts, by the Marquis of Puymaurin, afterward deputy to the Invisible Chamber, and director of the mint, accompanied by his brother, the Comte de Puymaurin. Other men, many in cassocks, were waiting for them. They proceeded toward a hole dug in the middle of the field. This hole, according to one of the witnesses, who since has been waiter at the inn of the Marronniers at La Rapée, was round, and looked like a blind well. At the bottom of the hole was quicklime. These men said nothing, and had no light. The wan break of day gave a ghastly light. The sack was opened. It was full of bones. These were, pell-mell, the bones of Jean Jacques and of Voltaire, which had just been withdrawn from the Pantheon. The mouth of the sack was brought close to the hole, and the bones were thrown into that darkness. The two skulls struck against each other; a spark, not likely to be seen by such men as those present was doubtless exchanged between the head that had made the "Dictionnaire Philosophique" and the head which had made the "Contrat Social," and reconciled them. When that was done, when the sack had been shaken, when Voltaire and Rousseau had been emptied into that hole, a digger seized a spade, threw inside the opening all the earth which was at the side, and filled tip the hole; the others stamped with their feet on the ground, so as to remove from it the appearance of having been freshly disturbed. One of the assistants took for his trouble the sack, as the hangman takes the clothing of his victim; they all left the enclosure, closed the door, got into the cab without saying a word, and hastily, before the sun had risen, those men got away.

[1] Deserving of being broken on the wheel.

[2] *Vol* meaning *theft*, *taire* meaning to be silent.

CHAPTER IV.

Saumaise, that worse Scaliger, does not comprehend Æschylus, and rejects him. Who is to blame? Saumaise much, Æschylus little.

The attentive man who reads great works feels at times, in the middle of reading, certain sudden fits of cold followed by a kind of excess of heat ("I no longer understand!—I understand!"), shivering and burning,—something which causes him to be a little upset, at the same time that he is very much struck. Only minds of the first order, only men of supreme genius, subject to heedless wanderings in the infinite, give to the reader this singular sensation,—stupor for most, ecstasy for a few. These few are the *élite*. As we have already observed, this *élite*, gathered from century to century, and always adding to itself, at last makes up a number, becomes in time a multitude, and composes the supreme crowd,—the definitive public of men of genius, sovereign like them.

It is with that public that at the end one must deal.

Nevertheless, there is another public, other appraisers, other judges, to whom we have lately alluded. They are not content.

The men of genius, the great minds,—this Æschylus, this Isaiah, this Juvenal, this Dante, this Shakespeare,—are beings, imperious, tumultuous, violent, passionate, extreme riders of winged steeds, "overleaping all boundaries," having their own goal, which "goes beyond the goal," "exaggerated," taking scandalous strides, flying abruptly from one idea to another, and from the north pole to the south pole, crossing the heavens in three steps, making little allowance for short breaths, tossed about by all the winds, and at the same time full of some unaccountable equestrian confidence amidst their bounds across the abyss, untractable to the "aristarchs," refractory to state rhetoric, not amiable to asthmatical *literati*, unsubdued to academic hygiene, preferring the foam of Pegasus to asses' milk.

The worthy pedants are kind enough to be afraid for them. The ascent gives rise to the calculation of the fall. The compassionate cripples lament for Shakespeare. He is mad; he mounts too high! The crowd of college fags (they are a crowd) look on in wonder, and get angry. Æschylus and Dante make their connoisseurs blink their eyes every moment. This Æschylus is lost! This Dante is near falling! A god is soaring above; the worthy bourgeois cry out to him: "Look out for yourself!"

CHAPTER V.

Besides, these men of genius disconcert.

One knows not on what to rely with them. Their lyric fever obeys them; they interrupt it when they like. They seem wild. All at once they stop. Their frenzy becomes melancholy. They are seen among the precipices, alighting on a peak and folding their wings, and then they give way to meditation. Their meditation is not less surprising than their transport. Just now they were soaring above, now they sink below. But it is always the same boldness.

They are pensive giants. Their Titanic revery needs the absolute and the unfathomable in which to expand. They meditate, as the sun shines, with the abyss around them.

Their moving to and fro in the ideal gives the vertigo. Nothing is too lofty for them, and nothing too low. They pass from the pygmy to the Cyclops, from Polyphemus to the Myrmidons, from Queen Mab to Caliban, and from a love affair to a deluge, and from Saturn's ring to the doll of a little child. *Sinite parvulos venire*. One of the pupils of their eye is a telescope, the other a microscope. They investigate familiarly these two frightful opposite depths,—the infinitely great and the infinitely small.

And one should not be angry with them; and one should not reproach them for all this! Indeed! Where should we go if such excesses were to be tolerated? What! No scruple in the choice of subjects, horrible or sad; and the idea, even if it be disquieting and formidable, always followed up to its extreme limits, without pity for their fellow-creatures! These poets only see their own aim; and in everything are immoderate in their way of doing things. What is Job?—a worm on an ulcer. What is the *Divina Commedia*?—a series of torments. What is the *Iliad*?—a collection of plagues and wounds; not an artery cut which is not complaisantly described. Go round for opinions on Homer: ask of Scaliger, Terrasson, Lamotte, what they think of him. The fourth of an ode to the shield of Achilles—what intemperance! He who does not know when to stop never knew how to write. These poets agitate, disturb, trouble, upset, overwhelm, make everything shiver, break things, occasionally, here and there. They can cause great misfortunes; it is terrible. Thus speak the Athenæa, the Sorbonnes, the sworn-in professors, the societies called learned, Saumaise, successor of Scaliger at the university of Leyden, and the *bourgeoisie* after them,—all who represent in literature and art the great party of order. What can be more logical? The cough quarrels with the hurricane.

Those who are poor in wit are joined by those who have too much wit. The septics lend assistance to the fools. Men of genius, with few exceptions, are proud and

stem; that is in the very marrow of their bones. They have in company with them Juvenal, Agrippa d'Aubigné, and Milton; they are prone to harshness; they despise the *panem et circenses*; they seldom grow sociable, and they growl. People rail at them in a pleasant way. Well done.

Ah, poet! Ah, Milton! Ah, Juvenal!—ah, you keep up resistance! ah, you perpetuate disinterestedness! ah, you bring together these two firebrands, faith and will, in order to make the flame burst out from them! ah, there is something of the Vestal in you, old grumbler! ah, you have an altar,—your country! ah, you have a tripod,—the ideal! ah, you believe in the rights of man, in emancipation, in the future, in progress, in the beautiful, in the just, in what is great! Take care; you are behindhand. All this virtue is infatuation. You emigrate with honour; but you emigrate. This heroism is no longer the fashion. It no longer suits our epoch. There comes a moment when the sacred fire is no longer fashionable. Poet, you believe in right and truth; you are behind your century. Your very eternity causes you to pass away.

So much the worse, without doubt, for those grumbling geniuses accustomed to greatness, and scornful of what is no longer so. They are slow in movement when shame is at stake; their back is struck with ankylosis for anything like bowing and cringing. When success passes along, deserved or not, but saluted, they have an iron bar keeping their vertebral column stiff. That is their affair. So much the worse for those people of old-fashioned Rome. They belong to antiquity and to antique manners. To bristle up at every turn may have been all very well in former days. Those long bristling manes are no longer worn; the lions are out of fashion now. The French Revolution is nearly seventy-five years old. At that age dotage comes. The people of the present time mean to belong to their day, and even to their minute. Certainly, we find no fault with it. Whatever is, must be. It is quite right that what exists should exist. The forms of public prosperity are various. One generation is not obliged to imitate another. Cato copied Phocion; Trimalcion is less like,—it is independence. You bad-tempered old fellows, you wish us to emancipate ourselves? Let it be so. We disencumber ourselves of the imitation of Timoleon, Thræseas Artevelde, Thomas More, Hampden. It is our fashion to free ourselves. You wish for a revolt; there it is. You wish for no insurrection; we rise up against our rights. We enfranchise ourselves from the care of being free. To be citizens is a heavy load. Rights entangled with obligations are restraints to whoever desires to enjoy life quietly. To be guided by conscience and truth in all the steps that we take is fatiguing. We mean to walk without leading-strings and without principles. Duty is a chain; we break our irons. What

do you mean by speaking to us of Franklin? Franklin is a rather too servile copy of Aristides. We carry our horror of servility so far as to prefer Grimod de la Reynière. To eat and drink well, there is purpose in that. Each epoch has its peculiar manner of being free. Orgy is a liberty. This way of reasoning is triumphant; to adhere to it is wise. There have been, it is true, epochs when people thought otherwise. In those times the things which were trodden on would sometimes resent it, and would rebel,—but that was the ancient system, ridiculous now; and those who regret and grumble must be left to talk and to affirm that there was a better notion of right, justice, and honour in the stones of olden times than in the men of to-day.

The rhetoricians, official and officious,—we have pointed out already their wonderful sagacity,—take strong precautions against men of genius. Men of genius are not great followers of the university; what is more, they are wanting in insipidity. They are lyrists, colourists, enthusiasts, enchanter, possessed, exalted, "rabid" (we have read the word) beings who, when everybody is small, have a mania for creating great things; in fact, they have every vice. A doctor has recently discovered that genius is a variety of madness. They are Michael Angelo handling giants; Rembrandt painting with a palette all bedaubed with the sun's rays; they are Dante, Rabelais, Shakespeare, exaggerated. They bring a wild art, roaring, flaming, dishevelled like the lion and the comet. Oh, shocking! There is coalition against them, and it is right. We have, luckily, the "teetotallers" of eloquence and poetry. "I like paleness," said one day a literary *bourgeois*. The literary *bourgeois* exists. Rhetoricians, anxious on account of the contagions and fevers which are spread by genius, recommend with a lofty reason, which we have commended, temperance, moderation, "common-sense," the art of keeping within bounds, writers expurgated, trimmed, pruned, regulated, the worship of the qualities that the malignant call negative, continence, abstinence, Joseph, Scipio, the water-drinkers. It is all excellent,—only, young students must be warned that by following these sage precepts too closely they run the risk of glorifying the chastity of the eunuch. Maybe, I admire Bayard; I admire Origen less.

CHAPTER VI.

Résumé: Great minds are importunate; to deny them a little is judicious.

After all, let us admit it at last, and complete our statement; there is some truth in the reproaches that are hurled at them. This anger is natural. The powerful, the

grand, the luminous, are in a certain point of view things calculated to offend. To be surpassed is never agreeable; to feel one's own inferiority leads surely to feel offence. The beautiful exists so truly by itself that it certainly has no need of pride; nevertheless, given human mediocrity, the beautiful humiliates at the same time that it enchants. It seems natural that beauty should be a vase for pride,—it is supposed to be full of it; one seeks to avenge one's self for the pleasure it gives, and this word superb ends by having two senses,—one of which causes suspicion of the other. It is the fault of the beautiful, as we have already said. It wearies: a sketch by Piranesi bewilders you; a grasp of the hand of Hercules bruises you. Greatness is sometimes in the wrong. It is ingenuous, but obstructive. The tempest thinks to sprinkle you,—it drowns you; the star thinks to give light,—it dazzles, sometimes blinds. The Nile fertilizes, but overflows. The "too much" is not convenient; the habitation of the fathomless is rude; the infinite is little suitable for a lodging. A cottage is badly situated on the cataract of Niagara or in the circus of Gavarnie. It is awkward to keep house with these fierce wonders; to frequent them regularly without being overwhelmed, one must be a cretin or a genius.

The dawn itself at times seems to us immoderate: he who looks at it straight suffers. The eye at certain moments thinks very ill of the sun. Let us not then be astonished at the complaints made, at the incessant objections, at the fits of passion and prudence, at the cataplasms applied by a certain criticism, at the ophthalmies habitual to academies and teaching bodies, at the warnings given to the reader, at all the curtains let down, and at all the shades used against genius. Genius is intolerant without knowing it, because it is itself. How can people be familiar with Æschylus, with Ezekiel, with Dante?

The / is the right to egotism. Now, the first thing that those beings do, is to use roughly the / of each one. Exorbitant in everything,—in thoughts, in images, in convictions, in emotions, in passions, in faith,—whatever may be the side of your / to which they address themselves, they inconvenience it. Your intellect, they surpass it; your imagination, they dazzle it; your conscience, they question and search it; your bowels, they twist them; your heart, they break it; your soul, they carry it off.

The infinite that is in them passes from them and multiplies them, and transfigures them before your eyes every moment,—formidable fatigue for your gaze. With them you never know where you are. At every turn the unforeseen. You expected only men: they cannot enter your room, for they are giants. You expected only an idea: cast your eyes down, they are the ideal. You expected only

eagles: they have six wings,—they are seraphs. Are they then beyond Nature? Is it that humanity fails them?

Certainly not, and far from that, and quite the reverse. We have already said it, and we insist on it, Nature and humanity are in them more than in any other beings. They are superhuman men, but men. *Homo sum*. This word of a poet sums up all poetry. Saint Paul strikes his breast and says, "Peccamus!" Job tells you who he is: "I am the son of woman." They are men. That which troubles you is that they are men more than you; they are too much men, so to speak. There where you have but the part, they have the whole; they carry in their vast heart entire humanity, and they are you more than yourself. You recognize yourself too much in their work,—hence your outcry. To that total of Nature, to that complete humanity, to that potter's clay, which is all your flesh, and which is at the same time the whole earth, they add, and it completes your terror, the wonderful reverberation of the unknown. They have vistas of revelation; and suddenly, and without crying "Beware!" at the moment when you least expect it, they burst the cloud, make in the zenith a gap whence falls a ray, and they light up the terrestrial with the celestial. It is very natural that people should not greatly fancy familiar intercourse with them, and should have no taste for keeping neighbourly intimacy with them.

Whoever has not a soul well-tempered by vigorous education avoids them willingly. For great books there must be great readers. It is necessary to be strong and healthy to open Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Job, Pindar, Lucretius, and that Alighieri, and that Shakespeare. Homely habits, prosy life, the dead calm of consciences, "good taste" and "common-sense,"—all the small, placid egotism is deranged, let us own it, by these monsters of the sublime.

Yet, when one dives in and reads them, nothing is more hospitable for the mind at certain hours than these stem spirits. They have all at once a lofty gentleness, as unexpected as the rest. They say to you, "Come in!" They receive you at home with a fraternity of archangels. They are affectionate, sad, melancholy, consoling. You are suddenly at your ease. You feel yourself loved by them; you almost imagine yourself personally known to them. Their sternness and their pride cover a profound sympathy. If granite had a heart, how deep would its goodness be! Well, genius is granite with goodness. Extreme power possesses great love. They join you in your prayers. They know well, those men, that God exists. Apply your ear to these giants, you will hear them palpitate. Do you want to believe, to love, to weep, to strike your breast, to fall on your knees, to raise your hands to heaven with confidence and serenity, listen to these poets. They will aid you to rise

toward the healthy and fruitful sorrow; they will make you feel the celestial use of emotion. Oh, goodness of the strong! Their emotion, which, if they will, can be an earthquake, is at moments so cordial and so gentle that it seems like the rocking of a cradle. They have just given birth within you to something of which they take care. There is maternity in genius. Take a step, advance farther,—a new surprise awaits you: they are graceful. As for their grace, it is light itself.

The high mountains have on their sides all climates, and the great poets all styles. It is sufficient to change the zone. Go up, it is the tempest; descend, the flowers are there. The inner fire accommodates itself to the winter without; the glacier has no objection to be the crater, and the lava never looks more beautiful than when it rashes out through the snow. A sudden blaze of flame is not strange on a polar summit. This contact of the extremes is a law in Nature, in which the unforeseen wonders of the sublime burst forth at every moment. A mountain, a genius,—both are austere majesty. These masses evolve a sort of religious intimidation. Dante is not less perpendicular than Etna. The depths of Shakespeare equal the gulfs of Chimborazo. The peaks of poets are not less cloudy than the summits of mountains. Thunders are rolling there, and at the same time, in the valleys, in the passes, in the sheltered spots, in places between escarpments, are streams, birds, nests, boughs, enchantments, wonderful floræ. Above the frightful arch of the Aveyron, in the middle of the frozen sea, there is that paradise called The Garden. Have you seen it? What an episode! A hot sun, a shade tepid and fresh, a vague exudation of perfumes on the grass-plots, an indescribable month of May perpetually reigning among precipices,—nothing is more tender and more exquisite. Such are poets: such are the Alps. These huge old gloomy mountains are marvellous growers of roses and violets; they avail themselves of the dawn and of the dew better than all your prairies and all your hillocks can do it, although it is their natural business. The April of the plain is flat and vulgar compared with their April; and they have, those immense old mountains, in their wildest ravine, their own charming spring, well known to the bees.

BOOK IV.

CRITICISM.

CHAPTER I.

Every play of Shakespeare's, two excepted, "Macbeth" and "Romeo and Juliet" (thirty-four plays out of thirty-six), offers to our observation one peculiarity which seems to have escaped, up to this day, the most eminent commentators and critics,—one that the Schlegels and M. Villemain himself, in his remarkable labours, do not notice, and on which it is impossible not to give an opinion. It is a double action which traverses the drama, and reflects it on a small scale. By the side of the storm in the Atlantic, the storm in the tea-cup. Thus, Hamlet makes beneath himself a Hamlet: he kills Polonius, father of Laërtes,—and there is Laërtes opposite him exactly in the same situation as he is toward Claudius. There are two fathers to avenge. There might be two ghosts. So, in King Lear: side by side and simultaneously, Lear, driven to despair by his daughters Goneril and Regan, and consoled by his daughter Cordelia, is reflected by Gloster, betrayed by his son Edmond, and loved by his son Edgar. The bifurcated idea, the idea echoing itself, a lesser drama copying and elbowing the principal drama, the action trailing its own shadow (a smaller action but its parallel), the unity cut asunder,—surely it is a strange fact. These twin actions have been strongly blamed by the few commentators who have pointed them out. We do not participate in their blame. Do we then approve and accept as good these twin actions? By no means. We recognize them, and that is all. The drama of Shakespeare (we said so with all our might as far back as 1827,^[1] in order to discourage all imitation),—the drama of Shakespeare is peculiar to Shakespeare. It is a drama inherent to this poet; it is his own essence; it is himself,—thence his originalities absolutely personal; thence his idiosyncrasies which exist without establishing a law.

These twin actions are purely Shakespearian. Neither Æschylus nor Molière would admit them; and we certainly would agree with Æschylus and Molière.

These twin actions are, moreover, the sign of the sixteenth century. Each epoch has its own mysterious stamp. The centuries have a seal that they affix to *chefs-d'œuvre*, and which it is necessary to know how to decipher and recognize. The seal of the sixteenth century is not the seal of the eighteenth. The Renaissance was a subtle time,—a time of reflection. The spirit of the sixteenth century was reflected in a mirror. Every idea of the Renaissance has a double compartment. Look at the jubes in the churches. The Renaissance, with an exquisite and fantastical art, always makes the Old Testament repercussive on the New. The twin action is there in everything. The symbol explains the personage in repeating his gesture. If, in a basso-rilievo, Jehovah sacrifices his son, he has close by, in the next low relief, Abraham sacrificing his son. Jonas passes three days in the

whale, and Jesus passes three days in the sepulchre; and the jaws of the monster swallowing Jonas answer to the mouth of hell engulfing Jesus.

The carver of the jube of Fécamp, so stupidly demolished, goes so far as to give for counterpart to Saint Joseph—whom? Amphitryon.

These singular results constitute one of the habits of that profound and searching high art of the sixteenth century. Nothing can be more curious in that style than the part ascribed to Saint Christopher. In the Middle Ages, and in the sixteenth century, in paintings and sculptures, Saint Christopher, the good giant martyred by Decius in 250, recorded by the Bollandists and acknowledged without a question by Baillet, is always triple,—an opportunity for the triptych. There is foremost a first Christ-bearer, a first Christophorus; that is Christopher, with the infant Jesus on his shoulders. Afterward the Virgin enceinte is a Christopher, since she carries Christ Last, the cross is a Christopher; it also carries Christ. This treble illustration of the idea is immortalized by Rubens in the cathedral of Antwerp. The twin idea, the triple idea,—such is the seal of the sixteenth century.

Shakespeare, faithful to the spirit of his time, must needs add Laërtes avenging his father to Hamlet avenging his father, and cause Hamlet to be persecuted by Laërtes at the same time that Claudius is pursued by Hamlet; he must needs make the filial piety of Edgar a comment on the filial piety of Cordelia, and bring out in contrast, weighed down by the ingratitude of unnatural children, two wretched fathers, each bereaved of a kind light,—Lear mad, and Gloster blind.

[1]Preface to "Cromwell."
